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A SHARED AUTHORITY? MUSEUMS CONNECT, PUBLIC DIPLOMACY, AND  
TRANSNATIONAL PUBLIC HISTORY

by

RICHARD J. W. HARKER

Under the Direction of Kathryn E. Wilson, PhD

ABSTRACT

Museums Connect stands at the intersection of public history and public diplomacy. The program, which has both public history and public diplomacy agendas, is sponsored by the United States Department of State and administered by the American Alliance of Museums. This dissertation examines the competing impulses of transnational public history and public diplomacy made manifest in Museums Connect and its ramifications for public history theory and practice. The project demonstrates both the seeming similarities between public history's ideas of shared authority, dialogic museum practice, and community engagement and public diplomacy's "people-to-people" diplomacy, as well as the limits of these similarities. This

dissertation also considers the ramifications of these dynamics on museum and public history practice and theory. It is shown that the assumptions of public diplomacy found in Museums Connect inform the program's structure and operation, while also precluding a truly shared authority between the American museums and their international partners. The appointment of the American museums as "lead" museums and the Department of State's choice to focus on young people as the target audience for the program foregrounds didactic relationships between the museums and their "communities" for the projects.

Through three case studies of Museums Connect projects between the United States and Afghanistan, Morocco, and South Africa, this dissertation challenges the seminal theoretical literature of public history, articulated in Michael Frisch's *A Shared Authority*, that interpretive and meaning-making authority in public history is inherently shared. Each case study reveals different factors that either promote or preclude more balanced power dynamics between the museums and their communities within the broader power dynamics established by the grant. Staff reflection-in-action, project activity and partner museum choice, and the non-American public history and museological contexts are all revealed to uniquely influence the dynamics between the museums and their communities. Throughout, the agency of the non-American participants, highlighted through the responses and reactions to the unequal dynamics of the projects, complicates notions of the singular democratic public sphere that underpin the paradigm of the museum as forum.

INDEX WORDS: Museums Connect, Transnational, Museums, Power, Shared authority, Public diplomacy, Public history

A SHARED AUTHORITY? MUSEUMS CONNECT, PUBLIC DIPLOMACY, AND  
TRANSNATIONAL PUBLIC HISTORY

by

RICHARD J. W. HARKER

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2016

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2016

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TRANSNATIONAL PUBLIC HISTORY

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RICHARD J. W. HARKER

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Georgia State University

August 2016

## **DEDICATION**

To my darling wife Sue, without whom none of this would have been possible.

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Although I accept all responsibility for this work and any inaccuracies or mistakes herein, this project has truly been a shared endeavor. I am eternally grateful for the myriad of people willing to support and help me throughout.

Without the tireless support and encouragement of my advisor Dr. Kate Wilson this dissertation would not have been possible. I am indebted to Dr. Wilson's consistent good humor, reassurance, and prodding as well as thoughtful guidance. Moreover, the willingness of Dr. Jeffrey Trask and Dr. Alex Cummings to serve on my committee and offer advice, comment, and support has similarly been invaluable. I also owe a deep debt to Dr. Carolyn Bilotft and Dr. Denis Gainty in the Georgia State History Department who have been incredibly encouraging throughout my course of study.

Throughout my time at Georgia State Dr. Cliff Kuhn was one of my biggest supporters. His constant encouragement, guidance, and passion immeasurably influenced me and this dissertation. Dr. Kuhn's guidance made this dissertation better in the earliest days and he was the epitome of the kind of public historian that I strive to be. I miss him dearly.

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I also owe deep intellectual gratitude to three people whose work in my early academic career so deeply influenced me that I cannot help but see it shine through in these pages. Professor Justin Willis and Dr. Cherry Leonardi at Durham University guided and mentored me during my Master's degree and introduced me to the plight of the subaltern. Dr. Bernhard Struck at the University of St Andrews introduced a seemingly radical new idea—transnational history—to a young undergraduate and has never wavered in his support of my academic career.

Without the time, energy, and help of many amazing museum professionals around the world, Department of State officials, and staff at the American Alliance of Museums, who took time to help an absolute stranger, this dissertation would never have been possible. Many of them responded with kindness and gave me many hours of their time as well as connections and documents, even when I contacted them out of the blue. My debt of thanks is greater than any words can express. By acknowledging them here I hope that in some small way it is known that I am eternally grateful for their help, patience, and guidance. Heather Berry, Brooke Leonard, and Madeline Vadkerty at the American Alliance of Museums, Karen (Lea) Perez, Mary Jeffers, and Laura Tedesco at the United States Department of State, and Sally Roesch Wagner and IPAM participants Carey Rote, Mark Heppner, and Patoo Cusripituck, all made this study richer with their time and willingness to share their experiences with me.

In Birmingham, Johannesburg, Atlanta, Kennesaw, Philadelphia, and Kabul I have met, sometimes in-person and others through e-mail and phone conversations, a myriad of dedicated and thoughtful museum professionals, teachers, students, and community activists who shared their experiences of Museums Connect, read and commented on drafts of my work, and formed the backbone of this study. For “Being We the People,” Hugh Allen, Jeff Stern, Sayeh Hormozi, and Lauren Cristella were incredibly gracious with their help, as were Jenay Smith, Sharifa

Garvey, Dominiq Gilyard, Nasim Fekrat, Aziz Royesh, Saeed Madadi, and Omara Khan Massoudi. Laura Tedesco at the State Department, Lisa Helling and Zalmay Attapoor at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, and Director Fahim Rahimi contacted, facilitated, and translated my questions for Dr. Massoudi and his responses, and I am entirely grateful for all their time, attention, and support of my project.

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I recognize that many a childhood family holiday driving around the British countryside visiting ruined cathedrals, castles, and their respective visitor centers started a deep love of history, museums, and historic sites. For this I have my parents, Barbara and Graham Harker, to thank. I am deeply appreciative for the deep love and support of an ever-expanding family: Trish, Chris, Poppy, and Betsy Turner, Lucy Harker and Tom Hemming, and Sonya Sharma. My brother, Chris Harker, has read almost everything substantial I've ever written including this dissertation, and without his help I would never have gotten to this place.

Without the continual love and support and unending patience of my wife Sue this project would never have happened. Sue has lived and breathed Museums Connect with me since the beginning, and her willingness and patience to listen to me think out loud, read this manuscript,

and deal with this addition to our lives is quite remarkable. It is to her that this is dedicated with my deepest and sincerest love and gratitude.

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## 1 PREFACE

My own relationship with Museums Connect first began when I was offered a job at the Museum of History and Holocaust Education in Kennesaw, Georgia in the spring of 2011, and was sent information about a Museums Connect grant that the museum had just been awarded with the Ben M'sik Community Museum in Casablanca, Morocco. Although I did not know it at the time, as I began my own career in museums and public history and started to learn and adapt to the local and regional contexts that shaped my new job, I would also play a role in the second grant between the two museums as a project facilitator.

While the prospect of working in an international context and traveling to Morocco was exciting, I also had questions about the work: Why would a Holocaust and World War II museum work on a project about Islam? What does it mean for American museums and museum professionals to be engaging in a practice that I later became aware was called “soft power”? These questions, however, mostly remained dormant, overtaken by the simultaneous thrill of traveling to Morocco and the pressure of navigating the complexities of international work, all while completing the “normal” day-to-day tasks of a new job.

One of the most memorable experiences during the yearlong project was our trip to Casablanca, Morocco. Jet-lagged and facing a week of exhibition development meetings in Casablanca as well as sight-seeing excursions, we—the American team of students from Kennesaw State University (KSU), my colleague from the KSU Museum of History and Holocaust Education, Dr. Julia Brock, and I—sat around tables with the Moroccan students and staff from the Ben M'sik Community Museum and engaged in our first brainstorming session of what to include in an online exhibition, the ultimate goal of the project. I was energized by the passion of our Moroccan counterparts; they spoke about their desire to dispel stereotypes of

Muslims as terrorists, and to address various misconceptions such as hijab in Morocco. Our students were talking, we were listening, and I was furiously taking notes. As the project developed, the visit of the Moroccan group to the United States as well as Skype workshops, blog posts, and e-mail exchanges continued to refine the online exhibition's content. But as the exhibition's development moved from preliminary conversations to decision making, our Moroccan colleagues' initial ideas were excluded from the final product. The earlier brainstorming about forthrightly addressing stereotypes and misconceptions that had driven those first in-person conversations was absent from our later discussions. Although I did not realize it at the time, we—the American side of the project—were sharing our authority, but only so far. The ultimate control for the exhibition's form and content remained in our hands as the grant's "lead museum" staffed by American public history and museum professionals educated and trained in the professional practices that underpin the Museums Connect program.

These silences and power dynamics were not obvious in the moment. The desire to finish the project and complete what we said we would overtook us. Yet reflecting back on these exchanges and moments with the benefit of the distance of time, I can see that this initial unease manifest in occasional conversations with colleagues mirrored the larger dynamics of the projects between the two museums. This only became clear to me as I started writing chapter five of this dissertation. Although that chapter is a direct response to my own experiences, the many subsequent questions, assumptions, thoughts, and ideas that emerged as I broadened my scope of inquiry beyond my own experience of Museums Connect has only expanded. This dissertation is my continued attempt at wrestling with those questions and my own experiences.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

**“In public history, approaches to related issues of authority—scholarly and intellectual authority—define much of the landscape.” Michael Frisch, 1990<sup>1</sup>**

Museums Connect stands at the intersection of public history and public diplomacy. Museums Connect sponsors partnerships between American museums and non-American museums and their communities.<sup>2</sup> The one-year projects are intended to be mutually beneficial, reciprocal in nature, and engage new communities for both museums in their respective countries. Established in 2008 as a reconceptualization of the International Partnership Among Museums (IPAM) program (1980-2007), since its creation sixty-one Museums Connect projects have been funded with a dual purpose: public history and public diplomacy.<sup>3</sup>

This dissertation explores the theoretical and practical ramifications of the interaction of public history and public diplomacy agendas in Museums Connect. The title of this dissertation, *A Shared Authority?*, is not an accident. It pays homage to Michael Frisch’s challenges to the authority of public and oral historians first articulated in his 1990 seminal work. Frisch expressed changes in the way that historical knowledge and corollary ideas of expertise and authority are understood in museums and public history theory and practice. However, punctuation is key. This dissertation challenges the utility of Frisch’s assertion that a museum’s or public historian’s authority is inherently shared when implemented in Museum Connect’s transnational public history context. In a program that serves the double purpose of public history and public diplomacy (defined and discussed at length in chapter three) and primarily funded by the U.S. Department of State, the power dynamics between the participating museums are skewed in favor of the Department of State-assigned American “lead museum.” These museums are

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*

<sup>2</sup> Museums Connect was known as Museum and Community Collaborations Abroad from 2008-2011. Hereafter it is referred to by its current name.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix for a complete list of Museums Connect projects.



responsible for the projects' finances and control reporting to the program administrator at the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) and DOS. Moreover, in selecting youth as the particular community of focus for the program, the DOS ensured that the relationships between museums and these communities would remain, for the most part, traditionally didactic. Indeed, the most equitable power relationships revealed by the three case studies in this dissertation were between the groups of students on both sides of the projects.

Three case studies provide three different contexts to analyze the Museums Connect program. "Being We the People" between the National Museum of Afghanistan, Kabul, Afghanistan and the National Constitution Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania analyzes Museums Connect operating alongside an abundance of American hard power (chapter four). The two projects between the Ben M'sik Community Museum, Casablanca, Morocco, and the Museum of History and Holocaust Education, Kennesaw, Georgia, highlight two university museums using Museums Connect for public history pedagogy at the university level (chapter five). And "The International Legacy Youth Leadership Project" between the Apartheid Museum and the Nelson Mandela House Museum in Johannesburg, South Africa and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Birmingham, Alabama, explores Museums Connect between museums and communities with shared histories (chapter six). In analyzing these case studies I argue that despite the inherent tension built into the program (explored at length in chapter three) different moments of exchange, shared inquiry, and dialogue emerged that promoted more equitable power relationships both between the museums and between the museums and their communities: similar public history contexts, shared histories, comparable-sized museums, and reflective practice by museum staff (especially in the United States). These three case studies, thus, provide multiple opportunities to explore the complex power dynamics of Museums

Connect and what they reveal about the theoretical implications of Frisch's concept of "a shared authority."

The different perspectives that these case studies offer also highlight the heterogeneity of the museum field through a diverse range of institutional, local, and individual contexts informing Museums Connect projects and transnational approaches to public history. They uncover the distinct local museological and public history contexts that all of the participating museums operate within, the different influences that museum staff on both sides of the projects had on project activities, and the different histories explored in the three projects. In so doing, this dissertation supports Corinne A. Kratz and Ivan Karp's assessment of contemporary museum practice as "prismatic...one in which perspectives are located in a diverse range of positions, places, and institutions and at different organizational levels, from macro to mezzo to micro. This is only appropriate, as museological processes involve an array of actors, perspectives, and interests, and globalizing processes themselves affect different sectors, institutions, and localities differently."<sup>4</sup>

In addition to being situated within and speaking against the longer genealogies of museums and public history theory and practice, this dissertation engages the few pieces of scholarship that examine Museums Connect. My analysis underscores the importance of understanding different museological contexts in order to better anticipate possible power differentials between Museums Connect participants. This contrasts with Jennifer Dickey, Samir El Azhar, and Catherine Lewis' edited collection, *Museums in a Global Context*, which argues "that common motives and sensibilities underlie these cultural institutions," while elucidating "how museums around the world have been shaped by globalization and have, in turn, shaped

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<sup>4</sup> Corinne A. Kratz and Ivan Karp, "Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations," in *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, ed. Ivan Karp et al (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 17.

the public's understanding of local, regional, or national identity as they connect with an ever wider audience."<sup>5</sup>

This dissertation explores not only the domestic and national contexts of Museum Connects' public diplomacy paradigm, but also its transnational nature. By reinserting the voices and perspectives of the non-American Museums Connect participants, I foreground the agency of these actors and highlight some of the ways that this American-funded and administered program is negotiated and received by non-American participants. Cultural diplomacy scholar Natalia Grincheva's work on Museums Connect aptly argues that American museums do not need to be directly controlled by the State Department, "because the operational principles of American museums, nurtured within the national economic and political environment, can communicate values of liberal democracy and public engagement without government guidance."<sup>6</sup> Grincheva's important contribution, however, approaches Museums Connect as a one-sided pursuit, neglecting the agency and museological/public history contexts and uses one short case study as evidence of a larger argument.

Using a transnational lens to interrogate the theory and practice of museum engagement with their publics in a domestic context illuminates as well as questions some of the basic assumptions underpinning ideas of shared authority and public history. In considering the multiple agencies of the different publics involved in each grant, as well as those excluded, this

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<sup>5</sup> J. Dickey, S. El Azhar, and C. Lewis, "Introduction," in *Museums in a Global Context: National Identity, International Understanding*, ed. Jennifer W. Dickey, Samir El Azhar, and Catherine M. Lewis (Washington, D.C.: AAM Press, 2013), 12-13.; Jana Greenslit also provides an analysis of the practice of implementing Museums Connect on participating museum professionals in her unpublished Master's thesis on the topic. Jana Greenslit, "Museums Connect: The Next Chapter of International Collaboration" (master's thesis, University of Washington, 2015), [https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/bitstream/handle/1773/33429/Greenslit\\_washington\\_02500\\_14792.pdf?sequence=1](https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/bitstream/handle/1773/33429/Greenslit_washington_02500_14792.pdf?sequence=1).

<sup>6</sup> Natalia Grincheva, "Democracy for Export: Museums Connect Program as a Vehicle of American Cultural Diplomacy," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 58, no. 2 (April, 2015): 146.

dissertation also provides a new forum through which to consider the assumptions of the public sphere that underlie the democratic discourse of the “museum as forum” and ideas of a shared authority. To understand the nature of the transnational public spheres created by Museums Connect, this dissertation evokes Nancy Fraser’s reconceptualization of the Habermasian public sphere. According to Fraser, Jürgen Habermas’s conception of the liberal public sphere, grounded in the modern nation-state, “stresses its claim to be open and accessible to all.” In Museums Connect this notion of the public is constructed to target specific groups according to the Department of State’s strategic goals and increase the ability of the museum to measure the projects’ effectiveness. This has the impact of including certain publics while at the same time creating “formal exclusions.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, the underlying ideology of Museums Connect, emergent from a liberal notion of “the public” so central to American democratic rhetoric, “stresses the singularity of the bourgeois conception of the public sphere, its claim to be *the* public arena in the singular.”<sup>8</sup> Alternatively, Fraser posits multiple, competing, stratified, and unequal publics, a public sphere borne out in Museums Connect projects, where certain publics are elevated while others are relegated and excluded. The exploration of these relegations and exclusions in this dissertation’s case studies highlights certain conditions that both reduced and accentuated the differentials between these publics. And although they operate in a domestic rather than a transnational context, public history practitioners can learn from these factors in attempting to engage marginalized or historically powerless communities in their own work. In the “Being We the People” project between the National Constitution Center (NCC) and its students and the National Museum of Afghanistan and Marefat High school students (chapter four), for example, the reflective practice of the NCC staff, who adopted the role of facilitator rather than knowledge

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<sup>7</sup> Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 63.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

giver, inadvertently reduced the differential between the Marefat students and the National Constitution Center. This provided this historically marginalized community the ability to negotiate its minority status vis-à-vis the nation while simultaneously speaking for the nation during their trip to Philadelphia. In contrast, the use of American public history faculty to teach public history methodologies in the two projects between the Ben M'sik Community Museum and the Museum of History and Holocaust Education (chapter five) accentuated power differentials between the two museums and resulted in negotiations of the project activities in Casablanca.

### **Museums Connect and transnational public history**

Museums Connect is administered by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) and the program's primary source of funding is the United States Department of State's (DOS) Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). AAM describes the program's intentions as follows: "The Museums Connect program strengthens connections and cultural understanding between people in the United States and abroad through innovative projects facilitated by museums and executed by their communities. The program's mission is to build global communities through cross-cultural exchanges while also supporting U.S. foreign policy goals, such as youth empowerment, environmental sustainability and disability rights awareness."<sup>9</sup> Individual museums in the United States and abroad are free to originate, create, and apply for Museums Connect grants. If selected by a peer-review system that includes museum professionals, past participants, and AAM staff with oversight from ECA, the participating museums are given latitude to operate the programs according to the performance-based outcomes agreed upon during the application and selection phase. Grants are awarded between \$50,000 and \$100,000

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<sup>9</sup> "Museums Connect: Building Global Communities," American Alliance of Museums, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://www.aam-us.org/resources/international/museumsconnect>.

with a 50% cost-share from the participating museums. Because the program's main-funder (the Department of State) and administrator (AAM) are American, each grant is administered by a "lead" American museum that is responsible for the grant's financials, compliance, and periodic reporting. Although some changes to the grant program have occurred since its inception—including a reduction of project lengths from two years to one year and a name change to Museums Connect in 2011—the principles and mission of the program have remained consistent.

Museums Connect is the only project of its type to broaden the geographical scope of American public history practice. It reflects a recent wider movement of the field of public history beyond its American-centered domestic roots and practice. In 2011, the International Federation for Public History-*Fédération Internationale pour l'Histoire Publique* was established "to create international linkages between public historians and promote the development of a world wide network of Public History practitioners."<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the American Alliance of Museum's 2016-2020 Strategic Plan also reflected these broader changes. It stated AAM's belief "in active participation in the global community and embracing international perspectives" and it set out the goal, "Global Thinking: connect US museums to the international community."<sup>11</sup> Unlike these other initiatives that move beyond the domestic, regional, and local, but operate within the paradigm of the nation-state, Museums Connect projects are transnational in nature. Drawing on ideas of transnationalism that emerged in the 1990s, Museums Connect projects transcend nation-state borders and reflect the centrality of the

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<sup>10</sup> "About," International Federation for Public History- *Fédération Internationale pour l'Histoire Publique*, accessed March 20, 2016, <http://ifph.hypotheses.org/sample-page>.

<sup>11</sup> "Strategic Plan, 2016-2020," American Alliance of Museums, accessed May 6, 2016, <http://www.aam-us.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/english.pdf?sfvrsn=0>, 1-2.

interconnectedness, exchange, connection, and multiple agencies understood in the term.<sup>12</sup> The projects create new products in the physical and intellectual spaces both between the museums as well as between the museums and their communities, and allow multiple agencies on all sides of the partnerships. This public history and museological mode marks a rupture within the long and complex genealogy of museums, which historically utilized the display and collection of “international” specimens and peoples as part of the original vehicle of nation-state power that museums helped to reinforce.<sup>13</sup>

Transnational museum partnerships are not the only function of the Museums Connect program. In addition to its museological/public history function, Museums Connect is simultaneously a public diplomacy program of the DOS. The program’s main funder, the DOS Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), intends the program to operate as one part of a larger public diplomacy agenda grounded in ideas of the nation-state and the promotion of America abroad. The goals of American public diplomacy programs like Museums Connect, explored at length in chapter three, are unlike more traditional diplomatic activities and are oriented toward the longer-term goal of building good will and affinity towards the United States. The DOS states public diplomacy’s goals thus: “The mission of American public diplomacy is to support the achievement of U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives, advance

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<sup>12</sup> In addition to many examples of empirical studies utilizing transnational as a frame of analysis, especially in the field of migration studies, a number of theoretical studies emerged. See: Ian Tyrrell, “American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History,” *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 4 (1991): 1031-1055.; Michael McGerr, “The Price of the New ‘Transnational History,’” *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 4 (1991): 1056-1067.; David Thelen, “Of Audiences, Borderlands, and Comparisons: Toward the Internationalization of American History,” *Journal of American History* 79, no. 2 (1992): 432-459.; David Thelan, “The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History,” *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (1999): 965-975.; Notably within many recent reflections on the “transnational turn” see: Michael Kazin, “The Vogue of Transnationalism,” *Raritan* 26 (2007): 155-167.; Ian Tyrrell, “Reflections on the Transnational Turn in United States History: Theory and Practice,” *Journal of Global History* 4 (2009): 453-474.; Laura Briggs, Gladys McCormick, and J.T. Way, “Transnationalism: A Category of Analysis,” *American Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2008): 625-648.

<sup>13</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995), 66.

national interests, and enhance national security by informing and influencing foreign publics and by expanding and strengthening the relationship between the people and Government of the United States and citizens of the rest of the world.”<sup>14</sup> Museums Connect focuses on young people as a strategic audience in countries and regions of the world that DOS deems strategically important for economic and geo-political reasons, underscoring the belief that influencing non-American youth will have a positive long-term effect for the United States’ “national interest.”

DOS’s dominant financial role determines the structure of the program, the regions of the world given preference for funding, and the types of audiences engaged, with a particular focus on youth audiences. Beyond the design of the program that places the authority to effectively “run” the grant in the hands of the American museums, the program was also created from two fundamentally different paradigms that continue to shape how the grant functions. The DOS’s concept of public diplomacy and its corollary people-to-people diplomacy is predicated on the underlying goal of promoting American interests abroad within an “international” world that operates through the lens of the nation-state. AAM’s objective of community engagement draws on the wealth of theoretical literature on “a shared authority.” This literature and the transnational public history goals of Museums Connect are predicated on collaboration, exchange, and equitable power relations. A close reading of the program’s stated goals, moreover, highlights this tension: “The Museums Connect program strengthens connections and cultural understanding between people in the United States and abroad through innovative projects facilitated by museums and executed by their communities. The program’s mission is to build global communities through cross-cultural exchanges while also supporting U.S. foreign

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<sup>14</sup> “Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs,” Department of State, accessed June 11, 2016, <http://www.state.gov/r/>.



policy goals, such as youth empowerment, environmental sustainability and disability rights awareness.”<sup>15</sup>

The program is designed to both promote “cross-cultural exchanges” and “global communities” while simultaneously and somewhat contradictorily promoting American interests abroad. The intersection and interaction of these competing impulses in Museums Connect are the central focus of this study and inform its guiding questions. To what extent and in what ways do these tensions impact the day-to-day operation, as well as the historical interpretation, of specific Museums Connect projects? What is the impact that this well-funded and internationally recognized program has and continues to have on the previously ignored foreign museums and their participants? And what are the implications of this on the central theoretical ideas of public history—Michael Frisch’s idea of “a shared authority” and ideas of dialogic public history, the museum as forum, and community engagement—that until now have been developed and put into practice only in a domestic context of the relationships between museums and their communities, and not between museums? Do all those involved in these projects see the museum as a “forum” for community dialogue? Are these concepts universally understood across different museum cultures? To answer these questions one needs to understand the longer genealogies of museums and public history that both frame this dissertation and the creation of the Museums Connect program, and that provide the arguments with which it centrally engages.

### **From “the Century of History” to the impulse to educate**

Museums Connect, while representing a new kind of transnational public history, did not emerge from a vacuum. By focusing on community engagement and understanding the museum as a place for discussion and debate, this program represents one example of a much larger and more gradual shift in the theory and practice of American museums. From the evolution of

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<sup>15</sup> “Museums Connect: Building Global Communities,” American Alliance of Museums.

“cabinets of curiosity” in Enlightenment-era Europe to the development of professionally staffed museums open to the public, debates have continually emerged around the form, function, and purpose of museums and the intricate power dynamics created therein.<sup>16</sup> Since their rapid growth in the nineteenth century, museums were considered to be places where knowledge was created, elites mingled, the populace was educated, and important artifacts were stored and preserved; more recently, they have become open forums for debate and discussion.<sup>17</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill identifies the historic role museums have played as creators of knowledge. “Looking back into the history of museums, the realities of museums have changed many times. Museums have always had to modify how they worked, and what they did, according to the context, the plays of power, and the social, economic, and political imperatives that surrounded them.”<sup>18</sup> Changes to the political and ideological power of the institutions and to the authority of the museum curator have occurred gradually, and not entirely homogeneously.

It is very difficult to generalize about American history museums, let alone American museums en masse, given the “plurality of histories” and economic, political, and cultural contexts within which museums have been founded, operated, and evolved.<sup>19</sup> Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig remind us, “The complex and diverse universe of history museums cannot be traced back through a direct linear path to a relatively few simple origins.” Any attempt to

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<sup>16</sup> The best summary of these debates are outlined in Duncan Cameron, “The Museum: A Temple or the Forum,” in *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift*, ed. Gail Anderson, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Plymouth: AltaMira, 2012), 48-60.; Full histories of American museums exist in Edward P. Alexander and Mary Alexander’s, *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Function of Museums*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Plymouth: AltaMira, 2007).; Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment* (Champaign, IL: University Illinois Press, 1989).; Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1992), offers a critical exploration of the role that museums have played in shaping knowledge since the Renaissance, while arguing against placing too much stock in the idea of continuity when studying the history of museums.

<sup>17</sup> Jeffrey Trask, *Things America: Art Museums and Civic Culture in the Progressive Era* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 3.

<sup>18</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

understand the history of American museums is made more challenging because “[t]he story becomes more complicated as other categories of museums—and other specific institutions—are considered.”<sup>20</sup>

American history museums grew in number during the nineteenth century, which Germain Bazin declared “the Century of History.” The accumulation of collections and specimens and the appreciation for the past that grew in this period had the result of dramatically increasing the number of museums on the American landscape. Bazin further argues, “Museums were flooded to the point of overwhelming with products created by all kinds of human endeavor, by all peoples of all periods. Thus was initiated a great idolatry of the past [as] a counterbalance to a certain complaisance toward the present, a present that passed like a moment in the accelerated race toward the future, the perspectives of which were nightmarish.”<sup>21</sup> This idolatry of the past, however, only occurred within elite circles, often in urban society. While museums became places of “education and public enlightenment” at the turn of the twentieth century, as Edward P. and Mary Alexander argue, they remained in the nineteenth century places where the wealthy wielded interpretive and intellectual authority that was used as an ideological tool and as an instrument of power.<sup>22</sup> Tony Bennett describes the role and function of the nineteenth century western museum: “Collections of valued objects formed a part of the cultural accessories of power in contexts in which it was the organization and transmission of power within and between ruling strata rather than the display of power before the populace that was the point at issue.”<sup>23</sup> Bennett considered museums and exhibitions as part of culture writ large that included “a veritable battery of new cultural technologies designed for this purpose. For

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<sup>20</sup> Leon and Rosenzweig, *History Museums in the United States*, xvi-xvii.

<sup>21</sup> Germain Bazin, “From the Museum Age,” in *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, ed. Bettina Messias Carbonell (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 20.

<sup>22</sup> Alexander and Alexander, *Museums in Motion*, 6-7.

<sup>23</sup> Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 27.

[early museum leaders like George Brown] Goode, libraries, parks and reading-rooms were just as much ‘passionless reformers’ as museums.’<sup>24</sup>

The use of museums as tools to promote the beliefs of their founders was evident from the earliest historical societies. Alexander and Alexander argue that the Massachusetts Historical Society, founded in 1791, the New York Historical Society (1804), and the American Antiquarian Society (1812) “were driven by zeal for learning and love of country. As true disciples of the Enlightenment they had unlimited faith in the power of knowledge and reason. They also were determined to preserve the story of their defeat of the powerful British Empire and to point out the factors that caused the American genius for self-government to flower.”<sup>25</sup> In contrast later in the nineteenth century the early Smithsonian Institution drove narratives of progress and advancement within the context of westward migration, rapid urbanization, and industrialization. This was aided by the designation of the Institution as the final repository for “artifacts exhibited by government departments and agencies” at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876.<sup>26</sup>

To understand the changing ways that early American museums viewed their power vis-à-vis the public, one only needs to turn to a report in the *New York Times* from July 14, 1865. The unnamed writer lamented the burning of Barnum's American Museum not because of the lost opportunity for the public to visit or the lost opportunity for education but because the objects themselves had been destroyed. The journalist bemoaned, “there were a great many relics of the Revolution, of the War of 1812, and other peculiar curiosities connected with our national

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>25</sup> Alexander and Alexander, *Museums in Motion*, 118-119.

<sup>26</sup> Robert C. Post, *Who Owns America's Past? The Smithsonian and the Problem of History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 6.

and personal history, which are gone forever.”<sup>27</sup> In a world where being in the presence of objects was thought to convey social status and the power of the owner, the destruction of these artifacts was deeply troubling to the writer. The newspaper published another article in 1873 about the construction of the New York Natural History Museum that similarly lauded the specimens and collection. After long reverential descriptions of its architecture and floor plan, the author offered deep praise of the collection and specimens owned by the museum: “The collection of specimens of natural history in the possession of the society, and which will be removed into the new museum on its completion, is a very rich, though not large one.”<sup>28</sup> Lord and Blankenburg later concluded that museums utilized the apparatus of display and exhibition to “communicate ideas about power and the hierarchy of ‘civilizations,’ so that there would be no doubt about the justice of ‘our empire’ or the superiority of ‘our civilization.’”<sup>29</sup>

Duncan Cameron observed in the 1970s, “Noting the exceptions, it can be said that it was about a century or a little more ago that we began, in western society, to create public museums. In large part, these public museums were private collections opened to the public, and, as long as that was made quite clear, there was, as mentioned earlier, no real problem.” Cameron went on to show, however, that towards the end of the nineteenth century American museums began to evolve to consider their role as public institutions. This he argued caused a new set of concerns for American museums that they have been dealing with ever since: “The trouble began with the introduction of a new idea: the democratic museum.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> No author, “Burning of the American Museum,” *New York Times*, July 14, 1865.

<sup>28</sup> No author, “City Improvements. What the Several Departments are Doing,” *New York Times*, December 6, 1873.

<sup>29</sup> Gail Dexter Lord and Ngaire Blankenberg, *Cities, Museums, and Soft Power* (Washington, D.C.: The AAM Press, 2015), 10.

<sup>30</sup> Cameron, “The Museum: A Temple or the Forum,” 52.

One of the earliest instances of museum owners beginning to think about the potential of their sites vis-à-vis the public, however, was highlighted in an 1872 article about the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Met attempted to encourage working people to attend a free weekend day at the museum, and although the paternalism of this venture is obvious by the article's language, the ultimate goal of viewing art in this way was the consumption of the aesthetic and thus its meaning. "Yesterday the experiment was tried of throwing it open to the public, without restriction, on Saturdays, and it was expected that there would be a great rush, and that those whose occupations confine them to the desk, or the room, or the counter all the week would joyfully profit by the privilege and attend." This attempt, though, was unsuccessful. The paper lamented, "Unfortunately this result was not arrived at." This piece, uncommon for the 1870s, is laced with the sentiment of wealthy elites seeking to educate illiterate, poorer people, as evidence by the final lines, "It is a pity that those for whom [sic] the gallery was specially thrown open did not choose to profit by it, but it is to be hoped that next Saturday, when greater publicity has been given to the fact, the work [sic] people will attend."<sup>31</sup> This highlighted the belief that the collection of art at the Met, rather than being interpreted, was expected by its presence to enhance the minds of those in attendance and that the "work people" would understand this when greater publicity was given to "the experiment."

In the 1880s George Brown Goode embraced the belief that museums could be places to benefit society and serve educational roles. Under Goode's guidance the Smithsonian, while maintaining its collection of artifacts, specimens, and art that had previously been thought to exude meaning by their presence alone, began to consider what larger knowledge museum objects and artifacts might convey.<sup>32</sup> It was not until the turn of the twentieth century, driven by

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<sup>31</sup> No Author, "Metropolitan Art Museum," *New York Times*, May 26, 1872.

<sup>32</sup> For a full discussion of Goode see Leon and Rosenzweig, *History Museums in the United States*, 7-12.

the nation's "democratic ideals and...deep faith in public education both as a political necessity and as a means of attaining technological excellence," Alexander and Alexander argue, that American museums began to more deliberately and thoughtfully use their collections for the education of their audiences.<sup>33</sup>

Museums and historical societies in the early twentieth century came to be seen not only as a gathering place for social and cultural elites and the accumulation of power, but also as an institution that could contribute to the improvement of society. Writing in 1917, John Cotton Dana lamented in "The Gloom of the Museum" the focus that museums had placed on preserving artwork and artifacts. Instead, he insisted that museums look at how they could serve the community: "Now seems to come the demand that the museum serve its people in the task of helping them to appreciate the high importance of manner, to hold by the laws of simplicity and restraint, and to broaden their sympathies and multiply their interests."<sup>34</sup> Within the context of the early twentieth-century museum this sentiment was only beginning to gain credence. Metropolitan Museum President Robert de Forest argued in 1922, "The phrase 'Art for Art's sake' has no place in a healthy republic." He continued, "Art for the enjoyment, for the study, and for the profit of the people is the cornerstone of the museum edifice, the object of its collecting, exhibition, and demonstration." Although the meaning of "for the profit of the people" was not entirely clear, the underlying assumption that museums could serve as places to educate and inform the uneducated and civically unengaged public was obvious.<sup>35</sup> Reinforcing this view of the museum as an agent of social control, Tony Bennett, citing Michel Foucault, argues that upon opening their doors to the public in the nineteenth century, museums became

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<sup>33</sup> Alexander and Alexander, *Museums in Motion*, 7.

<sup>34</sup> John Cotton Dana, "The Gloom of the Museum," in *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift*, ed. Gail Anderson, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Lanham: AltaMira, 2012), 33.

<sup>35</sup> Trask, *Things American*, 3.

“Institutions, then, not of confinement but of exhibition, forming a complex of disciplinary and power relations.” The presence of the general public as witnesses to “a display of power” was just as important “as had been that of the people before the spectacle of punishment in the eighteenth century.”<sup>36</sup> Historian Jeffrey Trask convincingly connects the actions of New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art—a trend-setter for all American museums—to the wider Progressive-era movements in education, city planning, and social reform in arguing, “Rather than restricting knowledge about the cultivation of taste, progressive connoisseurs [at the Metropolitan] tried to democratize taste by presenting a diverse array of objects and using those objects to teach a broad public of museum visitors the principles of design, through examples in the everyday object of domestic life.”<sup>37</sup>

While the impulse to educate was becoming a larger trend within American museums, it was not ubiquitous and remained enmeshed within these institutions’ wider ideological and political functions. Many urban historical societies continued to act as gathering places and social clubs for elites long into the twentieth century.<sup>38</sup> As interests in history continued to flourish in the early twentieth century within the American population other types of museums and sites interpreting the nation’s past, including outdoor museums, emerged to respond to the public’s needs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., founded the first and most famous of these new outdoor museums, Colonial Williamsburg, in 1926.<sup>39</sup> While Colonial Williamsburg sought to engage the public in the nation’s past, it did so within the particular ideological prism of its founder.

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<sup>36</sup> Tony Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex,” *new formations* 4, no. 1 (1988): 73.

<sup>37</sup> Trask, *Things American*, 4.

<sup>38</sup> See for example, Catherine M Lewis’ discussion of the Chicago Historical Society: Catherine M. Lewis, *The Changing Face of Public History: The Chicago Historical Society and the Transformation of an American Museum* (Dekalb, IL: University of Northern Illinois Press, 2005), 11-16.; And, Jennifer W. Dickey’s discussion of the Atlanta Historical Society: Jennifer W. Dickey, *A Tough Little Patch of History: Gone with the Wind and the Politics of Memory* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2014), 39-46.

<sup>39</sup> Alexander and Alexander, *Museums in Motion*, 123.



Historians Richard Handler and Eric Gable refute the oft-told origin myth that Colonial Williamsburg was created to rehabilitate the reputation of John D. Rockefeller, the founder's father, and "explain and justify the facts of the families wealth."<sup>40</sup> They argue that the younger Rockefeller, motivated by religious beliefs rather than the guilt of public relations, created a living-history site that celebrated the nation's past as one of "great men and elites, and ignored the works and lives of the vast majority of the American population. Moreover, it was exclusively celebratory. It privileged national consensus and ignored social conflict, thereby cleansing American history of oppression, exploitation, injustice, and struggle."<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan, created by Henry Ford in 1929, sought to impart its founder's view of the nation's past. Like Colonial Williamsburg, it was developed after a period of rapid industrialization, labor strikes, and political unrest in the Progressive Era that shaped how Ford saw himself within the nation's changing economic and social formations. Ford's statement about the function of Greenfield Village leaves no doubt about his intentions for the site's purpose: "By looking at things people used and that show the way they lived, a better and truer impression can be gained than could be had in a month of reading."<sup>42</sup> Historian Jessie Swigger argues that in the opening of Greenfield Village, Ford's celebration of preindustrial America was obvious.

The homes, artisan and industrial shops, and businesses were not linked by geography or time period but, as the replica of Menlo Park suggests, by Ford's personal interests. Guests might have also noticed that there were no automobiles in the village. Ford excluded them to capture the period before the arrival of his Model T and to indicate that there were aspects of modern life of which he was wary. He imagined a small town where his friends, mentors, and those he admired lived in harmony in a preindustrial

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<sup>40</sup> Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 32.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>42</sup> Henry Ford quoted in Alexander and Alexander, *Museums in Motion*, 124.

age.<sup>43</sup>

The 1930s also marked the first employment of professional historians for the National Park Service (NPS), whom Verne Chatelain, the first chief historian of the NPS, called “a new kind of technician,” and whom historian Denise Meringolo has identified as “among the first public historians.”<sup>44</sup> The creation and development of these sites further contributed to the view of public history sites as places that had educational impact on the public through the promotion of certain ideas of the national past. In tracing the early years of the fledgling National Park Service, Meringolo highlights, “Between 1916 and the end of the 1920s, his [Chatelain’s] recommendations gradually coalesced as the Park Service Creed, which identifies four primary functions for the agency: promotion of health and outdoor recreation, promotion of natural history education, *development of patriotism*, and advocacy of domestic tourism.”<sup>45</sup> [emphasis added]

### **From temple to forum**

Reflecting the slow pace of change in American museums, the underlying power relationship between curator, institution, and public did not begin to change until the latter half of the twentieth century. Trask argues that the seeds of change began with the progressive connoisseurs in his study of the Metropolitan Museum that introduced educational programs into art museums in the early decades of the twentieth century. But this transformation faded as American museums reflected larger economic, political, and societal shifts between the 1930s and 1950s—the economic disarray of the Great Depression, attempts to appeal to traditional art museum visitors who had moved to the newly developed suburbs, and fears of being associated

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<sup>43</sup> Jessie Swigger, *History is Bunk: Assembling the Past at Henry Ford’s Greenfield Village* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014), 2.

<sup>44</sup> Denise D. Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), xiii-xiv.

<sup>45</sup> Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks*, 55.

with “the taint of socialism.”<sup>46</sup> Only in response to the larger intellectual shift and growth of the Civil Rights Movement and the New Social History in the 1960s, as well as the fracturing of the liberal consensus and the associated “culture wars” of the 1980s and 1990s, did museums—and public historians more broadly—begin to address the need to democratize the interpretation and exhibition of history.<sup>47</sup> Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig argue that this seismic shift in public history practice did not “spread evenly over the museum landscape; its effects have varied according to the size, purpose, and focus of differing institutions.”<sup>48</sup> Writing in 1971, Canadian museologist Duncan Cameron provocatively questioned the traditional power dynamics and authoritarian position of museums, probing the question of whether a museum should be “a temple or a forum.” In his influential article he resoundingly supported the latter.

They [museums] must meet society’s need for that unique institution which fulfills a timeless and universal function—the use of the structured sample of reality, not just as a reference but as an objective model against which to compare individual perceptions. At the same time, and with a sense of urgency, the forums must be created, unfettered by convention and established values. The objective here is neither to neutralize nor to contain that which questions the established order. It is to ensure that the new and challenging perceptions of reality—the new values and their expressions—can be seen and heard by all. To ignore or suppress the innovation or the proposal for change is as mindless as to accept that which is new because it is novel.<sup>49</sup>

Cameron concluded by advocating for the use of the museum as a space for dialogue that could inform the present and future: “From the chaos and conflict of today's forum the museum must build the collections that will tell us tomorrow who we are and how we got there. After all, that's what museums are all about.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Trask, *Things American*, 234.

<sup>47</sup> For more thorough discussions tracing these evolutions see Catherine M. Lewis, *The Changing Face of Public History*, 3-10.; Edward Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, ed., *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 1996), 1-8.

<sup>48</sup> Leon and Rosenzweig, *History Museums in the United States*, xviii.

<sup>49</sup> Cameron, “The Museum, a Temple or the Forum,” 59.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

Yet, this view was not homogenously shared across American museums. The 1960s and 1970s also were a time when many community and neighborhood African American museums—connected to the politics of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, as well as larger shifts in African American political and economic power—opened and began to challenge what African American poet June Jordan lambasted as “ultimately meaningless temples of Euro-American hegemony.”<sup>51</sup> The Black Museum Movement that developed in the 1960s and 1970s, Andrea Burns argues, counteracted the “shallow gestures” of many traditional American museums’ representations of African American history and culture. Burns concluded, “If mainstream museums perpetuated white America’s power over the historical narrative, then African American neighborhood museums must disrupt this exclusive, and excluding, account.”<sup>52</sup> These contestations to the dominant, mainstream national museum culture, mirroring similar challenges by Native Americans that manifested in “the Native American Museum movement,” thus caution against painting trends in American museums with too broad a brush.<sup>53</sup>

Since Cameron opened a larger public discussion about the power of the curator and role of the museum forty-five years ago, American museums have generally begun to transition from their role as cultural temples—holders of important artifacts that sought to dictate meaning—to community forum spaces where dialogue and dissonance is encouraged. This change in the understanding of the power dynamics inherent in historical interpretation, and the changing role of the public vis-à-vis the museum, was brought into focus by the vitriolic “culture wars” of the 1980s and 1990s. These “wars” were made infamous amongst historians by the failed attempt to

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<sup>51</sup> Andrea A. Burns, *From Storefront to Monument: Tracing the Public History of the Black Museum Movement* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 2.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>53</sup> Amy Lonetree and Amanda J. Cobb, “Introduction,” in *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversations*, ed. Amy Lonetree and Amanda J. Cobb (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), xviii.

present a complex and not entirely celebratory exhibition of the *Enola Gay* and its role at the end of World War II at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Air and Space in 1995. They led to a refocusing of the publics' attention on the process of historical interpretation and nudged museums and other public history sites to collaborate and share their intellectual authority more freely with their audiences than they had done before.<sup>54</sup> As Edward Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt highlight, "the uproar of the *Enola Gay* show joins a number of other controversies of the 1990s in which historians became unexpected players on a public stage. They found their work debated or attacked, misused, and abused, and themselves accused of aiding and abetting the post-Vietnam War fragmentation of an American consensus."<sup>55</sup> Indeed, these debates served the function of illuminating a discussion about the role and function of history within societies and nations.

### **"A shared authority" and beyond**

The move to revise traditional museum power relationships gained momentum in the final decades of the twentieth century, providing practical and theoretical contexts for Museums Connect program and the three American museums featured in this dissertation's case studies. Writing from the perspective of a historian practicing oral history, Michael Frisch defines the larger reconceptualization of power that was wielded by public historians and museums in the 1980s and 1990s and coined the term "a shared authority," a phrase that has come to form the central tenant of both the practice and study of public history. According to Frisch, "that what is most compelling about oral and public history is a capacity to redefine and redistribute intellectual authority, so that this might be shared more broadly in historical research and

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<sup>54</sup> See for example, Linenthal and Engelhardt, *History Wars*.; and Thomas F. Gieryn, "Balancing Acts: Science, *Enola Gay* and *History Wars* at the Smithsonian." in *The Politics of Display: Museums, Science, Culture*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (New York: Routledge, 1998), 197-228.

<sup>55</sup> Linenthal and Engelhardt, *History Wars*, 5.

communication *rather than continuing to serve as an instrument of power and hierarchy.*”<sup>56</sup> [emphasis added] Grounded in broadly democratic assumptions about the public sphere, Frisch argues, “[P]ublic historians need to realize that their method can do much more than merely redistribute such knowledge. It can, rather, promote a more democratized and widely shared historical consciousness, consequently encouraging broader participation in debates about history, debates that will be informed by a more deeply representative range of experiences, perspectives, and values.”<sup>57</sup> Frisch’s thesis possesses potent force as both a descriptor of changes in the way that historical knowledge was understood in the last quarter of the twentieth century, as well as a challenge for public and oral historians to consider their own position vis-à-vis their power and the public. Since Frisch inked these lines in 1990, a number of important works and practices have wrestled with the theory and practice of this now seminal idea in the field of public history; this dissertation is no exception. These works expand upon Frisch’s original exposition and the broadly democratic and activist assumptions that underpin it, exploring different theoretical and practical strategies for relocating the power of the curator and institution vis-à-vis its public. Although this dissertation explores the power relationships *between* museums as well as between the museums and their respective communities, Frisch and these subsequent works provide the theoretical terrain upon which this study of Museums Connect stands.

Using the transformations of the Chicago Historical Society in the latter half of the twentieth century as a case study, Catherine Lewis, in agreement with Frisch’s central thesis, further reasons that during the 1980s and 1990s, “The era of the curator as the sole voice of authority had ended. The era of collaboration had begun.”<sup>58</sup> Thus, in the decades since, many museums and historical sites have attempted to move towards the ideal of the forum and cast

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<sup>56</sup> Frisch, *A Shared Authority*, xx.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, xxii.

<sup>58</sup> Lewis, *The Changing Face of Public History*, 8.

aside their histories as the sole authority on the meaning of the past. In so doing they engage their publics in many different ways, including considering their interpretations and perspectives of the past and allowing dialogue and dispute to occur within their once-hallowed walls.<sup>59</sup> In tracing the transformation of American museums in the last one hundred years, Gail Anderson and the many contributors to her edited collection endorse these arguments. In the introduction to this important anthology Anderson argues, “The last century of self-examination—reinventing the museum—symbolizes the general movement of dismantling the museum as an ivory tower of exclusivity and toward the construction of a more socially responsive cultural institution in service to the public.”<sup>60</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill calls this transformation “a major shifting and reorganization.”<sup>61</sup> Lisa Roberts, moreover, argues that this has led museums to move their focus from knowledge to narrative, with the result that museum education has grown in significance and has led to “a paradigm shift in museums from Knowledge to knowledges, from science to narrative.”<sup>62</sup>

One important outcome of this larger rethinking of the intellectual underpinnings of museums has been a broader shift in the way that museums think about and engage with their local communities. In their seminal work, *Museums and Communities*, Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine offer considerations of “how museums could accommodate multiple communities in their programs and why this process is critical to the

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<sup>59</sup> A full exploration of examples of this has consumed many books and articles important examples are included, however in Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski, ed., *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World* (Philadelphia: Pew Center for the Arts & Heritage, 2011).

<sup>60</sup> Gail Anderson, “Introduction: Reinventing the Museum,” in *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*, ed. Gail Anderson, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Lanham, MD.: AltaMira Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>61</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, 1.

<sup>62</sup> Lisa C. Roberts, *From Knowledge to Narrative: Educators and the Changing Museum* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 2-3.

production of a civil society that accommodates diversity.”<sup>63</sup> Essays in the volume wrestle with the complexities of communities and their relationships to museums. One of the most tangible outgrowths of Frisch’s original formulation in this volume is the idea of the “dialogic museum.” Within the context of immigrant community experiences in the United States, a number of writers have shown how historic sites have attempted to rethink the relationship between place and the immigrant communities that those places represent. This rethinking was often driven by the goal of acting as a community center or advocacy organization for these traditionally underrepresented groups. Writing about the Chinatown History Museum in New York, John Kuo Wei Tchen traced the move towards a “dialogic museum” model in the late 1980s and early 1990s that facilitated conversations and dialogue between the Chinese American communities of New York and the museum’s other constituents. This move, he and the museum argue, empowered the immigrant community to become part of the history that is being explored as the museum attempted to adopt a central place within a “critical examination” of contemporary “social problems.”<sup>64</sup>

The focus on communities was also reflected in a 1998 study by the then American Association of Museums (AAM) called “Museums and Community Initiative.” This initiative showed the importance that communities had gained in the language of museums at the turn of the twenty-first century. As a later press release accompanying the first round of Museums Connect grants highlighted, “Museums and Community gathered sound and current data and documented best practices by which museums can work in partnership with their communities,

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<sup>63</sup> Ivan Karp, “Introduction: Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture,” in *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, ed. in Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1992), 7.

<sup>64</sup> John Kuo Wei Tchen, “Creating a Dialogic Museum: The Chinatown History Museum Experiment,” in *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Levine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 320.



expand their civic engagement and involve new and diverse audiences in their work.”<sup>65</sup> One important outcome of this process was the 2002 publication by AAM of the book “Mastering Civic Engagement: A Challenge to Museums.”<sup>66</sup> The tone of the book, if not obvious from its title, was to urge museums to rethink and redefine the way they engage with their communities. “M&C is neither a new recipe for what museums do nor a one-sized shoe into which each institution must be crammed. Rather it is about a process through which museums and communities can redefine new mutual relationships that will vary from community to community and museum to museum.”<sup>67</sup> Writing in 2007, Sheila Watson also argued that museums only shape “collective values and social understandings” depending “on the attitudes of those who work in the museums towards the communities they serve.”<sup>68</sup> Watson reminded the reader that understanding and enacting community engagement from a museum’s perspective presents many challenges. She noted, “Research and museum practice over the last decade and a half has served to demonstrate that this relationship is more difficult to understand and change than was, perhaps, once thought.”<sup>69</sup> There is, moreover, an economic element to these changes. In 2006 John H. Falk and Beverly K. Sheppard urged that in order for museums to adjust to the twenty-first century “knowledge age” and remain economically and socially viable, a major transformation in practice is needed. They argued that museums need to “transition from the

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<sup>65</sup> “AAM International Grant: MSU Museum one of four institutions selected for international cultural exchange,” Michigan State University, accessed April 22, 2014, <http://museum.msu.edu/?q=node/114>.

<sup>66</sup> American Association of Museums, *Mastering Civic Engagement: A Challenge to Museums* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums Press, 2002).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Sheila Watson, *Museums and Their Communities* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2007), 1.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 2

mass-production, object-centered models of the twentieth century into something more closely resembling [a] individualized and personalized learning-focused model.”<sup>70</sup>

More recently, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York has introduced dialogic programming to connect visitors to the history of immigration that the site interprets. Small facilitator-led dialogic programs encourage visitors to challenge their preconceived stereotypes and consider the contemporary ramifications of New York’s immigrant history. Thinking about the practicalities of creating a dialogic museum program, the museum’s founder Ruth Abram explained that the museum had to train its staff and visitors because they were accustomed to participating in a certain type of museum program that foregrounded the voice of the “expert.”<sup>71</sup> In evaluating their “Kitchen Conversations” program, one of Abram’s colleagues concluded, “Why is it important to talk?...In a democratic society, people need to engage. On a human level, there is something empowering as a human being about having a place where you reflect upon your country and its history. The lack of such space is dehumanizing. If we create this space for people who might not have it or even seek it, they may demand other opportunities.”<sup>72</sup> Similarly, Maggie Russell-Ciardi showed how the Tenement Museum recently engaged new immigrants in dialogue about the immigrant experience of New York’s Lower East Side in its “Shared Journeys” program to engage these visitors in the practice of “citizenship.” She argued, “the Tenement Museum has embraced the challenge of civic involvement by developing programs that engage a wide range of visitors—including new immigrants—in considering the various perspectives that exist about immigration and other related civic

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<sup>70</sup> John H. Falk and Beverly K. Sheppard, *Thriving in the Knowledge Age: New Business Models for Museums and Other Cultural Institutions* (New York: AltaMira, 2006), 15.

<sup>71</sup> Ruth J. Abram, “Kitchen Conversations: Democracy in Action at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum,” *The Public Historian* 29, no. 1 (2007): 68.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

issues.”<sup>73</sup> These examples emphasize the fundamentally shifting position of the visitor and institution vis-à-vis knowledge within the dialogic museum model.<sup>74</sup>

Building upon the idea of shared authority and its implication for public history practice, Katharine Corbett and Dick Miller argue that “shared inquiry” should be at the center of reflective public history practice. This includes the ability for all participants to share questions, guide the direction of inquiry, and truly practice a shared exploration of the past, despite potentially desiring different outcomes. Reflecting on their own practice and careers, Corbett and Miller conclude that oral historians, by necessity, are better at engaging in collaboration from the formative stages of a project. However, for many public historians, especially those operating in an academic environment, a truly shared inquiry between the public historian and public is rarely achieved. They argue, “Honest sharing, a willingness to surrender some intellectual control, is the hardest part of public history practice because it is the aspect most alien to academic temperament and training.”<sup>75</sup> And while they acknowledge that public history practice is inherently situational and there is no one-size-fits-all approach for public historians when engaging in collaborative projects, they must engage in the active process of “shared inquiry” with the public.<sup>76</sup> They conclude, “Like other keepers of the useful myths, we are mediators between the past and the present, between the truths we want to tell and the truths people want to tell us. To do our jobs well, we have to remain flexible, responsible, always open to a chance encounter.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Maggie Russell-Ciardi, “Building Institution: Reflection on the Shared Journeys Program at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum,” *The Public Historian* 30, no. 1 (2008): 40.

<sup>74</sup> This argument is also highlighted in Roberts, *From Knowledge to Narrative*, and Falk and Sheppard, *Thriving in the Knowledge Age*.

<sup>75</sup> Katharine T. Corbett and Howard S. (Dick) Miller, “A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry,” *The Public Historian* 28, no. 1 (2006): 36.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

Contributors to the important 2011 edited collection, *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World* developed these ideas further. They explored “how public history practice is wrestling with issues of shifting authority in each of these realms—the Web, community-based programming, oral history, and contemporary art.”<sup>78</sup> The essays in this volume reveal how American museums and public history sites have negotiated the new terrain of Web 2.0 that has provided individuals with greater opportunities and easier access to share and contribute to the histories and stories being told about themselves, their communities, and the world around them. The contributors posit an idea of public historian as facilitator rather than knowledge-giver, a move that decenters institutional authority. This idea, they suggest, places dialogue at the center of public history and requires the public historian to bring a different set of skills to their practice.<sup>79</sup> An essay from Frisch in this volume nearly twenty-five years after he introduced the term “a shared authority” reflects that the term has been used too carelessly. He reminds us that the authority is not the public historian’s to share, but rather the authority is inherently shared: “that in the nature of oral and public history, we are not the sole interpreters.”<sup>80</sup> Frisch argues, “Rather, the interpretive and meaning-making process is in fact shared by definition—it is inherent in the dialogic nature of an interview, and in how audiences receive and respond to exhibitions and public history interchanges in general. In this sense, we don’t have authority to give away, really, to the extent we might assume.”<sup>81</sup> While the volume’s idea of public historian as facilitator is valuable for framing the actions of many of the museum

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<sup>78</sup> Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski, “Introduction,” in *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*, ed. Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski (Philadelphia: Pew Center for the Arts & Heritage, 2011), 11.

<sup>79</sup> Corbett and Miller, “A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry,” 15-38.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Frisch, “From A Shared Authority to the Digital Kitchen, and Back,” in *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*, ed. Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski (Philadelphia: Pew Center for the Arts & Heritage, 2011), 127.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

professionals in this dissertation's case studies, Frisch's thesis is challenged by the experience of Museums Connect, in which interpretive and meaning-making authority is not inherently shared because of the centrality of the Department of State's public diplomacy agenda.

In addition to these examples of the challenges and implications of changing the relationship between public historians and their publics, some of the most important works regarding the interpretation and negotiation of history between different cultural groups have come out of an international context. Charlotte J. Macdonald, Ruth B. Phillips and Mark Salber Phillips write about New Zealand and Canada, respectively, and highlight the recent processes of interpreting marginalized indigenous histories in national museums. Within the post-colonial struggle for national memory in New Zealand, Macdonald argues that the Museum of New Zealand-Te-Papa Tongarewa chose to embrace "biculturalism" as its "dominant narrative." The museum acknowledges the power of two histories—one indigenous and one white colonial—as different from the history of the nation under imperial rule where everybody was oppressed by the colonial regime.<sup>82</sup> The challenge, Macdonald argues, is that the museum has had to deliberately efface some of the nation's past in order "to distance itself very firmly from its own origins as a descendent of imperial institutions in which indigenous peoples such as Maori, and the places they inhabited, constituted prime collecting grounds for the exotic object."<sup>83</sup> As a result of this work, the museum has become a place for national healing and celebration as two very different histories are given equal weight.

Within the context of Canada's long and fractured relationship with its indigenous population, Ruth B. Phillips and Mark Salber Phillips highlight a rupture from traditional

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<sup>82</sup> Charlotte J. Macdonald, "Two People, One Museum: Biculturalism and Visitor 'Experience' at Te Papa-'Our Place,' New Zealand's New National Museum," in *Contested Histories in Public Space: Memory, Race, and Nation*, ed. Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Maya Knauer (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 40.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

museum practices at the Canadian Museum of Civilization by attempting to “transform the relationship between Aboriginal people and the Canadian state.”<sup>84</sup> Unlike the New Zealand example, the interpretation of the First Peoples history in Canada attempts to be inclusive and reflect indigenous history for the first time without offering a celebratory narrative. Phillips and Phillips argued that histories interpreted within the context of post-colonial reconciliation efforts are tense, complex, not easily cast into a single, celebratory mold, and leave the visitor with a feeling of unease. They conclude, “Collectively, we have yet to discover whether two bodies can occupy the same space, or whether they will have to find their parallel and separate paths.”<sup>85</sup> This analysis mirrors David Neufeld’s analysis of the incorporation of First Nation’s narratives gained from oral histories into Park Canada’s interpretation and ecological processes. In order to reconcile two very different memories and interpretations of the past, Neufeld suggests “we need to communicate differences and respect alternative visions of the future. For Parks Canada this means a broadened understanding of commemoration.”<sup>86</sup>

The challenges, contestations, and mixed outcomes of sharing authority between indigenous groups and settlers also occurred during the creation of the National Museum of American Indian (NMAI) in Washington, D.C. Amy Lonetree and Amanda J. Cobb and their contributors argue that the methods employed to create the museum, including tribal committees, an indigenous curator, and the embrace of different methods of telling histories, reflected a larger decolonization of traditional museological practices at the Smithsonian as the institution

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<sup>84</sup> Ruth B. Phillips and Mark Salber Phillips, “Contesting Time, Place, and Nation in the First Peoples’ Hall of the Canadian Museum of Civilization” in *Contested Histories in Public Space: Memory, Race, and Nation*, ed. Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Maya Knauer (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 50.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>86</sup> David Neufeld, “Parks Canada, The Commemoration of Canada, and Northern Aboriginal Oral History,” in *Oral History and Public Memories*, ed. Paul Hamilton and Linda Shopes (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 23.

embraced indigenous histories and methods of meaning-making in the creation of the museum.<sup>87</sup> All of these works engage with Frisch's central thesis that public history is most democratically and successfully practiced when intellectual authority is shared in a controlled manner with as many interested stakeholders as possible, while showing many of the contestations and conflicts that can occur. Yet, like the aforementioned examples that wrestle with the practical application of the theoretical idea of involving wider audiences in the museum, Lonetree and Cobb's volume also highlights tensions between this decolonization and NMAI's role as a national museum, as well as a wider debate about the voices and perspectives included in the museum's exhibitions.

In addition to the tensions present in the creation of the NMAI, a move toward a shared intellectual experience at history museums and public history sites has not always been homogeneously embraced. With so many different types of history museums occupying the American landscape, including living-history museums, historic houses, local historical societies, large national museums, and many others besides, the range of responses and approaches to their work reflects this diversity. Moreover, the significant range of practices that permeates this loose coalition of organizations that might self-identify as "history museums" has ensured that change and evolution have been haphazard, sporadic, and slow moving. This is particularly acute where the interpretation of the nation's past at larger national museums plays a role in contributing to understanding definitions of the nation. Despite a brief flirtation with the idea of "story-driven" exhibitions led by curator and Smithsonian Institution leader George Browne Goode between 1870s and 1890s, the collection, organization, and display of the Institution's collection "assumed to be intrinsically interesting and by the assumption that artifacts 'spoke for themselves'" Robert C. Post argues never truly disappeared. Post succinctly reveals this tension

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<sup>87</sup> Amy Lonetree and Amanda J. Cobb, ed. *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversations* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

even when a new generation of curators at the Smithsonian in the later decades of the twentieth century attempted to reconcile the traditional practices of the “Nation’s museum” with more contemporary changes to the nature of historical knowledge production challenges. “[I]t quickly became evident that there were profound disagreements about the right meaning, about the relationship of exhibits and the way they were designed to the idea of progress and to political and patriotic narratives.”<sup>88</sup> Thus the ideological function of Smithsonian museums, including the more recently opened Museum of History and Technology (later National Museum of American History) and National Museum of Air and Space (NMAA), which evolved in a Cold War context remains to promote ideas “representing an evolutionary sequence, primitive to modern, and exemplifying a march away from empiricism and toward an adherence to scientific principles.”<sup>89</sup>

The focus and target audience of museums has also played a significant role in determining the methods and practices that their staff, both professional and volunteer, utilize. Rosenzweig and Leon suggest, “Like outdoor history museums, some American museums have been influenced by trends in vacationing and travel, whereas other institutions seek a purely local audience. Yet whatever the category of museum, some institutions remain unaffected by developments shaping other museums of the same type or even the same locale.” This divergence in experience and willingness to change means that “[s]ome history museums are still using methods pioneered by George Brown Goode at the Smithsonian Institution in the 1880s, while others feature futuristic high-tech multimedia exhibitry [*sic*].”<sup>90</sup> Moreover, while the move to a more democratic approach to the presentation and understanding of history has occurred within history museums more broadly, this move is also problematic. Museums do not operate in

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<sup>88</sup> Post, *Who Owns America’s Past?*, 10.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>90</sup> Leon and Rosenzweig, *History Museums in the United States*, xvii.



a social, cultural, or political vacuum. They engage with publics who learn history through many other, potentially contradictory or more appealing means, such as television, books, and public education. Therefore, while there are many potential benefits for museums to try and reach out to new communities and audiences in new ways, there are many challenges associated with this work that are potentially complicated and often overlooked.<sup>91</sup> The larger trend towards community outreach should not be misunderstood as a homogenous shift in that direction for *all* American museums. Museums Connect, however, represents one example of a program created and operating within this new public history and museological paradigm. The three case studies in this dissertation feature American museums that embrace the idea of dialogism, community engagement, and museum as forum.

### **Oral history in a cross-cultural context**

In its analysis of the interplay of public history and public diplomacy, this dissertation engages with the growing body of literature on community engagement and changing relationships between public historians and their publics. This literature not only informs the theoretical analysis of this dissertation, but also its research methodology. As I have wrestled with the aforementioned questions about my own experiences with Museums Connect and conducted interviews with colleagues and fellow museum professionals, I have considered my own subjectivity vis-à-vis that particular project, the Museums Connect program more broadly, and my colleagues and interviewees specifically. In addition to grant documents, this study utilizes oral interviews with officials at the American Alliance of Museums and the Department of State, as well as Museums Connect and International Partnership Among Museums participants from all sides of the partnerships to avoid presenting a one-sided perspective of Museums Connect. In so doing, this study reinserts the agency and perspectives of non-Western

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., xx.

individuals into a discipline that has deep historical roots in the colonization of non-Western bodies.<sup>92</sup> It is thus positioned alongside the work of Shaila Bhatti in her study of Pakistan's public history, where she sets out an agenda that seeks to move beyond the traditional positioning of Western museology. Bhatti explains:

I want to extend beyond the comfort zone, where we have a preconceived idea of what a museum is, and so largely do not question other possibilities of definition, cultural properties, and status attributes. Since our [Western public historians] museum-consciousness is particularized and resultant of an explicit positioning that naturalises the institution and its meanings within Western civilization, the problematic I set concerns the suitability of this Eurocentric conception for understanding institutions in non-Western and postcolonial societies, where museums, as might be assumed, do not simply replicate this grand narrative.<sup>93</sup>

Throughout the research process, especially in conducting oral interviews, I have tried to be cognizant of these prior assumptions throughout the interview process, while reading/hearing the interviews as texts, and in considering the particular projects and Museums Connect program more broadly. Indeed, I have wrestled with Valerie Yow's question, "Do I like them too much?" at length, and have attempted to heed her guidance: "we have to be conscious therefore of what our prior assumptions are... These aspects of research can only be goals, not actual attainments: we can never gather all the evidence, we can never be completely aware of all researcher intrusion. And the 'complex web' in the interpersonal relations in an interview prevents us from sorting things out in discrete boxes."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> See for example, Patrick Wolfe, "History and Imperialism: A Century of Theory, from Marx to Postcolonialism," *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 2 (1997): 388-420.; Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum.*; Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

<sup>93</sup> Shaila Bhatti, *Translating Museums: A Counterhistory of South Asian Museology* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2012), 26.

<sup>94</sup> Valerie Yow, "Do I like them too much? Effects of the oral history interview on the interviewer and vice-versa," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 63.

Many of the interviews conducted were with non-American Museums Connect participants. The power relations embedded in cross-cultural interviews are also a central concern of my methodology.<sup>95</sup> Through interviewing Japanese women living in England, Susan K. Burton highlighted potential challenges of crossing cultural barriers for oral historians. She recalled the difficulties of being a white British female interviewing Japanese women during her oral history project. These included an inability to gain the same rapport and level of detail and intimacy with her narrators that a Japanese woman interviewing other Japanese women might have been able to achieve. She recalled: “Over time, I came to realize that the variables within a cross-cultural interview: the cultural context, the choice of language, the use of English or Japanese communicative styles, were largely dependent on how the women viewed themselves and how they chose to express their own cultural identities in conversation with a non-Japanese interviewer.”<sup>96</sup> Similarly, Belinda Bozzoli, in a study of the “Women of Phokeng,” underlined these challenges.<sup>97</sup> Valerie Yow, however, warned that cultural and ethnic boundaries are not the only challenges for public historians. She suggested that public historians should also “be aware of power relationships based on race and gender.”<sup>98</sup> Yow emphasized this fact within the context of the Works Progress Administration oral history project in the 1930s and 1940s. She argued,

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<sup>95</sup> Heather Goodall and Micaela Di Leonardo’s writing on cross-cultural oral history are important considerations on the wider implications of this type of practice: Heather Goodall, “Writing a Life with Isabel Flick: An Exploration in Cross-Cultural Collaboration,” *The Public Historian* 27, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 65-82.; And Micaela Di Leonardo, “Oral History as Ethnographic Encounter,” *The Oral History Review* 15, no. 1 (Spring, 1987): 1-20.

<sup>96</sup> Susan K. Burton, “Issues in Cross-Cultural Interviewing: Japanese Women in England,” in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 174.

<sup>97</sup> Belinda Bozzoli, “Interviewing the Women of Phokeng,” in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 156.

<sup>98</sup> Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Plymouth, UK: AltaMira Press, 2005), 169.; This argument is also made at length by Martha Norkunas in her studies of the public histories of Monterey, California and Lowell, Massachusetts. See Martha Norkunas, *The Politics of Public Memory: Tourism, History and Ethnicity in Monterey, California* (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 1993).; Martha Norkunas, *Monuments and Memory: History and Representation in Lowell, Massachusetts* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Press, 2002).

“Racial difference impinged on the interviewing situation, but power and race was [*sic*] inseparable. Black narrators saw white males as having the power to hurt them if they said something those interviewers interpreted as criticizing the social order.”<sup>99</sup>

In addition to these works that provide caution and guidance on how to understand the power dynamics embedded in conducting interviews across ethnic, cultural, racial, and gender boundaries, the work of a number of oral historians working cross-linguistically has greatly influenced the oral history practice that underpinned the research of this dissertation. The limitations of my own language skills prevented me from conducting interviews with Museums Connect participants in any language other than English. I therefore took seriously Andrew Clark’s advice to ask narrators to describe, rather than evaluate, since some narrators feel inclined to respond in the affirmative for fear of seeming impolite or ungrateful.<sup>100</sup> It is possible that those interviewed, at both the American and non-Americans museums, reflected upon their experiences positively to “tow the party line,” praise a program that provided their institutions with large sums of money to enact transnational projects, or paint their involvement in the project in the best possible light. Heeding Valerie Yow’s suggestion, I therefore sought to educate my narrators about the nature of my “serious research study” and that they should not view my dissertation as a public relations exercise.<sup>101</sup> I also considered the narrators’ experiences as a collective, and used their stories and expressions to corroborate their individual interpretations. For example, the abundance of positive responses I received from all the respondents about the impact of the grants allowed me to surmise that the experience of this project was generally very positive. However, I also interrogated the meaning of this collective

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<sup>99</sup> Yow, *Recording Oral History*, 170.

<sup>100</sup> Andrew F. Clark, “The Challenges of Cross-Cultural Oral History: Collecting and Presenting Pulaar Traditions on Slavery from Bundu, Senegambia (West Africa),” *The Oral History Review* 20, no. 1/2 (Spring-Autumn, 1992): 4-5.

<sup>101</sup> Yow, *Recording Oral History*, 205.

tone and tenor to assess what it reveals about the project and the relationships developed between the participants and their museums, and a program that provided large amounts of funding for international travel and transnational projects in addition to their normal work. To move past these rose-tinted recollections of the project, I analyzed the interviews not just as sources of information but also as discursive tracts full of embedded meaning. Thus, the words the narrators used when discussing the other participants and museums, the projects' themes, processes, and products, and how they perceive their roles were treated as equally important as the stories they told about their experiences. I thus heeded the advice of Alessandro Portelli that what makes oral sources different is that they "tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did....The organization of the narrative reveals a great deal of the speakers' relationships to their history."<sup>102</sup>

Many of the interviews were scheduled by telephone and Skype in order to be able to gain the perspectives of Museums Connect participants across the globe. Two significant problems presented themselves while conducting these interviews. The first related to building rapport with the narrators. It was much harder to establish rapport with interviewees over Skype than if I had been face-to-face with them. Valerie Yow reminds us that to build rapport, when the interview begins there "is a period of listening and observing."<sup>103</sup> Without being able to see one another, and in the absence of observing body language, facial expressions, and non-verbal cues, it was much more difficult to establish deep and meaningful conversations.

Secondly, in order to avoid misunderstandings based on the faulty assumption that words and phrases share the same meaning when understood by a native English-speaker compared to a non-native speaker, I have shared this work with the narrators featured in this study to offer them

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<sup>102</sup> Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 1998), 36.

<sup>103</sup> Yow, *Recording Oral History*, 96.

a chance to review and suggest where my analysis has misunderstood their original words and meanings.<sup>104</sup> Although I maintained the final interpretive authority and the work is my own, receiving interpretive input, perspectives, and suggestions from many participants of the projects has also helped ensure that I have subjected the Museums Connect program and its projects to as many critical lenses as possible. My research thus observes the guidance of oral historian Katherine Borland who argues vis-à-vis the challenges of sharing interpretive authority with narrators: “I am suggesting that we might open up the exchange of ideas so that we do not simply gather data on others to fit into our own paradigms once we are safely ensconced in our university libraries ready to do interpretation.” But instead, “By extending the conversation we initiate while collecting oral narratives to the later stages of interpretation, we might more sensitively negotiate issues of interpretive authority in our research.”<sup>105</sup> Drawing on Michael Frisch’s concept of shared authority, Daniel Kerr and many other public history practitioners have returned their interpretations to their narrators and informants to seek feedback and advice on the quality and thoroughness of their scholarship.<sup>106</sup> In keeping with Frisch’s dictum, I have attempted to “redefine and redistribute intellectual authority, so that this might be shared more broadly in historical research and communication rather than continuing to serve as an instrument of power and hierarchy.”<sup>107</sup> I offered my narrators the opportunity to give comments with the proviso that this project is my own work and that I maintain the rights to make final

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<sup>104</sup> This practice draws on the work of a number of scholars operating in cross-linguistic contexts, especially, Saeeda Shah, “The Researcher/Interviewer in Intercultural Context: A Social Intruder!,” *British Educational Research Journal* 30, no. 4 (August, 2004): 561.; And Norton Wheeler, “Cross-Lingual Oral History Interviewing in China: Confronting the Methodological Challenges,” *Oral History* 36, no. 1 (Spring, 2008): 58-59.

<sup>105</sup> Katherine Borland, “‘That’s Now What I Said’: Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research,” in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 319.

<sup>106</sup> Daniel Kerr, “‘We Know What the Problem Is’: Using Oral History to Develop a Collaborative Analysis of Homelessness from the Bottom Up,” *Oral History Review* 30, no. 1 (2003): 27-45.

<sup>107</sup> Frisch, *A Shared Authority*, xx.

interpretive decisions. Although this has offered my work up to the same kind of “That’s Not What I Said,” issues that Borland faced in interviewing her grandmother, the exchange and back-and-forth that has resulted from sharing interpretive authority has enriched and made more nuanced my analysis of the individual case studies, and Museums Connect more broadly.<sup>108</sup> One particular instance highlighted the virtue of this approach. Upon receiving a draft of one chapter, one of the non-American museum professionals was quick to challenge my interpretation of a number of the moments in the grant where they felt that I had dismissed their own interpretations of events in favor of those of the American narrators who had also reflected on the same moments. The spirited back-and-forth ended with the inclusion of a much greater appreciation for the subtlety and nuances of the particular moments under debate, and while we agreed to disagree about the ultimate interpretation, my own analysis is richer for this discussion and reflection.

### **Organization/Chapter Outlines**

The three Museums Connect partnerships explored in this dissertation between museums in the United States and museums in Afghanistan, Morocco, and South Africa provide an analysis of the practical and theoretical implications of transnational public history. This case-study approach, widely used in public history, takes its rationale from Michael Frisch’s own argument that, “Presenting a series of concrete case studies may thus be a good way to penetrate what is most interesting in oral and public history, and it is arguably the best way to permit readers to explore what is found there—to sense how issues have come to the surface through engagements with particular problems in particular settings at particular points in a broader, surrounding cultural and political discourse.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Borland, “‘That’s Not What I Said,’” 310-321.

<sup>109</sup> Frisch, *A Shared Authority*, xvi.

To understand the historical context of the Museums Connect program, and the particular public diplomacy and public history paradigm that framed the creation of the program in 2007 and the three projects explored in this dissertation, readers should understand the specific conditions in both the fields of public history and public diplomacy that gave rise to the Museums Connect program. Chapter three of this study traces this context and explores how both American museums and public history and the State Department's people-to-people diplomacy initiative appear similar in favoring dialogue and personal interaction. Yet it argues that these two practices possess contradictory motivations that formed an unresolved tension that was built into Museums Connect when it was created. This tension shapes the projects selected for funding and forms the context within which Museums Connect projects function.

Chapter four explores a Museums Connect project, "Being, We the People: Afghanistan, America, & the Minority Imprint," conducted between students from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Kabul, Afghanistan in 2008-2009. In an environment with an explicit and pressing hard power context, the students, through the National Constitution Center, Philadelphia, and the National Museum of Afghanistan, Kabul, created a photography exhibition that opened simultaneously in both museums in 2009. Although conducted in the middle of a war-torn country and amongst an abundance of American hard power, the project became a significantly shared endeavor between the students, despite the lack of role played by the National Museum of Afghanistan and the dominance of the National Constitution Center. In the unlikely of circumstances, reflective staff, a fortuitous selection of Afghan partners, and exhibition design all contributed to unexpected shared-inquiry between the two groups of students.

Chapter five analyzes the power dynamics of two Museums Connect grants conducted between two university museums where transnational public history pedagogy was the central



component of both projects. The Museum of History and Holocaust Education at Kennesaw State University, in Kennesaw, Georgia and the Ben M'sik Community Museum at University Hassan II, in Casablanca, Morocco engaged in two projects, "Creating Community Collaborations" (2009-2010) and "Identities: Understanding Islam in a Cross-Cultural Context," (2011-2012) that built upon one another and sought to train participating undergraduate and graduate students from both universities in oral history and exhibition development methodologies. These projects were complicated by the role that the American museum played in the Moroccan museum's founding, the instruction of students in a discipline grounded in American higher education, and the reaction against colonialism inherent in the Moroccan museological context. The complexities of these dynamics created unequal power differentials that led to negotiations of the projects' activities by the Moroccan museum and its students that were interpreted differently by the participants.

Chapter six probes "The International Youth Legacy Leadership" project conducted in 2011-2012 by the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Birmingham, Alabama and two museums from Johannesburg, South Africa: the Nelson Mandela House Museum and The Apartheid Museum. Conducted between museums and communities that have parallel histories and similar public history contexts, this project was adapted to include the Apartheid Museum after an inauspicious beginning that inadvertently benefitted the project. The deep and complex historical study of the parallels between the two communities' histories conducted by the museums and their students throughout the project reflected the power of a shared history underpinning a transnational project. However, the deep and complex shared exploration conducted by the students that allowed them to move beyond the "great men" interpretations of the Civil Rights and anti-Apartheid Movements did not translate to the wider public of South Africa who engaged

with the project. Those who attended the Mandela Day program in Birmingham reverted to the “great men” approach in their interpretation of the connections between Johannesburg and Birmingham’s histories. Moreover, the similar interpretive scopes and sizes of the American museum and the Apartheid Museum, as well as reflective staff in both countries, meant that more than either of the other projects, “The International Youth Legacy Leadership Project” featured an equitable power relationship between those two museums, although not the Nelson Mandela House Museum.

The concluding chapter revisits the literature on “shared authority” and considers what the three case studies tell us about Museums Connect as a new type of transnational public history and the utility of this seminal concept in the field of public history within a transnational context. It argues that the DOS’s concept of people-to-people public diplomacy is complementary with the evolving paradigm of dialogic museums and public history, to an extent. And while these transnational partnerships are designed to help positively project America’s image abroad and form one piece of a more complex public diplomacy agenda, the act of engaging in transnational public history has an equally important impact on both the American and foreign participants. Within the public history context the structures of the Museums Connect program, including those that informed the creation of the program—especially the focus on young people and minorities who typically possess little authority—and the presence of both federal government funding and public diplomacy agendas, preclude a truly shared authority between the American museums and their international partners. It is suggested that transnational public history is at its most balanced when projects combine similar historical subject matter, equally funded and sized museums and public history contexts, and staff reflection-in-action, particularly at the American museums. Furthermore, by resituating both the

history of American public history and the distinct contexts of non-American museologies and public histories, this dissertation argues that Museums Connect, although a transnational public history program with its genesis, funding, and administration in American public history, is not simply a manifestation of the work conducted in the year-long partnerships. The program is also directly impacted by the historical and cultural contexts of the different participating countries' public histories.

### 3 “STATE DEPARTMENT MUSEUMS”? THE CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE OF PUBLIC “PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE” DIPLOMACY AND “A SHARED AUTHORITY”

**“Does this mean that institutions that imprudently allow themselves [to] be co-opted by political propagandists will henceforth be known as ‘State Department Museums’?”  
Lee Rosenbaum, 2007<sup>1</sup>**

After the announcement of the Museums and Communities Collaboration Abroad (MCCA) program in July 2007, National Public Radio’s “Morning Edition” questioned both Eric Ledbetter, Director of International Programs at AAM, and culture critic Lee Rosenbaum. The central theme of the report was the overt and—in Rosenbaum’s eyes—insidious use of American museums as vehicles for public diplomacy. Show host Steve Inskeep provocatively opened the segment suggesting, “Some people who run American museums are asking if they want to be used to promote foreign policy” before cutting to the responses from separate interviews conducted with Ledbetter and Rosenbaum.<sup>2</sup> Rosenbaum focused on the State Department’s suggestion of geographical and thematic areas for consideration in the first round of grants. “Certainly, there has been a history of government support for exhibitions going abroad. But the proposals generally and the planning and the concepts behind the exhibition should come from the museums and not be dictated by the federal government.” Ledbetter’s rebuttal, however, clarified that, “It’s their colleagues, U.S. scholars, not administration officials who will make the final awards.”<sup>3</sup> This short treatment of MCCA only began to scratch the surface of Rosenbaum’s critique of Museums Connect, as MCCA was renamed in 2011. Writing later on her blog and reflecting on the radio piece, Rosenbaum suggested “Does this mean that institutions that

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<sup>1</sup> “My NPR Soundbite on the Museum Propaganda Initiative,” Lee Rosenbaum, accessed April 2, 2014, [http://www.artsjournal.com/culturegrl/2007/07/my\\_npr\\_soundbite\\_on\\_the\\_museum.html](http://www.artsjournal.com/culturegrl/2007/07/my_npr_soundbite_on_the_museum.html).

<sup>2</sup> “State Department Funds World Museum Exhibits,” Morning Edition, National Public Radio, Washington, D.C., July 17, 2007, accessed April 1, 2014. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=12026427>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

imprudently allow themselves [to] be co-opted by political propagandists will henceforth be known as ‘State Department Museums’?”<sup>4</sup>

As Rosenbaum’s comments reveal, the issue of American museums operating as vehicles for government-sponsored cultural diplomatic programs can be polarizing for individuals who fear the encroachment of the government into every sphere of their lives or who consider governmental foreign policy, however enacted, to be insidious and imperialistic.<sup>5</sup> While her critique of MCCA’s launch was relatively localized and based on the misinformation that the State Department was dictating which museums would receive funding, it was also predicated on the false assumption that American museums are apolitical and divorced from ideological and power considerations. This view neglects the long history of museums within the United States and the West.

The birth of the modern Western museum in the nineteenth century, Tony Bennett argues, was intimately connected to the solidification of the nation state’s power over the public en masse. “[T]he public museum exemplified the development of a new ‘governmental’ relation to culture in which works of high culture were treated as instruments that could be enlisted in new ways for new tasks of social management.”<sup>6</sup> Since these early institutions were founded, museums have grappled with their roles vis-à-vis the public. Jeffrey Trask argues that debates about the idea of the democratic museum and the civic role of museums that began at the end of the nineteenth century possess a long and complex genealogy. “Debates about the civic role of museums—whether museums should serve primarily as places to preserve the sacred status of fine art and reify cultural capital or as institutions to promote social cohesion through democratic

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<sup>4</sup> “My NPR Soundbite,” Lee Rosenbaum.

<sup>5</sup> For a sample of comments related to this story see Edward Winkleman’s blog: <http://www.edwardwinkleman.com/2007/07/matter-of-trust-bad-idea.html>, Edward Winkleman, accessed 4/10/2014.

<sup>6</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995), 6.

programming and educational outreach—continue to this day.”<sup>7</sup> Public history sites and museums in the latter half of the twentieth century evolved gradually—and certainly not homogenously—away from the projection and demonstration of authority, the belief that the public is monolithic and passively receives culture and education, and the definition of the self vis-à-vis a foreign other, towards the democratization of the interpretation and exhibition of the past.<sup>8</sup> Although this change has occurred slowly through the twentieth century, it gained momentum in the last decades of the century.<sup>9</sup>

This evolution is not the only context within which Museums Connect was created in 2007. As a public diplomacy program of the United States Department of State, this program serves simultaneously a public history and public diplomacy agenda. Thus, this chapter traces the evolution of public diplomacy since World War II including the introduction of the use of museums and exhibitions in foreign policy during the Cold War. In so doing it argues that there appears to be mimesis between public diplomacy’s idea of “people-to-people” diplomacy and the aforementioned movements towards community engagement, dialogism, and the “forum” museum model in public history that grew out of the movement toward “a shared authority,” because both of these modes value placing individuals and communities in conversation. Moreover, this chapter argues that there was a similarity of immediate motivations, including cost-saving and broadening economic impact, which shaped the immediate decision to reimagine the International Partnership Among Museums (IPAM) program into Museums Connect in 2007.

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<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey Trask, *Things American: Art Museums and Civic Culture in the Progressive Era* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Notably Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett’s work on ethnological museums argues that many ethnographic exhibitions still create knowledge through the exhibition of objects not originally intended for display. Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

In tracing these developments and evolution, and the underlying structures and motivations of both public diplomacy and the contemporary public history paradigm, it is argued that Museums Connect was created because of similar short-term motivations but remains predicated on a fundamentally un-resolved tension. As with so many grant programs funded by a major sponsor, the agenda of the people-to-people diplomacy of the DOS Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs is central to the program. While the program's conception, approach to the types of grants that are awarded, and control of grants during their operation is based on exchange, dialogue, and collaborative relationships, it is fundamentally motivated by the desire to improve America's standing in the world. In contrast, the more recent paradigm of public history that forms the rationale for the program's creation by the AAM and provides the model upon which projects are supposed to operate assumes that the power and authority of the museum is not projected but instead inherently shared. Although American museums were explicitly political in their earliest years, their use in foreign policy gained significant momentum immediately following World War II during the Cold War when culture as a vehicle of foreign policy was widely adopted.

### **Soft power, public diplomacy, and the power of “people-to-people” diplomacy**

During World War II the United States Government began to explore new ways to further its interests abroad by engaging foreign nations and people through a broad range of public diplomacy pursuits. It was not until the earliest years of the Cold War, however, that this method of diplomacy was widely adopted. A subjective and debated term, public diplomacy is broadly understood as “the art of communicating with foreign publics to influence international perceptions, attitudes and policies.”<sup>10</sup> In the Cold War ideological struggle against the Soviet

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<sup>10</sup> J. Michael Waller, “Introduction,” in *The Public Diplomacy Reader*, ed. J. Michael Waller (Washington, D.C.: The Institute of World Politics Press, 2007), 19.; Richard T. Arndt, *The First Resort*

Union that emerged after World War II, it became an important method of pushing the United States' "soft power" agenda in addition to the more recognized traditional diplomatic efforts of governmental communication through political figures, ambassadors, and diplomats. Although Joseph Nye, former Assistant Secretary of Defense in the Clinton Administration, did not coin the term until 1990, he explained "soft power" thus: "It is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced... When you can get others to admire your ideals and to want what you want, you do not have to spend as much on sticks and carrots to move them in your direction."<sup>11</sup> After September 11, 2001, Nye also argued that ideas of "soft power" are motivated by the ideas of "attraction and seduction." He suggested that American officials had erred too far in the direction of "hard power," and that to be most effective "soft power" must work hand-in-hand with "hard power" (the carrot and stick) to advance America's interests in global affairs.<sup>12</sup> Natalia Grincheva argues that those interests are "global democratization," which "has governed the dialogue of foreign-policy objectives" since the Presidency of Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921). After World War II, these ideas gained momentum by broadly re-defining America's foreign policy objectives "to reshape the globe in the American model."<sup>13</sup>

Still, how to define and implement public diplomacy was not always agreed upon. Joseph Nye argues that a division emerged between "those who favored the slow media of cultural diplomacy—art, books, exchanges—that had a trickle-down effect, and those who favored the

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*of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books Inc, 2005), xxi.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), x.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>13</sup> Natalia Grincheva, "Democracy for Export: Museums Connect Program as a Vehicle for American Cultural Diplomacy," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 58, no. 2 (April, 2015): 138.



fast information media of radio, movies, and newsreels, which promised more immediate and visible ‘bang for the buck.’”<sup>14</sup> Reflecting contemporary debates about the best way to engage in public diplomacy and advance American soft power, Nye opines, “proponents of these two approaches struggled over how the government should invest in soft power. The ‘tough-minded’ did not shy away from direct propaganda while the ‘tender-minded’ argued that changing foreign attitudes is a gradual process that needs to be measured in years” and occurs through meeting Americans and engaging in conversations with wider publics.<sup>15</sup> Grincheva explains this process thus: “Democratic principles are projected to foreign audiences both through programming and through organizational values and best practices.”<sup>16</sup> There were also struggles over how free of government control government-supported programs should be. Nye concluded that despite the success of Cold War-era policies and programs, which made America attractive to citizens in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and China, “debate over how directly or indirectly the government should try to control its instruments of soft power can never be fully resolved because both sides make valid points.”<sup>17</sup>

The ideological struggles of the Cold War saw an effective implementation of “soft power” through public diplomacy. In the transition from a hot war to a cold war, the importance of spreading America’s message to foreign publics in order to counter negative Soviet propaganda about the dearth of American culture and other inadequacies of the United States—and increasingly by extension capitalism—gained greater urgency. The United States Information Agency (USIA), the government agency responsible for public diplomacy between 1953 and 1999, saw American cultural products as one vehicle for effectively attracting support

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<sup>14</sup> Nye, *Soft Power*, 102-103.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>16</sup> Grincheva, “Democracy for Export,” 141.

<sup>17</sup> Nye, *Soft Power*, 103.

for the United States’ “culture, political ideals and policies.”<sup>18</sup>

In practice, since World War II the U.S. Government messily and contradictorily applied the implementation of cultural diplomacy as one method of advancing American interests abroad through public diplomacy. Writing about a CIA-operated program in Western Europe in the early years of the Cold War that attempted “to nudge the intelligentsia of Western Europe away from its lingering fascination with Marxism and Communism towards a view more accommodating of ‘the American way,’ Francis Stoner Saunders highlighted:

[T]he incipient CIA started, from 1947, to build a “consortium” whose double task it was to inoculate the world against the contagion of Communism and to ease the passage of American foreign policy interests abroad. The result was a remarkably tight network of people who worked alongside the Agency to promote an idea: that the world needed a *pax Americana*, a new age of enlightenment, it would be called the American Century.<sup>19</sup>

The expression of *pax Americana* was not without contradictions and ambivalence. Penny M. Von Eschen’s masterful analysis of Cold War jazz tours between 1956 and 1974 in *Satchmo Blows up the World* reveals some of the challenges that the government faced in attempting to use citizens, especially African American musicians from the pre-Civil Rights legislation era, to project American values abroad and counter Soviet anti-American propaganda as part of a much larger effort at global engagement. Highlighting the interconnectedness of American domestic and foreign policies, Von Eschen argues that throughout the Cold War a “can-do foreign policy culture” extended “across Democratic as well as Republican administrations.” She contended that “policy makers exhibited extraordinary confidence in America’s ability to shape the world in

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<sup>18</sup> Nye, *Soft Power*, x.; See for example, Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 2001).; and Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 1-2.

its image with whatever tools it had.”<sup>20</sup> Von Eschen’s analysis of these tours also uncovers the challenges, internal contradictions and complexities of a public diplomacy program built upon the “abiding paradox” of black musicians being asked to “promote a vision of color-blind American democracy.” “The tours foregrounded the importance of African American culture during the Cold War, with blackness and race operating culturally to project an image of American nationhood that was more inclusive than the reality.”<sup>21</sup>

These uses of “tough-minded” approaches to public diplomacy as one vehicle of soft power during the Cold War simultaneously co-existed with more exchange-based methods of “person-to-person contacts.” Public Law 402, the United States Information and Educational Exchange Act also known as the Smith-Mundt Act, was one of the first manifestations of what Nye later called a “tender-minded” approach to soft power. The law was passed on January 27, 1948, “to promote the better understanding of the United States among the peoples of the world and to strengthen cooperative international relations.”<sup>22</sup> The objective of this founding legislation was, “to enable the Government of the United States to promote a better understanding of the United States in other countries, and to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries.”<sup>23</sup> On January 27, 1948, President Truman approved the Smith-Mundt Act, committing the government to conduct information, education, and cultural exchange activities on a worldwide, long-term scale during a time of peace.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> “Public Law 402: The Smith-Mundt Act” (1948) in *The Public Diplomacy Reader*, ed. J. Michael Waller (Washington, D.C.: The Institute of World Politics Press, 2007), 488.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 488.

<sup>24</sup> The Panel on International Information, Education, and Cultural Relations, *International Information Education and Cultural Relations: Recommendations for the Future* (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1975), 1.

Developing these ideas further, the apogee of the idea of exchange and people-to-people diplomacy in this period, and still the continuing justification for educational and cultural exchanges, was the 1961 Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act, commonly called the Fulbright-Hays Act. It “enable[d] the Government of the United States to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange.” This exchange, it was hoped, would:

strengthen the ties which unite us with other nations by demonstrating the educational and cultural interests, developments, and achievements of the people of the United States and other nations, and the contributions being made toward a peaceful and more fruitful life for people throughout the world; to promote international cooperation for educational and cultural advancement; and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic, and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world.<sup>25</sup>

This train of thought supposed that by connecting Americans and foreigners through cultural and educational programs, the United States was and still is able to tacitly recruit the support of foreign audiences for its many foreign policy agendas. Or, as a one commentator suggested, at least give the United States the benefit of the doubt.<sup>26</sup>

The belief in the power of citizen exchanges as expressed in the Smith-Mundt and Fulbright-Hays Acts has formed the central justification for those preferring a “tender-minded” approach to public diplomacy rather than a more overt propagandistic approach practiced by others in the latter half of the twentieth century. However, while both of Nye’s “tender” and “tough” minded modes of public diplomacy have been employed since World War II, they rarely operate within a vacuum. Historian and cultural diplomat Richard Arndt declares, “In *projecting* their cultures, groups and nation states from the beginning of history had insisted on balance, *on*

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<sup>25</sup> Fulbright-Hays Act. H.R. 8666 Public law 87-256, The Fulbright-Hays Act, Code of Federal Regulation, Title 22: Chapter 33 (1961): <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/iegps/fulbrighthaysact.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Mary Jeffers, “Expert Views on Public Diplomacy: The Next Four Years,” *Take Five* (blog), November 26, 2012, <https://takefiveblog.org/author/mmvj/>.

'exchanges,' on reciprocity, and on bidirectional flow.'<sup>27</sup> [emphasis added]

The understanding of public diplomacy that seeks to draw upon the inherent values and virtues of American culture to assuage negative opinions of the United States has consistently drawn on those important early pieces of legislation. A 1985 report by the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy suggested, "Public diplomacy supplements and reinforces traditional diplomacy by explaining U.S. policies to foreign publics, by providing them with information about American society and culture."<sup>28</sup> In another instance, National War College fellow Paul A. Smith reflected on the intimate connection between cultural and public diplomacy and other types of foreign policy and international relations in 1989: "It [public diplomacy] seeks to elicit popular support for solutions of mutual benefit that avoids threats, compulsion, or intimidation. It is not a form of political warfare, although it may be used in combination with political warfare."<sup>29</sup> The 2004 Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy, moreover, clarified the rationale behind the use of culture within public diplomacy. It argued, "Cultural diplomacy is the linchpin of public diplomacy; for it is in cultural activities that a nation's idea of itself is best represented."<sup>30</sup> It further defended the virtues of this approach to public diplomacy when it maintained:

Cultural diplomacy is a two-way street: for every foreign artist inspired by an American work of art, there is an American waiting to be touched by the creative wonders of other traditions. Culture spreads from individual to individual, often by subterranean means; in exchange programs like Fulbright, Humphrey, and Muskie, in person-to-person contacts made possible by international visitor and student exchange programs, ideas that we hold dear – of family, education, and faith – cross borders, creating new ways of thinking.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings*, xii.

<sup>28</sup> United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, *1985 Report* (February 1985), in *The Public Diplomacy Reader*, ed. Waller, 27.

<sup>29</sup> Paul A. Smith, *On Political War* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1989), 7.

<sup>30</sup> Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy, "Cultural Diplomacy: The Linchpin of Public Diplomacy, April 15, 2005," in *The Public Diplomacy Reader*, ed. J. Michael Waller (Washington, D.C.: The Institute World Politics Press, 2007), 165.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

The underlying ideological assumptions of this approach to public diplomacy were outlined when the report concluded, “Indeed the ideals of the Founding Fathers, enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Federalist Papers, and the Bill of Rights, take on new life in the vibrant traditions of American art, dance, film, jazz and literature, which continue to inspire people the world over despite our political differences.”<sup>32</sup> Connecting American citizens with individual citizens in foreign countries allows foreign citizens to learn about the virtues of the United States in a way that is less overtly propagandistic than the programs and activities that take the “tough-minded” approach. Put another way, Nancy Snow summed up the underlying assumptions as: “to know us, is to like us.”<sup>33</sup>

John Lenczowski, a senior DOS public diplomacy official in 2007, supported the use of culture as one method of public diplomacy, reflecting on the notion that exchange and people-to-people diplomacy must operate in connection with other types of public diplomacy. Writing in 2007, he argues, “cultural diplomacy can be integrated with other elements of these activities whether they be in the realm of information policy, ideological competition, countering hostile propaganda, foreign aid policy, religious democracy, or establishing relationships of trust.” Thus, “in these capacities, cultural diplomacy can have positive effects on foreign cooperation with U.S. policy.”<sup>34</sup> Entrenched within both of these views is the belief that public diplomacy, whichever mode is practiced, can positively impact the United States’ global standing, create affinity for the United States amongst global populations, and act in conjunction with traditional diplomacy and hard power to reinforce the United States’ global hegemony. Indeed, in her

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>33</sup> Nancy Snow, “International Exchanges and the U.S. Image,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1. (2008): 199., quoted in Grincheva, “Democracy for Export,” 139.

<sup>34</sup> John Lenczowski, “Cultural Diplomacy,” in *The Public Diplomacy Reader*, ed. J. Michael Waller (Washington, D.C.: The Institute of World Politics Press, 2007), 197.

confirmation address before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 2013, Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs Evan Ryan more recently explained, “When you meet Americans, you meet American values.”<sup>35</sup> Implicit yet broadly understood within this statement is the belief that “meet[ing] American values” will naturally persuade and convince skeptical audiences to understand, forgive, give the benefit of the doubt to, or collaborate with the apparently homogeneous United States on any number of complex foreign policy objectives or projects.

### **Museums and “soft power”**

The potential for museums to play an important role in foreign policy was identified at the same time that the United States government was beginning to explore the virtues of public diplomacy and soft power. In 1942 Metropolitan Museum of Art educator Theodore Low urged museums to become central educational institutions within the fraught international context of World War II. Low argued in a piece commissioned by the American Association of Museums that “the museum as an already established institution with vast resources of material of all kinds and description must take its place beside the library as a bulwark of the movement for popular education.”<sup>36</sup> Significantly, Low additionally identified the important role that the American museum could play in foreign policy:

No one can deny that museums have powers which [*sic*] are of the utmost importance in any war of ideologies. They have the power to make people see the truth, the power to make people recognize the importance of the individual as a member of society, and, of equal importance in combating subversive inroads, the power to keep minds happy and healthy. They have, in short, propaganda powers which [*sic*] should be more effective in their truth and eternal character than those of the Axis which are based on falsehoods and half-truths. Museums with the potentiality of reaching millions of our citizens must not

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<sup>35</sup> *Statement of Evan Ryan, Nomination Hearing Before the Foreign Relations Committee, United States Senate, 113<sup>th</sup> Cong.* (July 30, 2013) (statement of Evan Ryan, Nominee to be Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs, United States State Department).

<sup>36</sup> Theodore Low, “What is a Museum?” in *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift*, ed. Gail Anderson, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Plymouth: AltaMira, 2012), 45.

fail to recognize their responsibility.<sup>37</sup>

The use of other cultural forms began in earnest in the 1940s as part of the larger utilization of “soft power” to win favor amongst foreign leaders. Despite Low’s urging the U.S. government only used exhibition and object exchanges for diplomacy sporadically until the International Partnership Among Museums (IPAM) was created in 1980.

One early exception was the 1959 American art exhibitions in Moscow, part of wider public diplomacy efforts to counter Soviet charges that the United States was a cultural void and to attract support within the Soviet Union for the United States.<sup>38</sup> The use of traveling exhibitions as a method of attracting support for foreign publics was not solely an American pursuit. Outside of the United States, traveling museum exhibitions were used as one mode of public diplomacy with the express purpose of projecting images of the nation (“tough-minded” approach). This began in the 1970s and 1980s with the introduction of a number of “national treasures” exhibitions by nations seeking to influence the thinking and actions of global audiences. However, despite the diplomatic goals of these exhibitions, Brian Wallis argues, “the good public relations they generated primarily benefitted their multinational corporate sponsors.”<sup>39</sup>

Traveling exhibitions serving as vehicles for international boosterism continued after the end of the Cold War. “Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries” traveled in the United States in 1990-1991, as did other large national cultural festivals produced with significant traveling exhibitions by Turkey and Indonesia in the late 1980s and early 1990s. And the United States government employed the use of a photographic exhibit of Ground Zero following the 9/11

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>38</sup> Marilyn Kushner, “Exhibiting Art at the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959: Domestic Politics and Cultural Diplomacy,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, no. 1 (2002): 6-26.

<sup>39</sup> Brian Wallis, “Selling Nations: International Exhibitions and Cultural Diplomacy,” in *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, ed. Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 267.



terrorist attacks that traveled the globe in an attempt to maintain sympathy for the United States in the years after the attacks.<sup>40</sup> The use of traveling exhibitions as purveyors of a manufactured view of the nation to sell the nation abroad mimics the efforts of many domestic museums to promote positive images of their communities' histories. Wallis argued that unlike the Treasures exhibitions, large art exhibitions' "unabashed purpose [wa]s to transform negative stereotypes into positive ones and, in the process, to improve the political and economic standing of their country."<sup>41</sup> Thus, he concluded, "in many different ways they function[ed] as huge public relations gambits, designed to 'sell' the nation's image in the United States."<sup>42</sup> The propaganda and public relations purposes of international traveling exhibitions in the last quarter-century was also noted by Daniel Walkowitz and Lisa Mayer Knauer. Exploring the global scope of public history in an attempt to de-center the American-centric focus of the field, they explored the question, "who is authorized to interpret events that are viewed as national narratives?" They concluded that governments have used traveling exhibitions with selective views of a nation's past "to bolster their international image, shore up domestic support, or placate critics."<sup>43</sup>

In addition to the overtly propagandistic use of museum traveling exhibitions acting as purveyors of American values during the Cold War, American museums also came to be seen as vehicles for the "tender-minded" approach of exchange as they evolved to look outward at engaging their communities in the late 1970s and early 1980s, rather than acting only as

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<sup>40</sup> Liam Kennedy, "Remembering September 11: Photography as Cultural Diplomacy," *International Affairs* 79, no. 2 (2003): 315-326.; See also: Sophie Macintyre, "The Art of Diplomacy: The Role of Exhibitions in the Development of Taiwan-China Relations," *Journal of Curatorial Studies* 4, no. 1 (2015): 56-77.

<sup>41</sup> Wallis, "Selling Nations," 267.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Mayer Knauer, "Introduction," in *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space*, ed. Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Mayer Knauer (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004), 4.

purveyors of object and exhibition exchange.<sup>44</sup> A seeming confluence of the “tender-minded” approach of people-to-people diplomacy and the new ideology of the museum as outward-facing forum, rather than temple of power, emerged as ideas about the function and role of museums in American society changed in the latter half of the twentieth century. The apparent mimesis between these two practices gave birth to the International Partnership Among Museums (IPAM) in 1980. Created as part of the aforementioned wider context of people-to-people public diplomacy, IPAM was administered by then American Association of Museums (American Alliance of Museums since 2012) and funded by the Department of State. The program, unlike concurrent traveling exhibitions that ignored dialogue in favor of projecting values and ideas, sponsored “one-to-one projects, connecting one curator, or one researcher, in a location with their counterpart.”<sup>45</sup> These yearlong projects allowed museum staff members to travel to their respective colleague’s country to engage in a project on which they both worked, providing for people-to-people exchange. These projects varied greatly. Heather Berry, the former Manager of International Programs at AAM, recalled that “There were dinosaur digs, there were people looking at telescopes, and we had a great partnership with a gentleman at the Adler Planetarium in Chicago working with a museum in Germany and they went through old collections and were able to find these old telescopes that people had not even realized what they were in their collections. They’d been sitting in the corner in this wooden box with some lenses, and they were able to find these.”<sup>46</sup> Throughout the twenty-seven years of the program, 245 partnerships were sponsored by IPAM, connecting U.S. museum professionals with eighty-five countries around

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<sup>44</sup> See for example, Marilyn Kushner, “Exhibiting Art at the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959: Domestic Politics and Cultural Diplomacy,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, no. 1 (2002): 6-26.

<sup>45</sup> Heather Berry, Interview with the author, digital recording, Washington, D.C., February 5, 2014.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

the world.<sup>47</sup> The program, functioning in the aforementioned “tender-minded” approach to public diplomacy, however, was limited in its impact to person-to-person exchange by two museum professionals and operated with little attention and at a relatively low cost throughout a much more tumultuous period of upheaval and change within the United States’ approach to public diplomacy.

### **“Generally apathetic”**

The “Culture Wars” raged in the U.S. at a time when public historians sought to re-think power and authority, just as the Cold War came to an end and the United States emerged from a half century-long ideological conflict.<sup>48</sup> The victorious atmosphere that emerged in the United States in the early 1990s created complacency that offered politicians an opportunity to limit government spending that had risen significantly since the 1940s. In the wake of the United States’ perceived ideological and cultural victory over the Soviet Union, the apparent absence of a need for public diplomacy, in either the “tough-minded” or “tender-minded” forms, resulted in heavy spending cuts that rippled through USIA and other government programs. This created the immediate economic context for the development of Museums Connect in the early twenty-first century. Mary Jeffers, a long time USIA and DOS Public Affairs Officer, and later Public Diplomacy Fellow at George Washington University, emphasized the lack of importance placed on public diplomacy programs at the end of the Cold War. She reflected, “USIA experienced severe budget cuts, so the trajectory I see over time is that we used to do a lot of things that are not that different from what we’re doing today, and then we went into a period of doing very

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<sup>47</sup> Jennifer W. Dickey, Samir El Azhar, and Catherine M. Lewis, “Introduction,” in *Museums in a Global Context: National Identity, International Understanding*, ed. Jennifer W. Dickey, Samir El Azhar, and Catherine M. Lewis (Washington, D.C.: AAM Press, 2013), 14.

<sup>48</sup> Rob Robin, “Requiem for Public Diplomacy?” *American Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (2005): 347.

little of them because we had very little money.”<sup>49</sup> To understand the significant decline in emphasis placed on public diplomacy and impending fear that those involved in United States public diplomacy felt after the end of the Cold War, one must only read a Government Accountability Office report dated September 23, 1996. Addressing the possibility of further budget cuts to the United States Information Agency, the report argued:

To sustain a major reduction, USIA may have to consider closing more posts than it presently plans in countries where USIA has determined that the United States has limited public diplomacy goals. The impact of such closures now and in the future is uncertain. Another option would be to reconfigure USIA's overseas presence, which is currently based on a structure established after World War II. For example, USIA maintains cultural centers and branch offices (that provide basic information on the United States and counsel students interested in attending U.S. schools) in countries that previously did not, but now have access to other sources of information on the United States. These options have the potential to substantially reduce costs.<sup>50</sup>

The language of this report reflected a desperate plea from bureaucrats and officials at USIA to those in charge of government appropriations to realize the need for a robust and well-funded public diplomacy program. And while the impact suggested in this excerpt “is uncertain,” the entire document is laced with the feeling that further reductions in USIA's budget would have been deadly to the United States' foreign policy agenda. Retired USIA Foreign Service Officer Arthur A. Bados mirrored the bleak tone of this report in a 2001 essay. Writing about USIA's merger with the Department of State in 1999, he lamented: “If public diplomacy has to give up its hard-won culture and is made to adopt that of the Department of State, it will languish until someday a new political accident again lodges it in a separate entity. Americans of good will who spent most of their lives learning and creating this new profession must hope that it will not

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<sup>49</sup> Mary Jeffers, Interview with the author, digital recording, by telephone, February 13, 2014.

<sup>50</sup> U.S. Information Agency, *Options for Addressing Possible Budget Reductions*, September 23, 1996, GAO/NSIAD-96-179. Washington, D.C.. (viewed online) accessed February 24, 2014, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/GAOREPORTS-NSIAD-96-179/html/GAOREPORTS-NSIAD-96-179.htm>

come to that.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, even though there was stronger political determination to balance the budget while celebrating the United States’ “victory” in the Cold War, these two inside accounts remind us that many felt, for a variety of reasons, that public diplomacy was just as important after the fall of the Berlin Wall as before it.

Listening to the language of President Clinton’s first inaugural address in 1993, ordinary Americans as well as diplomats and USIA officials may have thought that the agenda of public diplomacy would acquire new and greater importance in the United States foreign affairs toolkit. A section of his first inaugural address read:

To renew America, we must meet challenges abroad as well as at home. There is no longer a clear division between what is foreign and what is domestic. The world economy, the world environment, the world AIDS crisis, the world arms race: they affect us all. Today, as an older order passes, the new world is more free but less stable. Communism's collapse has called forth old animosities and new dangers. Clearly, America must continue to lead the world we did so much to make.

While America rebuilds at home, we will not shrink from the challenges nor fail to seize the opportunities of this new world. Together with our friends and allies, we will work to shape change, lest it engulf us. When our vital interests are challenged or the will and conscience of the international community is defied, we will act, with peaceful diplomacy whenever possible, with force when necessary. The brave Americans serving our Nation today in the Persian Gulf, in Somalia, and wherever else they stand are testament to our resolve. But our greatest strength is the power of our ideas, which are still new in many lands. Across the world we see them embraced, and we rejoice. Our hopes, our hearts, our hands are with those on every continent who are building democracy and freedom. Their cause is America's cause.<sup>52</sup>

Clinton’s touting of “peaceful diplomacy whenever possible,” as well as his exultation of the “power of ideas,” in a way that Natalia Grincheva argues “harkened back to Wilson,” seemed to suggest a move away from the use of hard power in the direction of softer means.<sup>53</sup> Yet the

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<sup>51</sup> Arthur A. Bardos, “Public Diplomacy’: An Old Art, A New Profession,” *VQR: A National Journal of Literature & Discussion*, Summer 2001, accessed April 3, 2014, <http://www.vqronline.org/essay/public-diplomacy-old-art-new-profession>.

<sup>52</sup> William J. Clinton, “First Inaugural Address,” January 20, 1993, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=46366>.

<sup>53</sup> Grincheva, “Democracy for Export,” 138.

reality of this speech and the Clinton Administration's larger view of public diplomacy was what Walter Laquer, writing in 1994, called "generally apathetic."<sup>54</sup> As spending on public diplomacy was cut to help balance the federal budget, cultural diplomacy programs dramatically shrank in number and scale, despite protest and warnings from bureaucrats and public diplomacy attachés within USIA. USIA's budget peaked at \$1.084 billion in 1992 before declining throughout the 1990s to \$450 million in 1997; it only grew slightly to \$475 million in 1999.<sup>55</sup> Emphasizing the mindset of streamlining and reducing inefficiencies, USIA and its public diplomacy programs were merged into the Department of State in 1999.<sup>56</sup>

Accounts of public diplomacy efforts in the period after the end of the Cold War are riddled with retrospective laments about missed opportunities and ill-informed celebrations of U.S. vitality and the success of spreading democracy around the world. William Laquer's prescient observation in 1994 predicted events that would jolt government action towards public diplomacy. He wrote:

There is always the possibility that a major international crisis will have a salutary effect, doing away with delusions about the state of the world, generating greater awareness of the dangers facing America, and putting an end to lethargy and indifference. But such a crisis might be years off, and in the meantime some words of warning are appropriate. The international agenda tends to ignore the concerns of Washington legislators, just as they tend to ignore events outside their bailiwicks. Various clocks are ticking away, irrespective of whether people want to listen to them.<sup>57</sup>

Laquer's prediction was apt. And while IPAM remained relatively unscathed from these larger

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<sup>54</sup> Walter Laquer, "Save Public Diplomacy" *Foreign Affairs*, September 1, 1994, accessed 2/26/2014. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/50323/walter-laqueur/save-public-diplomacy-broadcasting-americas-message-matters>.

<sup>55</sup> Data collected from Office of Management and Budget. Office of Management and Budget, *The Budget of the United States, 1990-2001*, Washington, D.C., United States Government Printing Office.

<sup>56</sup> Much has been written about the history of USIA and its decline see, for example, Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).; and Nicholas J. Cull, *The Decline and Fall of the United States Information Agency: American Public Diplomacy, 1989-2001* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012.)

<sup>57</sup> Laquer, "Save Public Diplomacy".

seismic shifts in public diplomacy at the end of the twentieth century, it took a major international crisis to energize conversations about national spending on public diplomacy. These debates, as well as a new focus on how programs would be measured and evaluated, formed the immediate context for the creation of Museums Connect.

### **“Why do they hate us?” A renewed focus on public diplomacy**

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 forced the United States to reconsider the nature of its public diplomacy agenda. During a statement to a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001, just nine days after the attacks, President George W. Bush asked, “Why do they hate us?”<sup>58</sup> This line of inquiry reflected a new but very real concern about the opinion of foreign citizens who, operating through the Internet and new social media, had gained a voice in global affairs. Bush’s answer, however, suggested that his administration was less interested in exploring possible answers to the question than prescribing their own and continuing the project of exporting American ideas of democracy: “They hate what they see right here in this chamber: a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.”<sup>59</sup>

A very public debate ensued after the attacks of 9/11 that brought the issues of public diplomacy, as well as its constituent parts including cultural diplomacy, into the national spotlight. Liam Kennedy and Scott Lucas argued in 2005 that the attacks on 9/11 “ignited media discussions about the merits and failings of American public diplomacy and hastened a political

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<sup>58</sup> George W. Bush, *Speech to a Joint Session of Congress*, 20 September, 2001, Washington Post, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress\\_092001.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_092001.html).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

review of its role in the planning and execution of foreign policy.”<sup>60</sup> This debate continued as American involvement in the newly developed “War on Terror” escalated in the following years. A 2005 DOS report argued that “the invasion of Iraq, the prisoner abuse scandal at Abu Graib, and the controversy over the handling of detainees at Bagram and Guantanamo Bay...diminishes our ability to champion freedom, democracy, and individual dignity” and that “culture matters.” It also insisted, “Now that we are at war again, interest in cultural diplomacy is on the rise.”<sup>61</sup> Historian Richard Arndt further suggested that cultural diplomacy “costs amazingly little, a shadow of the cost of one wing of fighter aircraft.”<sup>62</sup> Arndt lamented, “Decently applied over the last six decades, in continuity with the past, and at some reasonable level of quantity, a decent cultural diplomacy might have made a difference, at little cost. It is surely the only element of foreign diplomatic activity which over that time frame might have slowed and perhaps softened the relentless U.S. slide to pariah-dom.”<sup>63</sup>

The commitment of the Department of State seen through shifts in funding for the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) since 2001, however, only partially reflected the urgent public need for a reevaluation of cultural diplomacy. The rapid growth of funding for ECA, from \$204 million in 2001 to a peak of \$635 million in 2010—it subsequently decreased to \$576 million in 2014—occurred at the same time that the entire DOS budget rose from \$27.2 billion to \$42.3 billion. (The Department’s budget reached a peak of \$52.6 billion in 2009 before

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<sup>60</sup> Kennedy and Lucas, “Enduring Freedom,” 309.; On this public debate see also: Bardos, “Public Diplomacy”; Justin Hart, *Empire of Ideas: The Origins of Public Diplomacy and the Transformation of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).; Craig Hayden, *The Rhetoric of Soft Power: Public Diplomacy in Global Contexts* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2011).

<sup>61</sup> U.S. State Department, “Report of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy”, 1.

<sup>62</sup> Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings*, xxi.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 545.



being reduced significantly in 2012.)<sup>64</sup> Thus, ECA's funding fluctuated between 0.7% and 1.5% of the total DOS budget between 2002 and 2012, with no pattern to the rises and falls in the percentage of the total budget. Indeed, while more dollars were being spent on exchange programs, the government's spending on foreign affairs escalated significantly as the United States exited the post-Cold War decade of relative global peace and financial restraint and entered an era of aggressive American global engagement and foreign policy spending, including other public diplomacy programs that embraced more overtly propagandistic approaches. The first State Department budget request of the George W. Bush Administration, written in 2001, reflected these changing dynamics:

This is a time of great opportunity for America – a time, as President Bush has said, to shape “a balance of power that favors freedom.” To do this will require good leadership. We have the requisite power and the tools at hand, from our exceptional corps of diplomats to our sturdy battalions of men and women in uniform, from our superb business people to our brilliant artists in every field. . . . In past years, the State Department's share of the Federal budget has not been what it should be. With a new Secretary on board, that is changing.<sup>65</sup>

Although the impact of greater investment in public diplomacy allowed for a surge in spending on all types of public and cultural diplomacy programs, the public rhetoric for efficiency in spending on public diplomacy programs that emerged after the Cold War also continued.

Despite political scientist James McCormick's argument that Congress fell into line behind the White House on matters of foreign policy after the attacks on 9/11, suggesting obedient support for aggressive military options, members of Congress publically urged new and

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<sup>64</sup> Statistics compiled from, U.S. State Department of State, “International Affairs Function 150: Summary and Highlights,” from 2002-2015. For example, accessed November 15, 2013, [www.state.gov/documents/organization/100014.pdf](http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/100014.pdf).

<sup>65</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Preface to the FY2002 International Affairs (Function 150) Budget Request,” FY2002 International Affairs (Function 150) Budget Request, accessed November 23, 2013. <http://www.state.gov/s/d/rm/rls/iab/2002/2103.htm>.

more efficient approaches to the practice of public diplomacy.<sup>66</sup> Richard G. Lugar (R-IN), Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, offered the following assessment of public diplomacy in his opening statement at the nomination hearing for Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy Karen Hughes in July 2005:

In an era when allied cooperation is essential in the war against terrorism, negative public opinion overseas has enormous consequences. The Ranking Member and I have observed for some time the unfortunate irony of American public diplomacy efforts. We have asked how the United States can be “all thumbs” at diplomacy when we are so expert at the strategy and tactics of public relations, marketing and advertising.<sup>67</sup>

Lugar went on to chastise the state of public diplomacy as “dysfunctional and require[ing] major reform.” The Chairman concluded in offering his support for Hughes that,

This Committee stands ready to ensure that the position of Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy has the power, the funding, and the political support required to do the job. We have backed increased funds for public diplomacy, but these funds will have to be spent efficiently if we are to explain clearly the views of the United States, successfully display the humanity and generosity of our citizens, and expand opportunities for interaction between Americans and foreign peoples. Creative thinking will be required.<sup>68</sup>

Lugar’s statement, while possibly the public pronouncement expected of Washington politicians, suggested a deep desire to reengage the world with supposedly productive, efficient, and effective public diplomacy of both types outlined by Nye. The ultimate goal was clearly to project American values and ideas abroad and to correct the “all thumbs” approach previously exhibited by the State Department. It was within this political and economic context that the final cycle of the first International Partnership Among Museums (IPAM) program occurred (2005-2007) and the decision to transition to Museum and Community Collaborations Abroad (MCCA)

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<sup>66</sup> James M. McCormick, “Introduction”, *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy: Insights and Evidence*, ed., James M. McCormick (Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 3.

<sup>67</sup> *Opening statement at the nomination Hearings, United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 109<sup>th</sup> Cong. (July 22, 2005) (statement of Richard G. Lugar, Chairman, Senate Foreign Relations Committee).*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

was conceptualized and created.

### **Museum and Community Collaborations Abroad**

Political bluster and television punditry may have driven public discussion about the role of cultural and public diplomacies in post-9/11 American foreign policy, but economic and practical concerns drove the initial decision to revamp the IPAM program from the State Department's point-of-view. While rigorously vetted by the State Department and signed off at the Assistant Secretary level, the decision to change the program came from Director of Citizen Exchanges (2003-2008) Karen (Lea) Perez, a long time USIA and State Department officer. A move towards a new program had the potential to correct a flaw that Perez identified. As Perez explained, "We were not getting enough diplomatically from a much smaller investment in IPAM."<sup>69</sup> This was undoubtedly a consideration given the larger discourse about efficiency that permeated all government decision-making in the early twenty-first century. Perez's experience with the French Regional and American Museum Exchange (FRAME) program while working as the Cultural Counselor at the U.S. embassy in Paris between 1999 and 2003 changed her thinking about museums as sites for public diplomacy and later would inform her thinking about the form of this new program. According to the program's website, "FRAME fosters partnerships among its member museums to develop innovative exhibitions, educational and public programs, and professional exchanges among museum staff, and maintains a bi-lingual website to reach global audiences."<sup>70</sup> Perez recalled her evolving thought process after observing the FRAME program:

As museum directors met and discussed how they might work together, the completely different structure of decision-making and governance in the two museum communities resulted in several misunderstandings. Those were, of course, sorted out among this

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<sup>69</sup> Karen (Lea) Perez, Interview with author, digital recording, Washington, D.C., January 31, 2014.

<sup>70</sup> "FRAME Mission Statement," French American Museum Exchange, accessed 4/19/2014, <http://www.framemuseums.org/en/>.

group of directors, but I became much more conscious of the prime role of the “community” in making cultural decisions in the U.S.<sup>71</sup>

At the twenty-year reunion of the Robert Morris Hunt cultural exchange program, where French and American participants conversed about the relative merits and shortcomings of the two countries’ approaches to heritage preservation, she solidified her “thinking about new directions that we [the State Department] might take in sponsoring museum partnerships.” She went on to recall that, “It seemed to me that the nature of American community participation in museums in our country fit well into a broader pattern of volunteerism and civil society that could represent, and reflect, the diversity of our society as a whole.”<sup>72</sup> Based on these two experiences in France before returning to Washington, D.C. as Director of Citizen Exchanges (2003-2008), Perez approached AAM at the same time that it too was considering how to keep IPAM relevant for twenty-first century museums. It took being pushed by the State Department, however, for the staff at AAM to leave the comfort zone of \$350,000 per year funding for the program and engage in a larger conversation about the nature of their flagship international initiative.

Ultimately, AAM’s decision to rethink IPAM after being nudged by Perez also arose from the desire to operate a program that helped American museums work with their communities more broadly than IPAM’s individual people-to-people initiative. Heather Berry, former Manager of International Programs at AAM, explained:

The IPAM program didn’t really meet the needs of the museums here in the U.S. and abroad because they were doing these great projects and yet no one in their community knew about it. And of course one of our main goals here at AAM is to advocate for museums locally and to make sure their communities understand what an important role they play in education, in bringing tourists locally, and it just wasn’t giving the museums enough to share more broadly with their community.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Karen (Lea) Perez, Correspondence with the author, April 14, 2014.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Berry, Interview with author.

IPAM participants also recognized this limitation of the program. During the last IPAM cycle (2005-2007) Mark Heppner, Vice President of Museum Services Division and Curator at Stan Hywet Hall and Gardens, Akron, Ohio, undertook a partnership with Patoo Cusripituck from the National Discovery Museum Institute, Bangkok, Thailand. They set out to explore “the rubber industries in both countries: its history, political and social impact as well as the people who have been impacted.” The planned traveling exhibition and book did not materialize because both individuals and the project lacked the deep institutional dedication of their museums.<sup>74</sup> Heppner remembers his IPAM experience fondly, which he described nearly ten years later as “life changing,” but recalled that the isolation of the museum professionals engaged in the program was a significant problem from his experience. “I got the blessing to go [to Thailand] but my colleagues, my supervisor, nobody really understood what this was, even though I did a presentation before I went and when I came back. But I don’t know if there was really appreciation or fully understanding the perks of this.”<sup>75</sup> He suggested that this lack of wider support prevented his project from ever meeting its full potential or producing intended outcomes. In addition to the issues of the breadth of IPAM’s impact, financial considerations were also at play. As the cost-of-living rose with inflation around the world between 1980 and 2007, fewer and fewer projects were funded as AAM and the State Department attempted to meet the evolving financial needs of program participants.

This impetus for redesigning IPAM at AAM was demonstrated in a letter from Kim Igoe, Director of International Programs at AAM, to Lea Perez in July 2006. Igoe reflected both the context that drove the form and function of public diplomacy programs in the early twenty-first century as well as AAM’s desire to satisfy the new conditions laid out by DOS for the new

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<sup>74</sup> Mark Heppner, interview with author, digital recording, by telephone, June 5, 2015.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

program: “After our meeting I formed a team within AAM to imagine a new kind of international partnership program that would be flexible, focused on outcomes, demonstrate an impact in a perceptible timeframe, and have a greater impact on communities in the US and abroad.”<sup>76</sup> Berry later recalled that there was a similarity between the two organizations’ desires for the new program and that the significance of “greater impact on communities” reflected, from AAM’s perspective, a desire to help American museums connect in more significant ways with their communities and locales than the individual people-to-people diplomacy of IPAM.<sup>77</sup>

Despite a similar desire for a more efficient program with a larger impact than IPAM, the underlying assumptions of public diplomacy and public history possess an unresolved contradiction regarding how they position power despite a congruent desire to connect people and engage in discussion. People-to-people public diplomacy, while based on exchange and dialogue, is motivated by the desire to improve America’s standing in the world and boost the nation’s power. In contrast, the evolving paradigm of public history, while not homogeneously embraced, endorses the idea that power and authority of the museum are not to be projected. Instead, it is based on the notion of a democratic public sphere where power is inherently shared. The seeming mimesis between people-to-people diplomacy and shared authority, as well as the shared desire to move beyond one-to-one exchanges, informed the creation of Museums and Community Collaborations Abroad, resulting in unresolved contradictions and assumptions within the program.

These were not the only contradictions built into the program designed to replace IPAM. Changes in how publics communicate across the globe shifted the priorities of the Department of State. The growth of the Internet and its ability to break down national and international

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<sup>76</sup> Kim Igoe to Lea Perez, *Letter*, July 12, 2006, American Alliance of Museums Archive.

<sup>77</sup> Berry, Interview with author.

boundaries after 9/11 challenged how the DOS began to target new foreign audiences in its public diplomacy. Through both “tough” and “tender” minded public diplomacy, post-9/11 programs were designed to engage young populations and other minority groups—including indigenous populations—who had been previously ignored by public diplomacy efforts but were beginning to utilize the power of the Internet for a political voice. Perez highlighted this change in thinking: since the Cold War “our public diplomacy was focused on elites and decision makers and opinion shapers, and we’ve kind of seen...it’s like these are not traditional pin-stripe suite decision makers. We need to refocus.”<sup>78</sup> However, the inclusion of these new audiences, especially with a focus on young people as project participants, further entrenched inherently unequal power between the museums and their “communities.”

With these conflicting motivations built into the contexts guiding the development of IPAM’s successor program, a white paper created by AAM and presented to the DOS ECA introduced three possible programs to replace IPAM. Each proposal clearly reflected the trend of museums engaging with their communities while simultaneously expanding the reach and public diplomacy of the program. Community engagement was at the center of each program’s proposed mission statements. One option, “International Action Grants,” was designed to “leverage the skills and expertise of US and non-US museum professionals and address specific problems or seize specific opportunities in communities.”<sup>79</sup> Another concept, “IPAM 2.0,” intended to “provide US museums and museums abroad with the resources needed to develop a community-centered international partnership with tangible outputs and demonstrated outcomes.”<sup>80</sup> And “Museums and Community Collaborations Abroad” (MCCA) was designed to

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<sup>78</sup> Perez, Interview with Author.

<sup>79</sup> AAM White paper, “Envisioning IPAM 2007-2009: Three Concepts for Collaboration,” September 30, 2013, American Alliance of Museums Archive.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

“build lasting ties between cultures; strengthen the connections between museums and their local communities; and create tools, models, and practices with the potential for widespread adoption.”<sup>81</sup>

Of the three proposals, MCCA was chosen to succeed IPAM. As Heather Berry recalled, “the first year it started [it] was also funded at \$350,000, but they [the State Department] were so excited about it that they then gave us an additional \$100,000.”<sup>82</sup> After some initial transition costs and a renaming of the program to “Museums Connect” in 2011, the program has consistently funded between six and eight grants per year, each totaling between \$50,000 and \$100,000, with a 50% mandatory cost share by the American museums. Perez explained this method of “grant-making”:

We [the State Department] work a lot with partners and one of the things that is really important to any kind of State Department funding is a transparent, competitive process. To run [Museums Connect] internally by the State Department would have taken us a lot of staff time and it would have required expertise that quite frankly we didn’t have...structurally the bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs functions primarily through grant-making to partner organizations and that grant-making is always on a very open, competitive basis...Our whole cultural team might have been eight people to do all the cultural stuff we were trying to do: dance and music and everything else. I mean, there’s no way [we could do it without partners].<sup>83</sup>

The discussions to alter IPAM and move to MCCA thus clearly emerged from the immediate context of financial efficiency and a movement towards more concrete ways to measure project outcomes addressing both partners’ needs at the time. From the vantage point of AAM, the reimagining of its international program fit within the larger trend of museums moving towards directly engaging with their communities. From the State Department’s perspective, MCCA provided the opportunity to engage more directly with communities and target audiences, especially young people, in a way that became obviously important to DOS

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Berry, Interview with author.

<sup>83</sup> Perez, interview with author.



officials after the end of the Cold War and the terrorist attacks of 9/11. However, the mimesis between people-to-people diplomacy and dialogic public history is limited, and the aforementioned tension between how the two practices negotiate power formed the paradigm within which Museums Connect projects have operated since the first grants were awarded in 2008.

### **“A complex game of multi-dimensional chess”**

“Hip-hop is America,” claimed former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in an interview with CBS News in 2010. Referencing a DOS program that sent American Muslim rap artists to the “Muslim World” to counter negative perceptions of the United States in the mid- and late-2000s, Clinton argued that, “we have to use every tool at our disposal.”<sup>84</sup> Whether hip-hop, like jazz in the 1950s, is a true distillation of America is debatable.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, the counter-cultural origins of both musical genres are best highlighted by Hisham Aidi, who argues that the use of jazz conveying “a sense of shared suffering, as well as the conviction that equality could be gained under the American political system” mirrored hip-hop’s history as “outsiders’ protest” against the American system, and now resonates among marginalized Muslim youth worldwide.<sup>86</sup> The underlying sentiment of Secretary Clinton’s argument highlights the broader understanding of the ideological assumptions underpinning public diplomacy that began during World War II. “You have to bet at the end of the day, people will choose freedom over tyranny if they’re given a choice,” Clinton went on to say. This argument is predicated on the idea that “cultural diplomacy is a complex game of ‘multidimensional chess.’”<sup>87</sup> It also reflects a belief that engaging foreign citizens in discussions about America, its culture, and its people (some of

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<sup>84</sup> Hisham Aidi, “Leveraging Hip Hop in US foreign policy,” Aljazeera.com, 7 November 2011, accessed November 18, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/10/2011103091018299924.html>.

<sup>85</sup> See Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World*.

<sup>86</sup> Hisham Aidi, “Race, Rap, and Raison d’Etat.” *Middle East Report* 260 (Fall, 2011): 28.

<sup>87</sup> Aidi, “Leveraging Hip Hop,” no page.

the pieces in this game of chess), and not just traditional diplomats in governmental diplomatic programs, will change their opinion of and behavior towards the United States. There is the hope that this will ease the development of official relationships and “enhance our national security in subtle, wide-ranging, and sustainable ways.”<sup>88</sup> This approach appears in sync with the practice of American museums, and public history more broadly, to engage wider audiences in their work, seek dialogue, and operate within a sphere of a shared authority. However, as this chapter has highlighted, despite the immediate shared motivations to achieve more from the financial investment and reimagine IPAM into a program with a deeper and more wide-reaching impact, Museums Connect was created by the convergence of two paradigms—public history’s shared authority and public diplomacy’s people-to-people diplomacy—that are driven by different conceptions of power.

The following chapters explore three case studies from public history projects sponsored by Museums Connect—zoos as well as science, art, and children’s museums have also participated in Museums Connect—to understand how the guiding public history paradigm of “a shared authority” operates within transnational museum partnerships that also have public diplomacy agendas. How the participating museums negotiate these dynamics, and their implications on the museums and projects, is the focus of the following case studies. Moreover, while the American museological and public history contexts are vital to understand the creation of the Museums Connect program, the following chapters highlight how the foreign culture of museums and the agency and actions of the international participants play an equally important role in the way that these projects function in practice. One of the first projects sponsored by the Museums Connect program in 2008 occurred within the larger foreign policy context of the war in Afghanistan. The unexpected results of a public history project occurring within this context

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<sup>88</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Report of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy,” 1.

during the “We, the People: Afghanistan, America & the Minority Imprint” project between the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia, PA and the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul, Afghanistan, are the subject of the next chapter.

#### 4 PUBLIC HISTORIANS AS FACILITATORS: THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFGHANISTAN AND THE NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER (2009-2010)

**“When a museum or site embraces public participation, staff members do not hand over the keys to the building and walk away. Instead of presenting visitors with a mess of objects or a mass of historical content, museum staff members lay the groundwork to enable visitors to participate successfully...Museum professionals, then, supplement content knowledge with expertise of interpreting, facilitating, engaging, listening, and learning with their visitors.” Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski, 2011<sup>1</sup>**

Project Director Jeffrey Stern traveled to Afghanistan with colleague Sayeh Hormozi in spring 2010 to deliver, install, and formally unveil a photography exhibition, “Being We the People.” The exhibition was the product of a one-year Museums Connect grant between the National Museum of Afghanistan (NMA), Kabul, Afghanistan and the National Constitution Center (NCC), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and two local schools. It exhibited pairs of bilingually captioned photographs taken by the students, one from each country, to encourage the viewer to consider similarities and differences between the photographs. When the exhibition opened simultaneously at both museums, Stern was asked to give remarks at the Kabul event. His remarks, which he subsequently described as “little” and only a small part of a larger ceremony, added the weight of the National Constitution Center and the American side of the partnership to the event. The significance of this occasion was not lost on local media. Dozens of television stations including BBC Persia and other local television and radio stations attended, in addition to 300 dignitaries and other guests.<sup>2</sup> While the interest in the opening of a small exhibition of photographs taken by two groups of high school students may seem disproportionate to an outsider, the significance of having their photographs exhibited in their national museum was not

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski, “Introduction,” in *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*, ed. Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski (Philadelphia: Pew Center for the Arts & Heritage, 2011), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Sayeh Hormozi, interview with author, digital recording, by telephone, January 21, 2015.

lost on the teenagers from Marefat High School, the NMA's community partner for the Museums Connect project. This large school in the western slums of Kabul educates children from the Hazara ethnic group, a historically persecuted minority group in the otherwise majority Pashtun country, which has suffered terrible physical violence as well as attempts at cultural genocide in the last one hundred years. The presence of their photographs in a national museum that symbolized the ruling Pashtun majority and Hazara neglect gave this moment added significance.

The symbolism of the opening of the exhibition, however, extended further when one of the Marefat students suggested that Stern wear the traditional Afghan outfit, the *shalwar kameez*, to give his remarks.<sup>3</sup> With little time to change before the program began, Stern was left wearing the top half of the outfit—"sort of like a long pajama top"—with his American-made jeans. While he recalled this episode with a rueful laugh, Stern's eclectic fashion drew joy from the students who suggested that, like the exhibition itself, he was "Afghan on top and American on bottom."<sup>4</sup> Their observation reflected the aesthetic decisions of the exhibition designers: photographs with captions taken by Afghan students were placed above the American photographs they were paired with. It also inadvertently symbolized the unexpected power dynamics of a year-long project constructed between the congressionally chartered American museum and the National Museum of Afghanistan. The National Constitution Center, like other American "lead museums" in Museums Connect projects, possessed significantly more professional skill and expertise than the NMA, illustrating a power dynamic that exacerbated the paradigm built into Museums Connect. As the project director, however, Jeff Stern created conditions for the project that empowered the Afghan students from Marefat High School. In so

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<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey (Jeff) E. Stern, interview with author, digital recording, by telephone, August 28, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

doing, Stern and his NCC colleagues embraced the role of the public historian as facilitator rather than knowledge giver.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the choice of photography as an exhibition medium, inspired by one of Stern's friends (Hazara photographer Nasim Fekrat), as well as the selection of comparable schools to act as community partners, allowed "Being We the People" to realize a dialogic mode of public history. This dialogism functioned through two groups of students engaged in a shared and self-guided exploration of the project's theme within the parameters laid out by the NCC facilitators. Stern's actions and framing of the project empowered the Marefat students to negotiate their ethnic minority identity both at home—through exhibition at the symbolically important National Museum of Afghanistan—and abroad during their trip to Philadelphia. The NCC staff's interpretation of the grant theme, however, was different from the original proposal. They focused on the title of the project "Being We the People" and the pluralist ideas embedded within that idea, marginalizing the original exploration of the "minority imprint" suggested in the project's subtitle. This had the effect of effacing the "minority imprint" of the American students themselves and promoting comparisons between the two countries rather than nuanced discussions about the circumstances of two minority groups in Philadelphia. This chapter analyzes these power relationships between the museums and the two schools during the "Being We the People" project by highlighting the guiding philosophies of the different partners, and the language, ideas, and framing of the "Being We the People" grant proposal. In so doing, it emphasizes the important role that the American museum professionals played in shaping the power dynamics between the two museums and the participating students.

### **"Preaching to the Choir": The project and the partners**

The NCC in Philadelphia approaches the study of the past through dialogue strategies born of the ideological positions, particularly a broadly celebratory idea of pluralism, embedded

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<sup>5</sup> Adair, Filene, and Koloski, "Introduction," 12.

within the political context of the museum's creation. The NCC was created during the early years of the "Culture Wars" in the last decades of the twentieth century, when political conservatives feared that the nation's history and founding principles were being overlooked or replaced by new revisionist histories that denigrated the nation's past. A strict patriotic orthodoxy emerged that "embraced a past which, its proponents claimed, had only one true and unchanging meaning."<sup>6</sup> President Ronald Reagan's signature on the Constitution Heritage Act of 1988 called for a continuation of the U.S. Constitution's 1987 bicentennial celebration through the creation of "a national center 'within or in close proximity to the Independence National Historical Park' that 'shall disseminate information about the United States Constitution on a nonpartisan basis in order to increase awareness and understanding of the Constitution among the American people.'"<sup>7</sup> Opened on July 4, 2003, the Center represents one example of the new paradigm of American museums by focusing on discussion and dialogue and de-centering the authority of traditional collections of artifacts and the power of an authoritative interpretive voice. Through interactive exhibitions, conversations and public forums, and public programming, it attempts to fulfill its patriotic mission "to illuminate constitutional ideals and inspire active citizenship" within the parameters defined by the United States Constitution.<sup>8</sup>

The NCC's goals of civic education and the development of active citizens based on principles embedded in the American Constitution, especially in young people, also led the museum to open Constitution High School in 2006. Placing Philadelphia's history as the symbolic center of American democracy at the heart of its curriculum, Constitution High School

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<sup>6</sup> Michael S. Sherry, "Patriotic Orthodoxy and American Decline," in *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past*, ed. Edward Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1996), 99.

<sup>7</sup> "Mission & History," *National Constitution Center*, accessed October 4, 2015, <http://constitutioncenter.org/about/mission-history>.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

is a Philadelphia public school whose theme is “Law, Democracy, and History.”<sup>9</sup> Reflecting NCC’s influence as a founding partner, the school promises, “By engaging students with an appreciation for history and an understanding of the democratic principles embodied in the United States Constitution, this college preparatory high school will develop the next generation of engaged citizens and civic leaders in government, public policy, and law.”<sup>10</sup>

These principles of civic discourse that guide both NCC and Constitution High School were developed by former NCC CEO Joe Torsella and Vice-President of External Relations Hugh Allen when they began the International Program at the NCC in 2007. The goals were to extend the museum’s reach beyond its stated domestic mission and create dialogue with populations beyond the U.S.’s boundaries, especially in so-called “emerging democracies.” Allen recalled his belief in NCC’s mission when he explained the thinking that ultimately led to NCC’s decision to jump at the opportunity to apply for Museums Connect. “What we do at the museum is really special and it’s really important. And this is probably the type of thing that we should look to do when we do international work.” He concluded that expanding the NCC’s model by acting as a space for dialogue between different groups across international boundaries was the appropriate methodology for potential international work rather than creating an entirely different mode of operation.<sup>11</sup> However, because NCC frames dialogue within the context of furthering understanding of the meaning of the United States Constitution, Allen inadvertently created an international program that in some ways sought to promote American constitutional ideas abroad. His decision to hire non-museum professional Jeff Stern to run the International

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<sup>9</sup> “About Us,” *Constitution High School*, accessed October 5, 2015, <http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/schools/c/constitution/about-us>.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Hugh Allen, interview with author, digital recording, by telephone, January 9, 2015.



Programs of NCC, of which Museums Connect was its first major program, unexpectedly challenged the NCC institutional ideology when it began a Museums Connect project in 2009.

Prior to working at the National Constitution Center, Stern worked in Afghanistan as a journalist. While working at the American University of Afghanistan in Kabul where his boss was an Afghan—a situation he described as unique for most Americans in Afghanistan—Stern taught English at Marefat High School through a partnership with the university.<sup>12</sup> He knew nothing about the school or the ethnic Hazara students during his early experiences in Kabul, but recalled that however raw his instruction, working at the school allowed him to learn a lot about the Hazara. During this time he also created close friendships and sympathies with its faculty and students. Throughout his work in Afghanistan he also developed a self-proclaimed cynicism regarding governmental and non-governmental aid and development projects. He admitted that through his experience in Afghanistan he developed skepticism “of preaching U.S. values,” and as a journalist he had been “professionally criticizing the U.S. approach to Afghanistan.”<sup>13</sup> These relationships and this context became significant when he was hired at the NCC to develop international programs with a focus on post-conflict nations. Although at first he worked on a number of small projects with Marefat students and faculty, including a voting guide in Afghanistan, he recalled that when the Museums Connect request for proposals was sent out from AAM in 2008, “it was very obvious that the Marefat School would be the perfect one.”<sup>14</sup>

Marefat High School was founded in exile in Pakistan after the civil war began in Afghanistan in 1994. By the end of 2001, with a unique coeducational system, it had opened six branches in Pakistan in Rawalpindi–Islamabad, Attock, and Peshawar. After the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2002, five branches of the school were moved to Kabul. The main

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<sup>12</sup> Stern, interview with author.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

branch ceased operation in Pakistan in 2006.<sup>15</sup> Moving back to Kabul after the fall of the Taliban, Marefat High School consolidated into one property in the mostly Hazara occupied slums of Dasht-e Barchi in West Kabul. With financial support from Speaker of the British House of Lords Baroness Dr. Frances D’Souza, the school educated thousands of Hazara students, including a high percentage of girls using a unique curriculum within Afghanistan.<sup>16</sup> While most schools in the country emphasize rote memorization and basic literacy rather than debate or discussion, Marefat has an advanced curriculum that it proudly describes as “Productive civic and democratic subjects in the curriculum: Humanism, Human Rights, Democracy.”<sup>17</sup> The school was forced to give up its coeducational status in 2005, was threatened with destruction and physical harm when students protested the 2009 Shiite Family Law that restricted women’s rights, and was banned from teaching civic education in 2012 by order of the Ministry of Education—a segment that became optional after school—but it maintains a progressive civic education focus.<sup>18</sup> One particular way that this manifests itself is through “Educative civic and democratic practices such as students elected representatives in the Board of Trustees, students’ parliament, students’ class councils.”<sup>19</sup> Under the leadership of Azizullah (Aziz) Royesh—who was recognized for innovative educational leadership when he was nominated as a finalist for the 2014 Global Teacher Award and a Yale World Fellow—Marefat’s progressive curriculum and focus on civic education mirrored the focus of its American

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<sup>15</sup> “About Marefat,” *Marefat High School*, accessed October 1, 2015, <https://marefat.wordpress.com/about/>.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Aziz Royesh, “Civic Education for Democracy in Afghanistan: Insights from the Kabul-based Marefat High School,” March 15, 2012, accessed September 24, 2015, <http://www.ned.org/docs/Aziz-Royesh-PowerPoint-Presentation.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> “About Marefat,” *Marefat High School*.

partners.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the persecution of the Hazara by both the Taliban and other ethnic groups in Afghanistan made the ethnic group, and the school in particular, open to the United States and the wider international community. Thus, when Stern approached Royesh about partnering on Museums Connect, their pre-existing friendship, similarities in Marefat's approach to education to those of the NCC and Constitution High Schools, and the school's level of warmth towards the United States, made the partnership obvious to Stern.

When AAM's Museums Connect request for proposals arrived at the NCC, the Center embraced the opportunity to move beyond doing small finite projects in Afghanistan, such as creating voter guides, and welcomed the opportunity to apply for a larger transnational grant with the National Museum of Afghanistan. While planning and writing the Museums Connect grant Stern thus connected Marefat High School with the NCC and its partner-school Constitution High School. Reflecting on the similarities between the NCC's missions and the schools' values, Stern speculated that had he approached any other institution in Afghanistan to partner with the NMA, NCC, and Constitution High School, there may have been a clash of values or intentions. Through his relationship with Marefat, a "lucky" partnership and Museums Connect project was planned between different stakeholders that "were just so aligned."<sup>21</sup>

"Being We the People," officially called "We, the People: Afghanistan, America, & the Minority Imprint" in grant documentation, was designed to be a collaborative exploration of the lives of minority students in Philadelphia from Constitution High School and in Kabul from Marefat School. The method for this exploration was a student photography exhibition to be simultaneously opened at the National Museum of Afghanistan and the National Constitution

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<sup>20</sup> Phillip Reeves, "From Afghanistan's Rubble, A Teacher Builds A School Of Ideas," National Public Radio, March 15, 2015, accessed September 15, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2015/03/15/392771462/from-afghanistans-rubble-a-teacher-builds-a-school-of-ideas>.

<sup>21</sup> Stern, interview with author.

Center at the end of the one-year project (2009-2010). Originally the project was planned to occur digitally through Skype workshops and Shutterfly.com discussion, as well as through physical travel of four NCC staff to Kabul to develop the project in the early stages and lend support and technical expertise to the National Museum of Afghanistan.<sup>22</sup> In addition to this early travel, it was proposed that “After the photographs, videos, and oral histories are collected and critiqued; students, teachers, and museum staff from Marefat High School and the National Museum of Afghanistan will travel to the United States for the design and installation of the final exhibition, which will open in May 2010.”<sup>23</sup>

Hugh Allen, Senior Director of Special Projects and Government Relations, reflected on a second Museums Connect project with the Natural History Museum of Latvia in 2011, describing the NCC’s approach vis-à-vis international programs: “you bring people together and then you do what museums do: you bring people together and then you get the hell out of the way.”<sup>24</sup> Stern’s role in guiding the decision-making during the project’s development and in constructing the conditions for the two groups of students to engage in a shared exploration of their ideas of “Being We the People” throughout the year-long project was as significant as the guiding philosophies of the schools and NCC. Stern’s sensibilities as an aid worker and journalist in Afghanistan before being hired by the National Constitution Center undoubtedly shaped the form and function of the NCC’s international work, creating conditions for “Being We the People” that allowed the students in both countries to act as shared “public curators.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> No author, Afghanistan & NCC Implementation Agreement, courtesy of Hugh Allen, 5.; Stern, interview with author.; Allen, interview with author.

<sup>23</sup> No author, Afghanistan & NCC Implementation Agreement, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Allen, interview with author.

<sup>25</sup> Filene, Adair, and Koloski, “Introduction,” 12.

With his deep connections to the Hazara, Stern is a self-professed Hazara sympathizer.<sup>26</sup> And even though these biases undoubtedly color Stern's subsequent recollections and reflections on "Being We the People," his relationships and sympathies ensured at the time that the Hazara were not treated as passive recipients nor powerless agents by the National Constitution Center.

Reflecting Stern's willingness to act as a facilitator and to create a project that was different from what he perceived as traditionally American-controlled "neo-colonial" programs in Afghanistan, he embraced an idea for the structure of "Being We the People" from Hazara photographer and blogger Nasim Fekrat.<sup>27</sup> When he traveled inside Afghanistan in early 2008 Fekrat recalled that his fellow countrymen did not recognize him. "People didn't recognize me, they called me Chinese."<sup>28</sup> This experience was not unique to Fekrat but reflects a common sentiment in Afghanistan, where Hazara have been historically marginalized and persecuted as a minority group because they are largely Shi'ite Muslim in a majority Sunni country. They also look different from the other ethnic groups in Afghanistan. In National Geographic in 2008, Phil Zabriskie described them as having "Asian features—narrow eyes, flat noses, broad cheeks—[that] set them apart in a de facto lower class."<sup>29</sup> Frustrated with the lack of Hazara media representation and the potential continuation of the larger marginalization of Hazaras within Afghanistan, Fekrat speculated that a mobile exhibition that highlighted all of the country's ethnic groups could serve to "introduce Afghans to Afghans in order to bring all Afghans together."<sup>30</sup> This fledgling idea, told to Stern through his friendship with Fekrat, became the foundational activity of "Being We the People," and was expanded to include exposing Afghans

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<sup>26</sup> Stern, interview with author.; Jeffrey E. Stern, *The Last Thousand: One School's Promise in a Nation at War* (New York: St Martins Press, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> Stern, interview with author.

<sup>28</sup> Nasim Fekrat, interview with author, digital recording, Athens, GA, August 14, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Phil Zabriskie, "Hazaras: Afghanistan's Outsiders," *National Geographic*, February 2008, accessed August 17, 2015, <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2008/02/afghanistan-hazara/phil-zabriskie-text>.

<sup>30</sup> Fekrat, interview with author.

to Americans, when the call-for-proposals for Museums Connect crossed Stern's desk at NCC in 2008.

Unprompted, Marefat Principal Aziz Royesh confirmed the importance of Stern's leadership and the conditions that he created for the project, explaining "The most important element of the success was Jeff Stern and his wonderful management of everything. He was a marvelous engine of the project."<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Stern was not the only project facilitator who saw the museum's role, in keeping with Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene and Laura Koloski's analysis in *Letting Go?*, as facilitator rather than knowledge giver.<sup>32</sup> In describing her work throughout the "Being We the People" project, Sayeh Hormozi, Senior Manager, Civic and International Engagement, reflected, "We really were just facilitating their work, we gave them so much ownership of the project, [we] were there to just support them and facilitate their vision for the partnership with the students." Giving an example of what this facilitation meant in practice, Hormozi recalled that she provided transport to take the students to different locations to take photographs for the project rather than actually directing the photography process. She recalled, "It was the 2008 election, so we took them to different polling places and they took pictures, and we took them, accompanied them while they were on photography trips."<sup>33</sup>

From his perspective in Kabul, Royesh recalled how he understood that "Being We the People" fit with Marefat's own civic engagement curriculum:

Through opportunities such as Being We The People, they [Marefat students] could turn the page and have their imprint. For me, this was the practical aspect of my theories shared with the students in my civic education classes. I would try to help them be the citizens of their country. Now, they could show their reach. For me, having the students at that position was both a dream and a mission; now I could see that dream realized and

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<sup>31</sup> Azizullah (Aziz) Royesh, email message to author, September 21, 2015.

<sup>32</sup> Filene, Adair, and Koloski, "Introduction," 13.

<sup>33</sup> Hormozi, interview with author.

that mission accomplished. That would [later] give me a pleasing sense of relief and content.<sup>34</sup>

The compatibility of the two schools' focus on civic education with the National Constitution Center created preconditions that allowed the students in the project to engage in a shared exploration through dialogue. Moreover, Stern's affinity for Marefat High School and the Hazara and his lack of willingness to proclaim American virtues abroad, although contrary to NCC's ideological position and the fundamental ideas underpinning people-to-people diplomacy (see chapter three), created conditions that allowed both groups of students to engage in a shared endeavor. And this led the National Constitution Center staff to adopt Filene et al's paradigm of museum professionals as facilitators who enable the work of "public curators," in this case the two groups of students.<sup>35</sup> The NCC's museum partner in Afghanistan, the National Museum of Afghanistan, participated significantly less than the two schools. The aforementioned power dynamics embedded in the structure and founding principles of Museums Connect, which gives the authority to the American museums to administer the projects, became even more pronounced due to the significant differences between the functions and capacities of the National Constitution Center and the National Museum of Afghanistan, Kabul.

**“A nation stays alive when its culture stays alive”**

Although several provincial museums have existed in Afghanistan in the last one hundred years, including in Jalalabad, Herat, and Ghazni, the National Museum of Afghanistan (NMA) in Kabul is the largest of Afghanistan's museums and is the symbolic center of the nation's public history. It is both the most consistently operated as well as located in the country's capital city.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Azizullah (Aziz) Royesh, e-mail message to author, September 22, 2015.

<sup>35</sup> Filene, Adair, and Koloski, "Introduction," 13.

<sup>36</sup> Nancy Hatch Dupree, "Cultural Heritage and National Identity in Afghanistan," *Third World Quarterly* 23, no. 5 (2002): 982-983.; William C. S. Remsen and Laura A. Tedesco, "US Cultural Diplomacy, Cultural Heritage Preservation and Development at the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul," in

The then-named Kabul Museum was created in 1919, amidst a wave of anti-colonial sentiment that accompanied the removal of British influence from Afghanistan. The early museum “consisted of manuscripts, miniatures, weapons and art objects belonging to the former royal families.”<sup>37</sup> Shortly thereafter it relocated to the King’s palace in Kabul, and in 1931 was moved again to its present location in southwest Kabul where it has remained since. In 1965 the Kabul Museum was renamed the National Museum of Afghanistan.<sup>38</sup>

Like many national museums, NMA is closely connected to the preservation of the “treasures of Afghan culture” for which it was designed to provide a safe haven.<sup>39</sup> Like many European and American museums created at the same time, the National Museum of Afghanistan devoted much of the last seventy-five years to preserving the nation’s antiquities, many of which originated with the excavations of sites along the Silk Road that converged in Afghanistan. Through agreements and partnerships with international archaeologists throughout the first half of the twentieth-century, the National Museum accumulated a significant, although not well-catalogued, collection of art, paintings, sculpture, coins, jewelry, and other ancient artifacts from across the country. The NMA’s official history recalls:

The original collection was dramatically enriched, beginning in 1922, by the first excavations of the Delegation Archeologique Francaise en Afghanistan (DAFA). Through the years other archaeological delegations have added their finds to the museum until today the collection spans fifty millenniums Prehistoric, Classical, Buddhist, Hindu

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*Museums, Heritage and International Development*, ed. Paul Basu and Wayne Modest (New York: Routledge, 2015), 137.

<sup>37</sup> Dana Visalli, “Afghanistan: The Legacy of British Empire. A Brief History,” *Global Research*, March 22, 2013, accessed June 4, 2016, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/afghanistan-the-legacy-of-the-british-empire-a-brief-history/5327994>. “History of the National Museum of Afghanistan,” National Museum of Afghanistan, accessed October 1, 2015, <http://www.nationalmuseum.af/about-museum/history>.

<sup>38</sup> Nancy Hatch Dupree, “Cultural Heritage and National Identity,” 982.

<sup>39</sup> Omara Khan Massoudi, “The National Museum of Afghanistan,” in *Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul*, ed. Frederik Hiebert and Pierre Cambon (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2008), 35



and Islamic and stands as one of the greatest testimonies of antiquity that the world has inherited.[sic]<sup>40</sup>

Reflecting upon the size, scope and depth of the NMA's collection, scholar of Afghanistan's history and the NMA Nancy Dupree argued, "By the 1970s...the displays presented a remarkably complete visual record of the cultural history of the Afghan area for 100,000 years, from the prehistoric to the ethnographic present, and, since the objects were excavated from Afghan soil, the collections truly represented the cultural heritage of all Afghan peoples."<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the 1968 museum catalogue translated and adapted into English from the 1961 French version describes the rich collection on display with some descriptions of the artifacts' provenances but little interpretation of their meaning or significance.<sup>42</sup>

Despite the depth and breadth of this large collection, Dupree lamented that before the Soviet invasion and "assault on culture" at the National Museum in the 1970s, the museum did not effectively serve the people of Afghanistan or contribute to a sense of "nation." Dupree situated her critique within a larger discussion of a national context that disregarded public history sites and the use of history for a larger national project: "heritage subjects were not included in any meaningful way in the school curriculum. School children were rarely taught about the richness of their past; field trips to museums or historical sites were not part of school activities. Few mature adults ever visited the museum."<sup>43</sup>

The turbulence of the national political situation in Afghanistan since the early 1970s, and especially its impact on the national museum and other public history sites across the country, further diminished public engagement with these sites. The overthrow of King

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<sup>40</sup> "History of the National Museum of Afghanistan," National Museum of Afghanistan, accessed October 1, 2015, <http://www.nationalmuseum.af/about-museum/history>.

<sup>41</sup> Nancy Hatch Dupree, "Cultural Heritage and National Identity," 983.

<sup>42</sup> Ann Dupree, Louis Dupree, and A.A. Motamedi, *A Guide to the Kabul Museum: The National Museum of Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghan Tourist Organization, 1968).

<sup>43</sup> Nancy Hatch Dupree, "Cultural Heritage and National Identity," 983.

Mohammed Zahir Shah in 1973, the military coup d'état of November 1978, the 1980 Soviet invasion, the Taliban takeover following the retreat of the Soviets in 1989, and the 1994 rocket attack on the museum damaged and destroyed much of Afghanistan's cultural heritage, both in the National Museum and at other sites around the country. Reflecting on the fate of the country's history and cultural heritage at this time, scholar of Afghanistan's cultural heritage Juliette Van Krieken-Pieters argued, "There is probably no country in the world that has fallen victim to so many cultural heritage-related disasters at the same place and time as Afghanistan."<sup>44</sup> Omara Khan Massoudi, director of the NMA for three decades until 2015, recalled that national political turmoil and war "led to the destruction of the economy and the cultural infrastructure," including the destruction and looting of the Hadda Museum near Jalalbad that "was plundered and burned in 1981, a loss that can never be made good."<sup>45</sup> The ability of the museum to survive this tumult, let alone continue to function, is in itself remarkable. Massoudi's recollection of these traumatic decades for the National Museum shows that many of the National Museum's dedicated staff throughout this time were arrested, mistreated, or killed for trying to preserve the country's historical and cultural heritage.<sup>46</sup>

Predicting that a vacuum of power between the Soviet departure from Afghanistan in 1987 and 1988 and the rise to power of the Mujahedeen could be disastrous for the National Museum, Massoudi took personal risks to ensure that at least some of the artifacts would be protected. Massoudi and his skeleton staff at the National Museum attempted to protect what they could by separating some of the most valuable artifacts, including the newly excavated Bactrian Treasures, into a number of vaults throughout Kabul such as the Central Bank's vault

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<sup>44</sup> Juliette van Krieken-Pieters, "Dilemmas in the Cultural Heritage Field: the Afghan Case and the Lessons for the Future," in *Art and Archaeology of Afghanistan: Its Fall and Survival*, ed. J. van Krieken-Pieters (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 201.

<sup>45</sup> Massoudi, "The National Museum of Afghanistan," 36.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-39.

in the Arg, the Presidential Palace. This action proved prescient as the National Museum and other government agencies were looted and plundered during the civil war that followed the resignation of communist president Mohammad Najibullah in 1992. Dupree explained that the Soviet invasion and the civil war created a “general atmosphere of opportunism” across the country, not just at the National Museum, which led to widespread looting of archeological sites and museums.<sup>47</sup> On March 12, 1994, to compound the gradual loss, destruction, and mistreatment of the museum in the previous decades that could only be temporarily protected by the staff, the museum was struck by a rocket when it was used as a military base and defensive position.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, between 1993 and 1996, 70% of the museum’s collection was looted. After 2001 when Taliban leader Mullah Omar “issued an edict” sponsoring widespread iconoclasm to re-write the country’s pre-Islamic history, roughly 2,500 works of art, sculpture, and artifacts at the NMA as well as the Bamiyan Buddhas in the Hazarjat region were destroyed, damaged, or defaced, sparking international outrage.<sup>49</sup>

In response to the tragic circumstances that befell the museum during this period, in addition to the staff and individuals who risked their lives for the museum, many international organizations, including UNESCO, worked to protect the building and its collection, sometimes successfully and sometimes unsuccessfully.<sup>50</sup> Between the mid-1990s and 2001, different

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<sup>47</sup> Nancy Hatch Dupree, “Cultural Heritage and National Identity,” 985.

<sup>48</sup> Omara Khan Massoudi, “The National Museum of Afghanistan,” 37.; See also Nancy Hatch Dupree, “Museum Under Siege,” *Archaeology*, March-April 1998, <http://archive.archaeology.org/online/features/afghan/>.; and Nancy Hatch Dupree, “Museum Under Siege: The Plunder Continues,” *Archaeology*, May-June 1998, <http://archive.archaeology.org/online/features/afghan/update.html>.

<sup>49</sup> Nancy Hatch Dupree, “Cultural Heritage and National Identity,” 986.; Massoudi, “The National Museum of Afghanistan,” 39.; Constance Wyndham, “Reconstructing Afghan Identity: Nation-Building, International Relations and the Safeguarding of Afghanistan’s Buddhist Heritage,” in *Museums, Heritage and International Development*, ed. Paul Basu and Wayne Modest (New York: Routledge, 2015), 159-163.

<sup>50</sup> See for example, Massoudi, “The National Museum of Afghanistan.”

international organizations and foreign governments sought to help the National Museum. The Society for the Preservation of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage (SPACH) was founded in Islamabad in 1994 to recover as much of its national history as possible. Beginning with a 1994 visit by Sotirios Mousouris, the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations, the United Nations and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) dedicated assistance to the NMA to support the basic function of the museum and to attempt to protect it and its collection from destruction.<sup>51</sup> The use of international capital to support the work of the museum has subsequently become a central funding stream, as Afghanistan's government investment has vacillated over time. In addition to the widespread international outcry over the fate of the NMA, international partnerships and support were central to the work of the museum when the Taliban was overthrown in 2001. These organizations began to inventory and restore what was left of the NMA's collection.<sup>52</sup> Foreign conservators and technicians alongside NMA staff restored, cataloged, and preserved parts of the collection that remained in Kabul.

Helping to support the museum's unofficial motto, "[a] nation stays alive when its culture stays alive," the United States DOS, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and other foreign governments and international organizations pledged financial and material support to help preserve Afghanistan's cultural heritage.<sup>53</sup> William Remsen and Laura Tedesco reflected on

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<sup>51</sup> Massoudi, "The National Museum of Afghanistan," 37-38.

<sup>52</sup> See for example, Barbara Crossette, "U.N., in Shift, Moves to Save Art for Afghans," *New York Times*, March 31, 2011.; National Endowment of Humanities, "Humanities Endowment Announces Afghanistan Initiative, Hosts President Karzai's First Official Visit to U.S. Museum," National Endowment of Humanities Press Release, May 23, 2005, <http://www.neh.gov/print/332>.; Alistair Lawson, "Afghan gold: How the country's heritage was saved," BBC, 1 March 2011, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-12599726>.

<sup>53</sup> Massoudi, "The National Museum of Afghanistan," 41.; Frederik Hiebert, "Curator's Preface," in *Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul*, ed. Frederik Hiebert and Pierre

the Department of State's long and complex history of protecting Afghanistan's cultural heritage, arguing that, aside from a brief interlude in the 1990s when the U.S. Government stopped supporting Afghanistan's cultural heritage efforts at the same time as DOS cultural diplomacy budgets were being reduced (see chapter three), "the US government has long recognized the value of cultural diplomacy and the preservation of Afghanistan's endangered cultural patrimony for the present and future generations of the Afghan nation and the world." They maintain that supporting attempts to protect the country's cultural heritage is a central part of the U.S.'s public diplomacy agenda. "Afghan cultural heritage preservation and development are integral parts of larger US public diplomacy efforts to support Afghanistan's people and government as they establish a more secure, prosperous and resilient state."<sup>54</sup>

After 2001, hope existed that the National Museum and the larger public history of Afghanistan would adopt a more central position in Afghan public life. Dupree argued in 2002 that "the global interest in Afghanistan presents unique opportunities" to create a larger intellectual ecosystem to make history a central part of Afghan public life. Some changes were made when the 2004 Law on the Preservation of Historical and Cultural Heritage was passed, reflecting de jure attempts to protect the country's historical and cultural heritage. The initialization of a 2011 plan to rebuild the National Museum reflected a positive attempt to protect Afghanistan's history. However, the continued absence of history in the larger public sphere, including school curriculum, continued the relegation of the National Museum to a symbolic role that serves tourists and foreigners rather than the everyday realities of public life in

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Cambon (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2008), 23.; Remsen and Tedesco, "US Cultural Diplomacy, Cultural Heritage Preservation and Development," 145.

<sup>54</sup> Remsen and Tedesco, "US Cultural Diplomacy, Cultural Heritage Preservation and Development," 137 and 141-142.

Kabul, or the nation. And given the relative prioritization of government functions in the process of nation building, the National Museum remains poorly funded by the national government.<sup>55</sup>

Public disagreements about the nation's history have also diminished the importance of the recent past in official national narratives. A debate about the nation's recent historical narratives, as told in the country's new textbooks developed since 2002, proved so divisive that the nation's history in textbooks ends in 1973.<sup>56</sup> Farooq Wardak, the education minister since 2008 argued, "Our recent history tears us apart. We've created a curriculum based on the older history that brings us together, with figures universally recognized as being great."<sup>57</sup> Although a discussion of history in the public sphere is a positive development and history is being taught in schools across the country to "encourage brotherhood and unity," the problem, as Wardak argued, is that the recent past is not seen as important to the new nation. Remsen and Tedesco argue, "Two generations of young Afghans, who have grown up with war or outside their own country as refugees, have little idea about their remarkable cultural past."<sup>58</sup> This sentiment emerged in interviews conducted with members of the Museums Connect project team, and others familiar with the National Museum. Although not an exhaustive survey, a larger critique emerged of the National Museum in Afghanistan as a repository for the country's ancient historical artifacts, especially of the Silk Road, but with little contemporary relevance for daily life in Afghanistan. Project facilitator Nasim Fekrat argued, "Museums here [in the U.S.] are for education and you go in, in Afghanistan that is not how they are viewed. It is just there...and

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>56</sup> Kevin Sieff, "In Afghanistan, a new approach to teaching history: Leave Out the Wars," *Washington Post*, February 4, 2012, accessed 8/31/2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/in-afghanistan-a-new-approach-to-teaching-history-leave-out-the-wars/2012/02/03/gIQA57KNqQ\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/in-afghanistan-a-new-approach-to-teaching-history-leave-out-the-wars/2012/02/03/gIQA57KNqQ_story.html).

<sup>57</sup> Farooq Wardak, quoted in Sieff, "In Afghanistan, a new approach to teaching history."

<sup>58</sup> Remsen and Tedesco, "US Cultural Diplomacy, Cultural Heritage Preservation and Development," 151.

people do not think that.”<sup>59</sup> Project participant Saeid Madadi suggested that the historical narratives of the museum served the ruling elites but had little relevance to the lives of everyday citizens. “It [the NMA] is a very formal, decorative projection of the history. All of these words of kings, or for example the pottery of the kingdom or the crowns of the kings, and there is little of culture in it and little of civilization in it. It doesn’t mean that there weren’t anything to display but it’s because it was how they [ruling elites] wanted it to be a very formal description of the history they wanted and liked.”<sup>60</sup> This view is also supported by Constance Wyndham’s analysis of the NMA as a site that features an abundance and central location of Buddhist statues, in a museum that offers little interpretation, and relegates and diminishes the Islamic pieces relevant to the overwhelmingly Muslim population to the physical and intellectual periphery of the museum.<sup>61</sup>

In spite of the failure of the NMA, like other governmental organizations, to facilitate a more developed national consciousness within Afghanistan, the museum has been used energetically for international affairs. The recovered artifacts from vaults around Kabul, including the Bactrian gold, formed an international traveling exhibition, *Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum* in 2006.<sup>62</sup> This exhibition was created with support from the National Geographic Society and has traveled to major museums in Europe, Australia, and the United States to showcase a “different side” of Afghanistan to the world. It reflected a larger trend that Daniel Walkowitz and Lisa Mayer Knauer skeptically argued has seen the use of

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<sup>59</sup> Fekrat, interview with author.

<sup>60</sup> Saeid Madadi, interview with author, digital recording, by telephone, September 16, 2015.

<sup>61</sup> Constance Wyndham, “Reconstructing Afghan Identity: Nation-Building, International Relations and the Safeguarding of Afghanistan’s Buddhist Heritage,” in *Museums, Heritage and International Development*, ed. Paul Basu and Wayne Modest (New York: Routledge, 2015), 162-163.

<sup>62</sup> Remsen and Tedesco, “US Cultural Diplomacy, Cultural Heritage Preservation and Development,” 141-142.

traveling exhibitions and a selective view of a nation's past by governments to "to bolster their international image, shore up domestic support, or placate critics."<sup>63</sup>

Writing in the *Hidden Treasures* catalogue, Former Deputy Minister of Information and Culture Omar Sultan explained the outward intentions of the exhibition by declaring, "By organizing this exhibition, we want to affirm our commitment to the international community that Afghanistan is changing from a culture of war to a culture of peace."<sup>64</sup> He explained that the Ministry of Information, Culture, Tourism, and Youth, at least in his estimation, was committed to encouraging a new atmosphere of peace, "through cultural gatherings, cultural heritage events, and festivals" to "lift people's spirits but also help in promoting a culture of tolerance and understanding."<sup>65</sup> The overt international political context of this exhibition was also confirmed by then-President Hamid Karzai's letter to "Dear Friends" at the beginning of the exhibition's North American catalogue. Connecting the significance of the exhibition to the domestic political realities of Afghanistan, its international position, and his own political realities, he wrote, "When I was elected President of Afghanistan, one of my promises to the Afghan people was that the world would never forget our country. 'Hidden Treasures' will paint a panoramic picture of our wondrous country and let the beauty of Afghanistan come alive in the imaginations of our friends around the world."<sup>66</sup> Former National Museum Director Omara Khan Massoudi concurred in a 2013 interview and optimistically suggested that the National Museum

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<sup>63</sup> Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Mayer Knauer, "Introduction," in *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space*, ed. Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Mayer Knauer (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004), 4.

<sup>64</sup> Omar Sultan, "Introduction," in *Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul*, ed. Frederik Hiebert and Pierre Cambon (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2008), 30.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Hamid Karzai, "Foreword From the President of Afghanistan," in *Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul*, ed. Frederik Hiebert and Pierre Cambon (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2008), 13.



could play a significant role in “introduc[ing] the other face of Afghanistan to people” around the world.<sup>67</sup>

These outward-facing sentiments were reflected in the embrace of the Museums Connect project when the U.S. Embassy in Kabul approached the National Museum of Afghanistan as a possible partner. Despite its limited financial and human resources the NMA embraced the idea. Hugh Allen recalled that initially, Massoudi “was fully willing. He signed on the concept papers and was like ‘Yes, this is great, this is wonderful recognition for their museum, and wonderful recognition for the country to be involved with the U.S. State Department.’”<sup>68</sup> The practical limitations of expertise and resources at an institution that lacked reliable electrical power and was trying to recover from decades of damage meant that the NMA’s role in the Museums Connect project was limited to serving primarily as an exhibition space. The NMA’s community partner—Marefat High School—conducted the day-to-day project activities and developed the exhibition. Massoudi later acknowledged, “interaction with the National Constitution Center mainly happened through Marefat High School. We rarely contacted them.”<sup>69</sup>

### **“Being We the People”**

Within these widely disparate public history contexts, the students in Philadelphia and Kabul understood the project’s ideas and themes differently. The phrase “Being We the People”—easily understood by an American audience from the preamble of the American Constitution—was understood and interpreted very differently by the students and, importantly, their facilitators on both sides of the project. These discrepancies of interpretation caused the

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<sup>67</sup> Alma Freeman, “In Conversation with Afghan Museum Director Omara Khan Masoudi,” *Asia*, January 23, 2013, accessed August 17, 2015, <http://asiafoundation.org/in-asia/2013/01/23/in-conversation-with-afghan-museum-director-omara-khan-masoudi/>.

<sup>68</sup> Allen, interview with author.

<sup>69</sup> Omara Khan Massoudi, correspondence with author, trans. Zalmay Attarpour and Fahim Rahimi, February 6, 2016.

students to make vastly different meanings from the process of taking photographs. Moreover, the lack of consensus about the phrase's meaning amongst these different participants highlights the folly of assuming that every participant understood the intentions or the stated goals of the project creators at NCC in a uniform way, reinforcing the need to consider project participants both collectively and individually.

The opening phrase of the Preamble to the American Constitution holds significant popular meaning in the U.S. and immediately evokes the political power placed in the hands of the American people and their elected officials. American constitutional scholar and Yale law professor Dr. Bruce Ackerman argues that the idea of government by the people remains both a central idea and distinctive feature of the American Constitution.<sup>70</sup> While the dominant meaning and understanding of this phrase and the ideas behind it originate in the United States, they are not totally isolated to America. After the Bonn Agreement of December 2001 required the new state of Afghanistan to rewrite its Constitution, Afghanistan ratified a new constitution in 2004 that adopted the phrase “We the People” in its preamble.<sup>71</sup>

The American and Afghan constitutions, however, were not the only sources for the project's theme and guiding ideas. The photography project was also framed using the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and key themes that emerge from it “such as work, religion, participation, expression, commerce, and myself.”<sup>72</sup> The presence of this terminology, and the underlying idea of imbuing power in the political process in both countries' constitutions, guided Stern and the NCC's choice of the project theme.<sup>73</sup> “We the People” and

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<sup>70</sup> Bruce Ackerman, *We the People: Transformations*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2000), 3-4.

<sup>71</sup> “The Constitution of Afghanistan,” *Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*, ratified January 26, 2004, accessed September 20, 2015, <http://www.afghanembassy.com.pl/afg/images/pliki/TheConstitution.pdf>.

<sup>72</sup> “Being We the People,” *National Constitution Center*, accessed October 21, 2015, <http://beingwe.constitutioncenter.org/>.

<sup>73</sup> Stern, interview with author.

the concepts of public involvement in democracy within a distinctly ideological frame that promulgates celebratory ideas of pluralism were not simply an abstract concept at the NCC, but rather a central part of the museum's construction. One part of the main permanent exhibition is titled, "The Story of We the People," and the dialogic museum is founded upon the idea of creating public dialogue about both the Constitution and ideas of citizenship within those ideas more broadly.<sup>74</sup> Thus, when the "Being We the People" Museums Connect project and the central theme for the photography exhibition was created, this language drew on a deep institutional ideology. This in turn shaped the National Constitution Center staff's perspectives and how they framed the project to the Constitution High School students as they facilitated their experiences in Philadelphia.

The explanation of Lauren Cristella, NCC Education Manager and a contributor to the creation of the original year-long project curriculum, reflected the patriotic, celebratory ideology of the "Great American Experiment" that the theme came to embody in Philadelphia:

'Being We the People' is taking the ideas, specifically from the Preamble but beyond that this whole 'Great American Experiment' and everything that entails, and saying 'what does that look like day-to-day? What does that look like for a High School student here?' And by the same principles, we were helping Afghanistan write their constitution, they were just coming out of the constitution writing process for Afghanistan, what does that mean? And this is the manifestation of that, through photography.<sup>75</sup>

Her explanation reveals expectations about what the students' photography would document that framed the project within a unifying and homogenous "us" and "them." This effaced the grant proposal's original framing as an exploration of "the minority imprint." Additionally, it highlights an assumption that both groups of students would interpret the project's theme in the same way. In keeping with people-to-people diplomacy's pursuit of similarities rather than

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<sup>74</sup> "Main Exhibition," *National Constitution Center*, accessed October 23, 2015, <http://constitutioncenter.org/experience/exhibitions/main-exhibition>.

<sup>75</sup> Lauren Cristella, interview with author, digital recording, by telephone, September 23, 2015.

dissonance, Cristella also recalled that she and her colleagues at the NCC hoped participating students “would glean an understanding of how similar their societies are. I think their gut reaction was that it’s so different, it’s a war zone, they don’t believe what we believe, and it’s a world away. It just seemed so far away, a lot of our students had never left Philadelphia.”<sup>76</sup> These ideas neglected the diverse life experiences and specific minority experiences of the two groups of students. Reflecting traditional celebratory notions of pluralism, it also expressed a desire for the students to understand their lives within a wider context that promoted the similarities between teenagers regardless of their background, rather than interrogated the challenges these minority communities faced within wider society. Cristella thus hoped that exploring connections between the two groups of students would foster “understanding that some of what our students are going through are very similar to what students in Afghanistan are going through, and vice-versa.”<sup>77</sup> One of the NCC’s earliest blog posts about “Being We the People” agreed with this interpretation of the project’s goals when the author, reflecting the NCC’s commitment to the United States Constitution, publically speculated about what the photography exhibition would reveal: “One can expect their photographs and interpretations of freedom to vastly differ from one another. However, perhaps what the resulting exhibition *will actually show us* is how similar these young people really are despite the thousands of miles and years of life experiences that separate them.”<sup>78</sup> [emphasis added]

Even Stern reflected that he hoped the grant would draw comparisons between the two countries rather than the two minority populations. Explaining his rationale behind the choice of a photography project in 2015, Stern shared:

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> “Constitution High School,” *Civic Learning (blog)*, National Constitution Center, August 26, 2009, accessed October 4, 2015, <http://civiclearning.blogspot.com/2009/08/constitution-high-school.html>.

I think that the American students from the Afghan students and the Afghan students from the American students got something that is unique to photography, which is if you're in a class and you're looking at an image, and it's just an image and it's not a video, and it's not a story, you are compelled to focus on one thing. An Afghan student can present a part of their world to an American student that is difficult—not impossible—but difficult to do with another medium. Because there is nothing else competing for your attention. There is a single, stark image. And you have a discussion about one image.<sup>79</sup>

These interpretations of the project neglected the American minority experience of the Constitution High School students and promoted a comparative frame between the two countries' experiences. This was exacerbated by NCC staff's personal attitudes that inadvertently elevated and celebrated the Marefat students' minority status as members of the Hazara ethnic group. In subsequent reflections, the language of NCC staff towards the Hazara students elucidated great admiration, sympathy, and respect for the students and school writ large. This inadvertently further diminished the “minority imprint” of the American students, who were seen as privileged “Americans” vis-à-vis their less privileged Afghan colleagues, and thus explained their experience within a positive unifying frame of “America.” These recollections and the attitudes they exposed simultaneously removed the agency of the Hazara students and “othered” them as a persecuted minority one-dimensionally defined by the historical experiences of Hazara in Afghanistan. Built into this mindset was the supposition that this group deserved particular reverence and respect for what they have been able to achieve, especially at Marefat School. Allen's description of the partnership of two minority communities reflected this subtle attitude that pervaded the NCC staff's reflections:

And what was unique about that was that the students that we worked with in both schools were predominantly minorities. Most of our students in Philadelphia were African American and most of our students in Afghanistan were Hazara. And Hazaras are a very distinct and very many times persecuted minority in Afghanistan. You know African Americans have come a long way in the United States and there are certainly still

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<sup>79</sup> Stern, interview with author.

issues, but *nowhere near as persecuted* as Hazaras are.<sup>80</sup> [emphasis added]

Sayeh Hormozi similarly reflected Allen's judgment that the African American community was "nowhere near as persecuted" as their Hazara colleagues. Hormozi, an important project facilitator at NCC, suggested that the reason for close connection between the two groups of students was their minority status. While her stratification of the two minority groups' relative tragedies was less overt than Allen's, she similarly relegated the African American community's minority status to second place behind that of the Hazaras:

For the American students, I think, knowing who was coming, having this advanced time to think and prepare and understand who was coming to visit them and what *they had been through*. And I think the other piece of it was that our students that we worked with and the school that we worked with were largely an African American population and this was a school that was a majority-minority school. And there also—the African American community—there are always these questions about marginalization and have this history of persecution and being marginalized that they are continuing to strive against today and here we have these Hazara students who have that similar threat and background and I think that was a connection that our students made. That these are students who have also experienced some of the ethnic and racial bigotry that they've [African American's] experienced. I think thinking about them in terms of people to be compassionate towards because of the war and all the atrocities that they have gone through.<sup>81</sup> [emphasis added]

Reverence for the difficult plight of the Hazara by NCC staff and the simultaneous reduction of the importance of their minority status coalesced with Stern's self-proclaimed bias and sympathy towards the Hazara. This translated into how the NCC staff framed the project to the students at Constitution High School, which in turn shaped how they created meaning throughout the project. Activities conducted early in the project, therefore, further diminished the minority status of the students and framed them as representatives of America, in keeping with the public diplomacy paradigm (see chapter three) that seeks to reinforce the nation-state and national identity. Allen recalled, "some of the early exercises were really neat. One of the first

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<sup>80</sup> Allen, interview with author.

<sup>81</sup> Hormozi, interview with author.

things we asked the American students to write [was] what they would say to an Afghan audience if they were the United States Government and then we asked the Afghan students to essentially write their equivalent of the President's State of the Union speech if he were speaking on the topic of their country. So we'd do things like that to get them warmed up, to get to know each other."<sup>82</sup>

The reflections of the students show that they understood the grant's title and guiding theme during the photography project within the framework established by the NCC staff. Jenay Smith reflected that "Being We the People" "didn't mean anything until the end of the project. For me it was like an essay, we filled in all the words and the title at that point came to fruition." She went on to recall that it was only after completing the project that she understood "Being We the People" to be an inclusive term that "encompassed all of us all over the world."<sup>83</sup> Smith's reflection after participating in the project by taking photographs and discussing them with her student colleagues in both countries suggested that she began to understand similarities between the two groups of students and their understandings of the ideas of democracy in the two countries: "I learned about the similarities between our worlds. I learned that they were and are fighting for the same rights and liberties we have and desire in America. They are very educated about world issues and that the type of knowledge we received throughout our lifetime was quite different."<sup>84</sup> Smith's recollection, while revealing her embrace of the normative pluralist narrative of the country and herself as "American," also simultaneously reflected a transnational sensibility that looked at the "rights" and "liberties" outside of the lens of the nation-state. Smith, an African American student, was not the only Constitution High School student to reach this particular understanding. Sharifa Garvey, a Jamaican-born student, recalled "'Being We the

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<sup>82</sup> Allen, interview with author.

<sup>83</sup> Jenay Smith, correspondence with author, February 5, 2016.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

People’ reflects that no matter our cultural, ethnical, or racial background there are similar grounds that we walk on...[it] is turning our backs away from our own trivial concerns about life and focusing on bigger issues that affects human rights by taking a physical approach to inspire and make change.”<sup>85</sup> Both of these understandings of the project’s theme highlight an inclusive approach to the similarities between the students rather than a complex wrestling with the similarities and differences between the two minority groups’ experiences, as the project was originally framed. While Smith showed an awareness of a transnational sensibility that moved beyond the nation-state frame, when pressed to consider the subtitle of the project, “the minority imprint,” she recalled that it was only after the fact in the process of reviewing the photographs that she considered the context for what she had taken. “I wouldn’t think so much about it until we had to think about the context of our photos [while pairing them]. Some of my photos were of graffiti in alleyways and the oh so familiar teddy bear memorials at every street corner. At that point you can only do a root cause analysis as to why that was the norm for me. While taking photos I really tried to just have fun.”<sup>86</sup> Smith’s recollection that the “minority imprint” emphasized in the project title was less a point of emphasis or guiding principal for her photography, than “just having fun.”

The meanings derived from the project by the American students were also reflected in the photography exhibition. For example, Constitution High student Dominiq Gilyard’s photograph of a Philadelphia grocery store was captioned, “The market was so full of food, but empty of people. There are all kinds of high-grade meats, veal, pork, beef, but no one buying it. In Afghanistan, there are people looking for food, but there isn’t as much as there is here, so it’s the reverse of this photo. This represents how I feel we have a lot of stuff, and it is important for

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<sup>85</sup> Sharifa Garvey, correspondence with author, February 11, 2016.

<sup>86</sup> Jenay Smith, correspondence with author, February 9, 2016.



people to share.”<sup>87</sup> This photograph was paired with a photograph of a Kabul shop by Marefat student Bismillah Alizada with a similar composition of neatly symmetrical rows of goods on sale. Alizada’s photo was accompanied by the caption: “This is a shop in which different kinds of cooking ingredients like spices and oils are sold.”<sup>88</sup> The compositional similarities of the photographs stood alongside Gilyard’s caption reflecting on the similarities and differences in consumer experiences between Philadelphia and Kabul. Although just one example, this photographic pairing and the tone of the captions is representative of the larger exhibition that defaulted to identifying similar visual and compositional aesthetics, collectively neglecting particular “minority imprints” in either country. It thus offered a much more homogenous “America” and “Afghanistan,” regardless of the photographers’ backgrounds, rather than a deeper look at the different political or social content and contexts of the photographs.

“Being We the People: Afghanistan, America, & the Minority Imprint” was much more carefully interrogated in Afghanistan because the project theme translated less readily, despite its presence in the new constitution of Afghanistan. Stern’s colleague Nasim Fekrat guided the Marefat students as they embarked on the photography project. Fekrat later recalled his understanding of the photography project’s goals for the students: “The purpose was to document everyday life and project it to a different audience, while in the meantime learn about themselves.”<sup>89</sup> The process of taking photographs in Kabul reflected what both Stern and Fekrat recognized in theory was the camera’s ability to encourage the students to look at their own lives, surroundings and communities through a still, finite image.

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<sup>87</sup> “Being We The People,” *National Constitution Center*, accessed February 23, 2016, <http://beingwe.constitutioncenter.org/>.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Fekrat, interview with author.

Royesh agreed with his colleagues' assessment of the power of photography to foster self-exploration, and a wider exploration of their own country, and recalled that his students were able to look at themselves in a new light through the process of creating their photography. He explained, "They shot many scenes that helped them ponder on the roots and richness of their country's culture and customs. They learned how to work in a group with specific agenda and a visionary mission."<sup>90</sup> As a participant, Madadi also recognized the benefits of photography as a medium for self-exploration when he recalled, "photography helped me to see the very tiny details of society that I often was not able to see with my eyes."<sup>91</sup> The act of taking photographs and seeking the consent of the photos' subjects also created momentary interactions that would otherwise have not happened, and encouraged a much closer reading of the photography as well. Reflecting on his experiences walking through Kabul taking photographs, Madadi suggested,

Each of the times I was going to take these photos it opened the time for a short discussion about what they [the photograph's subject] were doing, how their lives were, and what they were thinking about society, about government, about education, all of this stuff. I think that this was a very good experience. The pictures gave me the opportunity to go into the details of people's lives, of social interactions, of the tiny details of culture, and how people lived.<sup>92</sup>

The marginalization of the minority identity of the American students was not mirrored in Afghanistan. For Marefat principal and NMA community partner Royesh, the idea of "Being We the People" was in keeping with the intentions of the project and its eponymous theme to explore civic education and the role of individuals in a larger democratic society. Royesh reflected, "For me, ['Being We the People'] meant the importance of People in a democratic system. People are the ultimate source of authority and the last body to legitimize any decision related to their destiny and life." For Royesh, this theme and its underlying ideas connected

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<sup>90</sup> Royesh, e-mail message to author, September 21, 2015.

<sup>91</sup> Saeid Madadi, interview with author, digital recording, by telephone, September 16, 2015.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

intimately to the unique civic education that he was helping to lead for Hazara students in Dasht-e Barchi. “I looked at this phrase as the basis of my theory about civic education or civic awareness. It provided me with a context in which I could bring my students to explore and practice their own power as people. For my students, it simply implied the notion of People as the tangible figures around them. They identified themselves as ‘beingwethepeople.’[sic]” This theoretical idea was made manifest in the photography work that the students conducted, according to Royesh, where they were able to translate theory into practice. He recalled in 2015 that from his perspective, “the people” of the project’s theme came to not only mean the students themselves, but the subjects of their photographs, and later the students in Philadelphia with whom they worked in partnership on the exhibition.<sup>93</sup> Royesh’s knowledge of the context of the phrase and his broader intellectual framework through which to consider its implications for the project was not a common response by the Hazara facilitators and students.

Those not as familiar with the American or Afghan Constitution, nor the ideas and theory surrounding democratic participation encapsulated in the phrase, understood the central idea of the project in different ways. Nasim Fekrat, despite his role in deciding the format of the project, did not know that the phrase “Being We the People” existed in the new Afghan Constitution. He suggested in 2015, “in the [Afghanistan] constitution it doesn’t say ‘We the People.’” Instead, he framed his understanding of the project’s central guiding concept within the ethnic identity of the Hazara group. He explained that in Afghanistan individuals do not identify as “Afghan”—a term he subversively suggested can often be used in a derogatory way when directed at other ethnic groups to imply a lack of education or backwardness—instead they identify themselves as members of their ethnic group. This framework guided his understanding of “Being We the People” because, for Fekrat, “We the People” had no inherent meaning, but instead “was

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<sup>93</sup> Royesh, e-mail message to author, September 21, 2015.

interpreted as ‘We the people of Hazara.’”<sup>94</sup> He explained that this was understood as empowering because it placed the focus of Afghans and Americans on a historically marginalized and little-seen group. While this interpretation was divergent from an understanding that might suggest being part of a larger national identity, it was in keeping with the projects’ exploration of what being “We the People” meant to different minority groups and also a larger conversation about the role of minority ethnic communities in the new “nation” of Afghanistan.

Marefat student Saeid Madadi, who took photographs for the exhibition and also traveled to the United States during the project, recalled that from his perspective the phrase did not have inherent meaning and that it was “just the name of the website, so the phrase or the title of the project in the beginning didn’t mean a lot to me.”<sup>95</sup> But, unlike Fekrat, when pushed to consider what this idea meant to him he saw “Being We the People” less as an assertion of Hazara pride or identity, and more as a prompt to bring to light the lives of everyday people, especially minorities, in Afghanistan. “It was a very good and comprehensive title which we took to be what we wanted it to be...to introduce the people...[we] were not trying to extoll certain perspectives, we’re not trying to make ways, or a campaign, or a mission; we were just trying to get [photographs of] these people, people who were living in Afghanistan, especially the minorities, and the minorities in the United States.”<sup>96</sup> Reflecting another way that the central concept and idea of the transnational project was understood in Afghanistan in a divergent way from its original intention, Madadi later suggested in 2015 that had he known what the intentions of the project’s creators were, he would have taken different photographs than the ones he did.

“Later, I found out, the project was very focused on the role of minorities in both countries, and I

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<sup>94</sup> Fekrat, interview with author.

<sup>95</sup> Madadi, interview with author.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

think if we were told about it in detail at the beginning of the project we might have taken very different photographs.”<sup>97</sup> And although Madadi’s reflection did not recall Stern’s early visit to Kabul to deliver the cameras and introduce the project to the Marefat students, it does highlight that the Marefat students did not receive or digest the emphasis on the minority imprint that was originally intended.

### **Visiting Philadelphia: A mid-project “audible”**

Despite the different interpretations of the project and its guiding theme, the choice of photography as the central medium of the year-long grant encouraged dialogue between the students at the two schools and also with each other when they were uploaded to the photography sharing website, Shutterfly.com. When one of the Constitution High School students, Jenay Smith, contributed a photograph to the Shutterfly site for her colleagues in both countries to discuss, it provoked discussion in both Philadelphia with her project teammates, and online with her colleagues abroad. Smith recalled, “through photographs we really had the chance to see what life was like for them. We shared memories, experiences and most of all what made us all people.”<sup>98</sup> While one particular photograph of her sister with cerebral palsy was created “with love but really giving an honest look,” it provoked an emotional discussion at Constitution High School as many of the students considered for the first time what it meant to Smith to have a sister with cerebral palsy.<sup>99</sup>

Smith’s photograph of her sister also created transnational dialogue on the project’s Shutterfly site as it led to a discussion of mental illness and disabilities in both countries. In discussing these issues, she asked her Marefat colleagues how they were understood in Afghanistan. The initial response that “estimated 97% of Afghans had mental disabilities” from

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Jenay Smith, correspondence with author, February 5, 2016.

<sup>99</sup> Cristella, interview with author.

one of the students in Kabul shocked the American participants. However, another student explained the first response: “I think that more than 20 years of war has effected deeply on our people, and it has caused an increase of people who have mental disabilities. But now they are members of our society and people respect them as human...People who have mental disabilities need to be helped and have access as ordinary members of society, and here in Afghanistan we try to expand this culture of accepting all society members as equal.”<sup>100</sup> This discussion also fostered an intimacy between the two project teams that made the Marefat students’ trip to Philadelphia feel like a reunion of old friends rather than an introduction.<sup>101</sup>

After the early workshops and the depth of discussion occurring between the students via the project’s Shutterfly website, a decision was made by the National Constitution Center’s project directors, Hugh Allen and Jeff Stern, to not travel NCC staff to Afghanistan as originally proposed. Instead they asked AAM and DOS to amend the original implementation agreement to allow for ten Marefat students to travel to Philadelphia. This decision reflected both pragmatic and ideological reasons that both project directors assessed as having an important and positive outcome for the students, as well as unintended consequences for the project and its participants.

Suspecting that working together would enhance both the exhibition and relationships between the students by allowing face-to-face dialogue, Allen mused, “Rather than sending a bunch of American museum executives, myself included, our director of exhibits, and a couple of project consultants, to Afghanistan to provide technical museum assistance at the National Museum. Wouldn’t it be a much better thing if we actually got these students in a room together?”<sup>102</sup> Stern similarly recalled, “it became clear that it would be much more valuable to

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<sup>100</sup> Saeid Madadi quoted in, Jeffrey Stern and Hugh Allen, Final Report Collaborations Abroad Being We the People Project, unpublished manuscript, July 23, 2010, courtesy of Hugh Allen, 9.

<sup>101</sup> Stern, interview with author.; Hormozi, interview with author.; Cristella, interview with author.

<sup>102</sup> Allen, interview with author.

bring the Afghan students—and cheaper—to bring the Afghan students to America. To actually physically meet and work with the people they had been working with virtually for so long.”<sup>103</sup> Stern later recalled that this changed the project’s original vision so that it “was very different from what happened in the end.”<sup>104</sup>

Security issues, insurance costs, and logistical difficulties also made the initial plan to send NCC staff to Kabul and the National Museum of Afghanistan appear less and less feasible. The cost of insurance for those traveling into Afghanistan, as well as security concerns about Taliban activity around the capital, made traveling a cohort of staff to Kabul both expensive and logistically very complicated. Reflecting on the pragmatic barriers to travel for the NCC staff, Hugh Allen recalled, “You have to buy—I’m not lying—you have to buy ransom insurance. There are a lot of things you have to do when you travel to a place that is dangerous because it’s in the middle of a war zone that you or I wouldn’t have to do if we were getting on a plane to go to London. It is logistically very difficult and really would be prohibitively expensive.”<sup>105</sup> The experience of Stern and Sayeh Hormozi, the NCC Senior Manager of Civic and International Engagement, who traveled to Kabul towards the end of the grant to deliver the exhibit and help install it at the NMA, confirmed these challenges. Unlike Stern, Hormozi had never traveled to Afghanistan. She recalled that despite utilizing Stern’s connections developed through years of working in Kabul, the experience was “life changing...but simultaneously terrifying.”<sup>106</sup> She later remembered, “Going into a place [hotel] that has really thick walls and lots of barbed wire and armed guards was also scary. That was unsettling. You could hear gunfire and shells in the

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<sup>103</sup> Stern, interview with author.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Allen, interview with author.

<sup>106</sup> Hormozi, interview with author.

distance. That was unsettling.”<sup>107</sup> And while it would still be logistically complicated, especially as the Marefat students did not have passports and it was particularly difficult to obtain U.S. visas for Afghan nationals at that time, the decision was made that it practically made more sense to travel a group of Marefat students to Philadelphia.

An ideological consideration also factored into the decision to “call a mid-project audible,” as Hugh Allen described this change employing colloquial language from American sports.<sup>108</sup> Recalling a common observation from his journalist pursuits in Afghanistan, Stern observed: “I see a lot of this where people say, ‘We’re going to teach you how to do this.’ And people saying, ‘Well thanks, but also I’m hungry can you give me some food.’”<sup>109</sup> With this in mind, Stern reflected on the original plan to send NCC staff to Kabul by acknowledging that they, “had just been very presumptuous that we could teach them things that they needed to know or didn’t already know... I think there would have been some interesting meetings and it would have been neat for them to see the National Museum of Afghanistan. But I just can’t see how they would have really had a lasting impact.” He continued to speculate that had they taken such a trip, they would have been greeted with smiles, especially by a museum that has relied so heavily on foreign investment, but that simultaneously their advice would have been redundant. “I think whatever capacity or lessons we could have taught them, they would have said, ‘Great, thanks so much for coming, can you help us install a fire retardant system and a security system. And here are all the things that we need to protect our artifacts. Your lessons are great but...’”<sup>110</sup> These recollections not only demonstrate a self-conscious attempt by the American partner to share its authority and not replicate neo-colonial power dynamics by solely deciding what

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Allen, interview with author.

<sup>109</sup> Stern, interview with author.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.



needed to be done, but also a partner who operated in an entirely different public history context from its Afghan partner museum that self-consciously identified its significant power. However, the authority to make this change remained the NCC's.

The “audible” that changed the planned activities had a significant impact on both the public history project and also the people-to-people diplomacy relationships between the students, teachers, and museum staff. The opportunity for the students to engage in unscripted, face-to-face dialogue with NCC staff acting as facilitators—an example of DOS’ people-to-people diplomacy—allowed for an extended in-person workshop to pair the American and Afghan photographs together, and permitted a much deeper conversation than virtual dialogue via Shutterly and Facebook allowed. In a workshop that staff recalled lasted almost an entire day, rather than the half-day that was allocated, the students discussed in English which photographs belonged together for the sake of the exhibition. Gathered around “ten giant round banquet tables” with photographs from both groups, they deliberated what each photo meant for the students and their lives. However, in keeping with people-to-people’s underpinning on building connections through attraction and similarities (see chapter three) as well as the exhibition’s design of “pairings” (understood as comparisons rather than juxtapositions), the day-long workshop focused predominantly on similarities rather than dissonance and disagreement. Cristella recalled with fondness, “I don’t know what I expected from that moment, but it ended up being half trip down memory lane, half story telling hour, half—or I guess third, third, third—opportunity to do the actual task of pairing.” She described an energetic room where friendships were cemented and intimate conversations about these young people’s lives, families, and countries took place, “I think the kids were making connections, and running up and saying, ‘Did you take this one? This one’s yours, right?’ And then they talked about it, and they asked

questions. That happened way more than we expected. It turned into a much longer process than we were anticipating. I never thought the kids would make the connections that they did to each other, to the photos.”<sup>111</sup> Hormozi, who recalled “a lot of compassion,” and Allen, who suggested that the success of this dialogic portion of the project was “unbelievably collaborative,” also echoed this recollection of the exhibition development phase of the Philadelphia trip.<sup>112</sup> Allen explained, “the students just sat there with each other, working in teams, trying to pair things up and talking about the concepts, with adults going around and helping them when assistance was needed. So it really was very organic and student driven.”<sup>113</sup> Constitution High student Jenay Smith corroborated the NCC staff’s assessment of this part of the project when she recalled, “The pairing of the photos was interesting because I didn’t think we could pair them all. When we actually started to pair the photos everything came together. The similarities in each photo varied and that’s what was cool about it. In one pair you might see graffiti in both photos and another you might see a basket juxtaposed with a brick wall (for an example). It allowed me to see our likeness in a different artistic way.”<sup>114</sup> Smith’s reflection also illustrated that aesthetic similarities rather than difference and dissonance between the two groups of students were her central interpretive frames of the dialogic process. While Sharifa Garvey explained that at first the photographs did not appear compatible, “when the students that were there who took the photos explained to us what was occurring during that moment we found that there was a deeper meaning.”<sup>115</sup>

These conversations and the goal of seeking similarities with little attention to interrogating difference also produced the people-to-people diplomacy impact of cementing

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<sup>111</sup> Cristella, interview with author.

<sup>112</sup> Hormozi, interview with author.

<sup>113</sup> Allen, interview with author.

<sup>114</sup> Smith, correspondence with author.

<sup>115</sup> Garvey, correspondence with author.

many of the burgeoning relationships that had begun to develop, both online and through the sharing of intimate photographs from their everyday lives. Allen recalled, “it really made those kids life-long partners with each other. In addition to the creation of the exhibit, it linked the group of students and the project to each other for ever.”<sup>116</sup> Reneé Jackson, a Constitution High School participant, noted that “Coming into the project I expected to take photos, learn more of their country and things, but I didn’t think I’d be able to actually have a hands-on experience meeting them and understand how they are. That was really something and I made friends in the process.”<sup>117</sup>

This conclusion was reached on both sides of the partnership. From the perspective of the Marefat students, Royesh recalled, “The other favorite memory was the comparison between the first day when the students of Marefat [met] their peers of the CHS in NCC with the moment they were hugging each other as farewell. That was an unbelievable change.”<sup>118</sup> He also recalled, “But for the students, I think it was [an] eye-opening experience by all terms. They had, if any, general cliché type of perception about the U.S. That changed, of course, during the project. They learned something first-hand about the kids in the U.S., about the dreams of their peers at a similar high school, they learned about their language, taste, and sense of understanding.”<sup>119</sup> Nasim Fekrat also recalled that many Afghans thought of professional wrestling and World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) when they thought of the United States. Working with and traveling to Philadelphia instead helped the Marefat students, “learn that ordinary people in the United States are like Afghanistan but very hard working people, very punctual, very ambitious,

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<sup>116</sup> Allen, interview with author.

<sup>117</sup> Reneé Jackson, quoted in Amanda L. Snyder, “Peace Offering,” *South Philly Review*, May 20, 2010, (online), accessed August 17, 2015, <http://www.southphillyreview.com/news/Peace-Offering-94326309.html>

<sup>118</sup> Royesh, email message to author, September 21, 2015.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

and hopeful, and positive, and generous.”<sup>120</sup> This was achieved because a decision was made to change the original plans of the grant and bring a group of Marefat students to Philadelphia. The effectiveness of these conversations in building friendships and allowing a deeper face-to-face dialogue between the students was deemed so successful that both Stern and Allen later lamented that they had not thought of bringing the Marefat students to Philadelphia from the earliest planning stages.<sup>121</sup>

Engaging in face-to-face exhibition development was only one demonstration of how “Being We the People” generally, and the trip of the Marefat students to Philadelphia more specifically, created a space for collaborative exploration of ideas and dialogue between all of the project participants. The “audible” that allowed ten Marefat students to travel to the United States in March of 2010 not only continued and deepened dialogue about the exhibition but also provided another sphere for identity negotiation and meaning making by the Marefat students.

### **Not from “war-torn Afghanistan”**

Perhaps the most pronounced instance of the Marefat students determining the parameters of dialogue, practicing the civic education taught at Marefat, and choosing to speak on behalf of their country occurred at the studio of the Constitution Center’s media partner, local television station CBS3, early in the students’ visit to Philadelphia. In a closed discussion between the American and Afghan students and the CBS3 news anchor Chris May, the Marefat students challenged May’s headline from the previous evening’s news: “students from war-torn Afghanistan.” When the floor was opened to questions after May had introduced himself and his work, the students “launched a veritable offensive against the CBS news team, who tried repeatedly, without any measure of success, to defend coverage of Afghanistan by the American

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<sup>120</sup> Fekrat, interview with author.

<sup>121</sup> Allen, interview with author.; Stern, interview with author.

media in general and their network in particular.” Recalling this event in the grant’s final report, Stern and Allen concluded, “When the students’ barrage of questions and smiling-incriminations would not cease, and only seemed to become more pointed, the news team realized that they were outmatched and, reluctantly, cried ‘uncle.’”<sup>122</sup> Stern and Allen marveled at the moment when the CBS anchor, “admitted, to the satisfaction of everyone in the conference room, that the American media’s coverage of Afghanistan was, on the whole, sub-standard and devoid of nuance.”<sup>123</sup>

The analysis offered by Stern and Allen suggested that this event highlighted their success in creating a space for dialogue in which the students could dictate the terms of discussion. It also showed the students demonstrating “a level of confidence to stand up for themselves, their ethnicity, and their country, that they did not have when the project began. The ten students showed, for the very first time, that they felt not only permitted, but *entitled* to have their voice heard.”<sup>124</sup> Recalling these events five years later, both Stern and Allen maintained their admiration for the students while celebrating that they had created an environment that implicitly encouraged the students to speak out on issues that concerned them. Stern was impressed by the students’ level of comfort, “To have been in this country for two days or a day or something, and to have the fortitude to rebuff a guy in a fancy three-pieced suit at the head of a conference table, it was really remarkable. They didn’t seem to be uncomfortable at all.”<sup>125</sup> Allen similarly recalled with satisfaction these moments but also suggested that the success of creating space for dialogue was not only because of the NCC’s staff embrace of the public

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<sup>122</sup> Stern and Allen, Final Report Museums and Community Collaborations Abroad Being We the People Project, 12.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>125</sup> Stern, interview with author.

historian as facilitator paradigm but also because of the students who were chosen to participate.

He recalled,

And that was this really unique moment where you're like: Wow, this is just absolutely amazing! At this point in time you know these kids get it. Forgetting the fact that we hadn't mixed and matched the pictures that had been the exhibition and we hadn't written the captions at this point in time. At that point in time I can remember looking at Jeff and thinking to myself, This is going to be a success. And this is going to be wildly successful, because they are where they need to be [intellectually]. And it isn't necessary that we need to be involved because they're just there.<sup>126</sup>

Those moments in the CBS3 studio were not the only examples of the student-led dialogue conducted throughout the project. While visiting the Penn Women Center, both groups of students engaged in discussions about differences in women's rights in the two countries. Recalling the threats that were made against her and other female students when they protested changes in Afghanistan's laws vis-à-vis women in 2009, one of the Marefat students, Fatima Jafari, broke down in tears. Hugh Allen's recollection of these events, and Jafari's defiant response, highlighted that he believed they had successfully created an open dialogic space for the program. "[Fatima's] response to [the other students' sympathy] was, 'I'm not crying because I'm upset, I'm crying because this is the first time I could tell the story without fear or trepidation that something would happen to me for saying it.' And again this in front of some of the American girls and some of the American students, so it was all of these things coming together."<sup>127</sup> These moments not only revealed how the project allowed the participating students to engage in a self-driven dialogue, but also how the Marefat students were willing to wrestle with their identity as both a persecuted minority and members of a larger nation.

While traveling in Philadelphia, the Marefat students found themselves speaking as "Afghans" because very few, if any, Americans knew about the Hazara or the history of ethnic

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<sup>126</sup> Allen, interview with author.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

groups of Afghanistan. Royesh later suggested that this gave the students “optimism, courage, and self-confidence.”<sup>128</sup> Speaking for both their country, which has historically persecuted them but is also in the process of being remade and their ethnic group paradoxically also caused some unresolved discomfort for the participants. Saeid Madadi recalled that he felt like he was presented with “a dilemma” in being addressed and speaking as a representative of a country that “it was very difficult for me to relate to the history of.”<sup>129</sup> He explained, “Inside Afghanistan I’m more attached to my ethnic identity, that’s what’s always been defining me in my role in society. So when I came to the U.S. this whole question of which one of these identities I would present more, was a question for me.” He continued, “I tried so much not to look like I’m not representing the larger population, I’m representing Afghanistan, but I’m also representing a smaller minority, or an ethnic minority. For example, I tried to my best not to think in a way that might somehow harm Hazara’s image.”<sup>130</sup>

The photography and travel processes were not the only way that “Being We the People” led to identity formation and negotiation. The exhibition at the National Museum of Afghanistan provided a vehicle for this particular Hazara community to assert its own place in a larger (and new) national identity and to briefly insert itself within a national museum that has historically contributed to the silencing of this group, even if this was more symbolic given the low visitation of the National Museum of Afghanistan.

### **Exhibiting ethnic and national identity**

Exhibiting their photographs was an equally important part of the project for the Marefat students, despite the limited role that the National Museum of Afghanistan plays in the lives of ordinary citizens. The symbolic role of the museum as a custodian of national history, and as an

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<sup>128</sup> Royesh, e-mail message to author, September 21, 2015.

<sup>129</sup> Madadi, interview with author.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

institution of the current government, gave the act of exhibiting additional importance.<sup>131</sup> Even though the photographs that were paired with the American students' photographs were not specifically of Hazara people or places, and in fact documented many aspects of urban life in Kabul, the opportunity to exhibit Hazara work in a museum that is not perceived to have traditionally exhibited artifacts of Hazara history or provenance was reported as significant.<sup>132</sup> Madadi explained that exhibiting photographs of Hazara in the National Museum was "very important for me" because it symbolized inserting Hazara and their history into a larger national history and narrative that had previously excluded them. He explained, "It was an opportunity to show us as normal citizens that we participate in these civil dialogues."<sup>133</sup> Royesh agreed with Madadi's analysis. He concluded that for all of his students "it was a real moment of pleasure and pride."<sup>134</sup> And he suggested that it was not only significant because of the importance of the National Museum, a point also suggested by NCC staff, but also because it allowed the Hazara students, through their photographs, to "speak to" parts of Afghanistan society and an international audience that they had previously not had access to. "They could see their work on display for hundreds of important dignitaries, national and international."<sup>135</sup> Stern suggested that from his outside perspective as a long-time ally of Marefat School and the Hazara people more broadly, the exhibition of Hazara photography in the National Museum was one of the "most powerful things" about the project.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995), 20-21.; Remsen and Tedesco, "US Cultural Diplomacy, Cultural Heritage Preservation and Development," 150.

<sup>132</sup> In fact the 1968 catalogue of the Museum includes some Hazara dress as exhibited in the "Ethnographic Room": Dupree, Dupree, and Motamedi, *A Guide to the Kabul Museum*, 86-87.

<sup>133</sup> Madadi, interview with author.

<sup>134</sup> Royesh, e-mail message to author, September 21, 2015.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Stern, interview with author.



This symbolic significance was also given added weight in the aftermath of the destruction of Hazara historic sites under Taliban rule and its suggestion of cultural genocide, underscoring the absence of this minority group's history from a larger national narrative. In putting together research for a written piece about the project, Stern asked one of the Marefat students about the significance of the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas. According to Stern, the girl compared the destruction with "hearing that a beloved grandfather had been killed."<sup>137</sup> That a similar process of destruction of Buddhas and Afghanistan's pre-Islamic history and culture also occurred at the National Museum under the Taliban only served to expand this persecution and feeling of marginalization from the national narrative.

While the NMA's version of the exhibition lacked the sophisticated interactive "flex-ibit" technology that was designed to allow the two copies of the exhibitions to "talk to one another," the guiding principal at the center of the exhibition was multi-vocal.<sup>138</sup> In his short remarks at the opening of the exhibition at the NMA, Saeid Madadi urged the visitors to explore the exhibition knowing that photographs would elicit different interpretations from different people. He recalled his comments to the gathered crowd: "I think the reason we did all of the photography is because we think each photograph has its own magic in it. And it speaks for itself, so I'm not here to tell you what we did or what we did not do, I'll let you watch [*sic*] the exhibition and see the photographs and get the message that they are trying to convey."<sup>139</sup>

Although the public reach of the exhibition was limited, those who did interact on site with the exhibition, especially at its opening, saw the photographs through the lens of Afghanistan's ethnic divisions. Massoudi recalled that the project was significant for NMA

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Stern and Allen, Final Report Museums and Community Collaborations Abroad Being We the People Project, 13.

<sup>139</sup> Madadi, interview with author.

because it allowed the museum to include one of Afghanistan's minority communities: "The significance of the project was involvement of students and presenting one of the communities from Afghanistan in the exhibition."<sup>140</sup> Royesh anecdotally recalled that even though visitors at the opening responded favorably and the students had succeeded in inserting the Hazara in a small way into Afghanistan's public life, the students' ethnicity dominated the way that the photographs were viewed. He suggested, "The opening event was a good and happy moment. The response of the audience was also good. There were people who would admire the works and the idea behind the exhibition. But there were also people that would show their surprise to see such a work from the kids of the Hazaras... You could see some audience's astonishment for such an innovative project by the Hazara kids."<sup>141</sup> And although this recollection may have been partly wishful thinking, its repetition by those who attended the opening suggested it had some validity.

Even though the impact of the exhibition on the public may have been limited by the lack of public engagement with the NMA, the act of constructing the exhibition in one of the museum's galleries was not only symbolically important for the Marefat students, it also had an impact on the NMA and its staff. Massoudi recalled the significance of this exhibition within the process of re-building at the NMA: "National Museum of Afghanistan didn't have too many exhibitions at that time because it was in [the] process of reopening. Therefore this exhibition was a complementary of displays there. In addition this exhibition was the first in history of the museum that presented parts of culture from other country [*sic*] and [the] work of students."<sup>142</sup> He subsequently reflected that his favorite memory of the whole project "was the great opening organized together with Marefat High School. The students of this school were looking great

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<sup>140</sup> Massoudi, correspondence with author.

<sup>141</sup> Royesh, e-mail message to author, September 22, 2015.

<sup>142</sup> Massoudi, correspondence with author.

when they were greeting guest[s] for the opening.”<sup>143</sup> And both Sayeh Hormozi and Stern also recalled with pride the experience of assembling the exhibition with the Marefat students at the National Museum of Afghanistan in the week before the opening and seeing the students win over the museum’s small staff.<sup>144</sup> Stern watched the students interact with the museum and its staff with a sense of anxiety that underlying ethnic tensions might surface, but was surprised by the reactions of the museum staff. “I remember the museum staff watching the kids, and this is another thing that I’d been worried about because, again, you just don’t know who holds what ethnic feelings. These were a bunch of non-Hazaras watching a bunch of Hazaras walking around the museum like they owned the place, and the museum staff were just so helpful. Or at least so courteous.” He cited an interaction between Massoudi and Royesh as another example of the good will established locally by the “Being We the People” exhibition in Kabul: “And the director at the very end grabbed Aziz [Royesh] by the hand and wouldn’t let him go, and said, ‘this is the most well behaved group of people or group of students I’ve ever had here’ or something like that. Everyone had tears in their eyes.... because I was so worried or maybe over-concerned about the ethnic tensions, [I] saw these moments as really powerful.”<sup>145</sup>

At the National Constitution Center the choice to present the photographs with limited captions to allow the viewer to reach their own conclusion about the photographs ensured that it was received very differently than it was in Kabul.<sup>146</sup> The exhibition was located in Posterity Hall between Signer’s Hall and NCC’s permanent exhibitions. Reviews of the exhibition suggested that unlike the “reading” of the exhibition in Kabul through the lens of Afghan ethnicity, in Philadelphia the exhibition was read through a comparative “us versus them”

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Hormozi, interview with author.

<sup>145</sup> Stern, interview with author.

<sup>146</sup> Stern and Allen, Final Report Museums and Community Collaborations Abroad Being We the People Project, 13-14.

national lens. Visitor reflections as recalled by NCC staff as well as published reviews elevated the Hazara to the position of representatives of war-torn Afghanistan that marginalized their minority status. This mirrored the way that the Constitution High School students' identities as minorities were relegated in place of their identities as "Americans" throughout the photography process. Thus, the lack of extravagant praise for an exhibition in a national museum by the Constitution High School students, which Hormozi and Stern explained resulted from the school's constant relationship with NCC, may have in part resulted from the elevation of homogeneity rather than heterogeneity of the United States throughout the project.<sup>147</sup>

The online exhibition that digitized the physical exhibition declared, "Visitors to the simultaneous exhibits were shown what being "We the People" looks like to young minority citizens—in an established democracy, and in one emerging from decades of war," but the deliberate lack of interpretative text in the exhibition meant that similarities and differences between the "United States" and "Afghanistan" became the dominant interpretations of "Being We the People."<sup>148</sup> Lauren Cristella, perhaps reflecting her own intentions for the project, speculated that visitors to the exhibition at the museum or later when it was installed at Philadelphia airport latched onto the compositional and aesthetic similarities between the photographs. She recalled, "I hear[d] them gushing about 'I can't believe how similar, I can't believe, some of them were so different. But the ones that were similar, those are the ones that really stuck with me.' Because it humanized people we only really hear about in the news for most people."<sup>149</sup> And although Cristella's recollection might be clouded by fond emotion as she

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<sup>147</sup> Stern, interview with author.; Hormozi, interview with author.

<sup>148</sup> "Being We the People," *National Constitution Center*, accessed October 21, 2015, <http://beingwe.constitutioncenter.org/>.

<sup>149</sup> Cristella, interview with author.

declared this project the “best project I’ve ever worked on,” Allen, Stern, and Hormozi also reflected this sentiment in interviews conducted in 2015.<sup>150</sup>

Reflecting the multiple interpretations of the exhibition, a review of the exhibition published in June 2010 also spoke about the photographs as representative of their respective countries in agreeing with the NCC staff’s interpretation of the differences and similarities between the two countries in the exhibition. The review argued that the exhibition, “is an impressive but unassuming collection of 30 or so photo pairings” and “it really stands out for the quality of the photographs across the board—from composition to color to subject matter. This isn’t the kind of exhibit where the work is impressive, ‘especially for high school kids.’ It’s simply impressive—just be sure to read the captions, too.”<sup>151</sup> However, this review disagreed with Cristella’s speculation that the photography mostly drew the viewer’s attention to the comparisons between the photographs. Irwin instead highlighted the differences between “war-torn Afghanistan” and the United States when he argued, “It’s the juxtaposition of these photos that really gives the exhibit its power. A photograph titled ‘Tank Playground’ of children climbing on armored vehicles half-submerged in sand on a beach outside of Kabul takes on a new meaning when paired with ‘Day at the Beach’—a tranquil photo of an Ocean City, N.J. lifeguard boat in the surf.”<sup>152</sup>

This interpretation thus reflected the Marefat students’ and facilitators’ desire for the exhibition to insert their voices into Afghanistan’s civic discourse and represent their nation while simultaneously showing the rest of the world that living in Afghanistan involved more than

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<sup>150</sup> Cristella, interview with author.; Stern, interview with author.; Hormozi, interview with author.; Allen, interview with author.

<sup>151</sup> Alex Irwin, “We the People: Afghanistan, America & the Minority Imprint @ the National Constitution Center,” *Uwishunu* (blog), June 2, 2010, accessed September 23, 2015, <http://www.uwishunu.com/2010/06/we-the-people-afghanistan-america-the-minority-imprint-the-national-constitution-center/>.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

just the war. But the interpretation also neglected to realize or acknowledge that these photographs were taken by a minority group of Afghanistan. Nasim Fekrat explained “the idea was to give an alternative meaning of Afghan life because people hear about war, and that’s a dominant theme. And if you see someone or talk to someone from Afghanistan, the first thing that comes into your mind is the Taliban and the fighting, all those wars, so how would you be able to convince people that war is not in all the places.”<sup>153</sup> Similarly Marefat student Nazefa Alizada reflected that the exhibition allowed her to engage not only in Afghanistan’s civic discourse but in a larger global discussion. “Now I can announce my ideas to the people of the world by photography.”<sup>154</sup>

The significance of working with the NMA experienced by the Marefat students was not as explicit in Philadelphia for the Constitution High School students. The close relationships between Constitution High School and the National Constitution Center and complementary missions of the two organizations meant that while the American students learned a lot from exhibiting their photographs at the NCC, it had less symbolic importance than the exhibition did for their colleagues in Kabul.<sup>155</sup> Jenay Smith reflected, for example, “It was exciting to see our work displayed for people to see.” But she also said that the opening of the exhibition “signified that the project was over and that hurt a little to be honest.”<sup>156</sup> Smith’s reflection suggested that her sadness about the end of the project was more important to her than any symbolic meaning that might have been gleaned from exhibiting photographs at NCC. Despite this dynamic, and although they were not able to visit Kabul, the Constitution High School students reflected that the project had an impact on their lives and outlooks on the world. Constitution High student Ian

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<sup>153</sup> Fekrat, interview with author.

<sup>154</sup> Nazefa Alizada, quoted in Stern and Allen, Final Report Museums and Community Collaborations Abroad Being We the People Project, 1.

<sup>155</sup> Cristella, interview with author.; Hormozi, interview with author.

<sup>156</sup> Smith, correspondence with author.

McShea, although misidentifying the location of Afghanistan, suggested, “I got to throw away all the stereotypes and all the feelings I had, especially about the Middle East, its important for our generation to communicate on a global scale.”<sup>157</sup> Constitution High School World history teacher Cliff Stanton stated, “Oh my gosh, it was very moving for me. The connection between the two cultures and then the connection between the kids was shown in what they picked [for the exhibition.]...It is a very deep connection that we have with [the Afghan students] that’s hard to describe.”<sup>158</sup>

### Conclusion

In the unlikelyst of transnational contexts, “Being We the People: Afghanistan, America, & the Minority Imprint” provided one practical example of a museum embracing “public curation.” This was in keeping with Adair, Filene, and Koloski’s notion that museums need not let go of expertise but of the “assumption that the museum has the last word on historical interpretation.” Adopting the role of facilitator allowed the museum to embrace and “even relish, uncertainty and unpredictability.”<sup>159</sup> Jeff Stern’s pro-Hazara sensibilities, the embrace of Fekrat’s idea for a photography exhibition, and skepticism about the foreign aid work in Afghanistan built upon the NCC’s model of dialogue and brought a desire to empower the Hazara students as agents of meaning making and content creation. The Marefat students, working within this framework, used the project as a means of negotiating their minority ethnic identities and claiming their voice within the nation, both at home and abroad. This empowerment and negotiation became manifest through the project’s focus on dialogue, which the Marefat students

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<sup>157</sup> Ian McShea quoted in Jon Hurdle, “Exhibit reveals common threads in Philadelphia, Kabul,” *Reuters*, May 15, 2010, (online), accessed October 24, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/05/14/us-museum-photos-students-idUSTRE64D4OX20100514>.

<sup>158</sup> Cliff Stanton, quoted in Amanda L. Snyder, “Peace Offering,” *South Philly Review* (blog), May 20, 2010, accessed August 17, 2015, <http://www.southphillyreview.com/news/Peace-Offering-94326309.html>.

<sup>159</sup> Adair, Filene, and Koloski, “Introduction,” 13.

took seriously during their trip to the United States. The pragmatic and ideological mid-project “audible” further highlighted the willingness of NCC staff and project director not to preach American public history practices. This allowed the dialogue and shared inquiry to flourish in-person as well as digitally. The Marefat students’ wrestling and renegotiation of the project’s themes vis-à-vis their own ethnic identity, however, was not mirrored in the United States. The ideological underpinning of the National Constitution Center’s staff and their understanding of the project as well as sympathies for the Hazara effaced the Constitution High School students’ minority status and framed their role within the project as representing America, rather than any particular minority community. These dynamics reinforced the Department of State’s public diplomacy paradigm that seeks to emphasize the nation-state imperative.

Stern’s inadvertent embrace of the paradigm of public historian as facilitator was not the only factor that contributed to the complex power dynamics of the “Being We the People” project. The particular Afghan public history context and the NMA’s beleaguered history and meager resources exacerbated the power dynamics embedded in the structure of Museums Connect. This meant that the NCC and its staff remained the major authority in administering the project and establishing the parameters of the project’s different components. The selections of Constitution High School and Marefat High School as community partners provided two civically inclined groups of students with a similar education in civic engagement and learning through dialogue, and ensured a relatively balanced relationship that allowed the work between the students to become a shared inquiry. The NCC’s willingness to share its authority and create certain conditions for the Marefat students contrasted with its approach to its local students at Constitution High School. The choice of photography as the exhibition medium also allowed for the multiple voices of the student participants to be placed side-by-side with their foreign



counterparts and allow for different interpretations. These activities also reflected Filene, Adair, and Koloski's conclusion that a structured activity for participants to engage in, rather than no structures at all, ensured "creative and confident expressions."<sup>160</sup>

Like the other Museums Connect projects studied in this dissertation the agenda of the State Department's people-to-people diplomacy loomed large over the project and its participants. Participants interviewed consistently celebrated the friendships and relationships developed between the student participants and different staff members at length. And the vigor and passion of the reported "successes" of the friendships made—the people-to-people relationships—at times overshadowed the public history outcomes in the minds of the participants and project facilitators during interviews. In 2015, for example, Jeff Stern concluded that one of the most significant impacts of the project was the personal relationships.<sup>161</sup> Sayeh Hormozi agreed, recalling that one of her most vivid memories was the deep sadness that the participants experienced when saying goodbye at the end of the Marefat students' trip. "When we took those kids to the airport we had to pull them apart, we had to literally pull them apart and pry them away from each other," she explained. "They were crying, they were sobbing, it was sad. And there was this very real feeling that they may never see each other again. They likely will never see each other again."<sup>162</sup>

Within this context the project facilitators on both sides also suggested that the project had a long-term impact on both themselves and the student participants. Hugh Allen reflected, "I think ultimately they are exactly what we aspire for people—at the time—who came to the Constitution Center to be, which is active citizens. It's not our place to say how they are active citizens, but that they take an active role in the world around them and we can see that in all of

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<sup>160</sup> Adair, Filene, and Koloski, "Introduction," 12.

<sup>161</sup> Stern, interview with author.

<sup>162</sup> Hormozi, interview with author.

them.”<sup>163</sup> Royesh correspondingly suggested, “The impacts of the project on the students, especially when they met each other face to face in Philadelphia, was beyond explanation. It was highly wonderful. The students would embrace each other with crying and tears in the eyes. That was the moment which none of the groups would forget. I am still in touch with those students through Facebook, but that would not suffice [to fill] the need we have.”<sup>164</sup>

In spite of these close personal relationships that developed during the project, and although the exhibition was redesigned and installed at Philadelphia International Airport where it was estimated that approximately 500,000 travelers passed the exhibition, the long-term relationships between the two museums and the longer-term institutional sustainability of the project are less evident. Lauren Cristella lamented, “I wish it had a more long term consequence. They [the NCC] had so much transition at the highest levels that the momentum didn’t stay around the international work.”<sup>165</sup> The NCC was invited to conduct another Museums Connect project, and when additional funding came available in 2011-2012, they chose to conduct a partnership with the Natural History Museum of Latvia based on the experiences with the NMA and Marefat High School. International programs at the NCC, however, have since ceased to operate because of significant staff turnover.

Although these issues of sustainability are common in the Museums Connect projects studied in this dissertation, the reflectiveness of the NCC’s staff during “Being We the People” to share some of their authority and embrace the role as facilitators rather than knowledge givers is not. The complex power relationships and the effects this had on the way the students made meaning throughout the year-long project resulted from the decisions of the National Constitution Center staff during “Being We the People.” The focus of the next chapter is two

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<sup>163</sup> Allen, interview with author.

<sup>164</sup> Royesh, e-mail message to author, September 21, 2015.

<sup>165</sup> Cristella, interview with author.

partnerships between two university museums, the Ben M'sik Community Museum and the Museum of History and Holocaust Education, which had uneven power dynamics written into the project by the choice to use Museums Connect grants as a means of teaching public history to university students.

## 5 TEACHING TRANSNATIONAL PUBLIC HISTORY: THE BEN M'SIK COMMUNITY MUSEUM AND THE MUSEUM OF HISTORY AND HOLOCAUST EDUCATION (2009-2010 AND 2011-2012)

**“While collaboration is a regular component of [university] public history programs, going global poses further challenges. First, language barriers and cultural misunderstand create confusion – even breakdowns – throughout the collaborative process. Second, different pedagogic philosophies make some basic assumptions in our field not so basic. Sharing authority, for example, does not come easily in classrooms that have long been dominated by one authoritative voice. Third, it is difficult to provide valid intellectual justification for training in public history if the field is attached to a strictly market-driven economy and services a commercial vision. Fourth, different sets of legal and ethical concerns sometimes complicate, if not stifle, genuine dialogue.” Na Li, 2015<sup>1</sup>**

Sitting in the Ben M'sik Community Museum (BMCM) in Casablanca in December 2011, curator Dr. Julia Brock and I of the Kennesaw, Georgia, based Museum of History and Holocaust Education (MHHE) facilitated a discussion with university students from both museums about the stereotypes of Islam they wanted to address in the online exhibit, “Identities. Understanding Islam in a Cross-Cultural Context.”<sup>2</sup> Vibrant discussions in impassioned tones ensued between the Moroccan students (all of whom were Muslim) and the American students (most of whom were not Muslim). They discussed the distorted images of Islam in the U.S. media caused by a small minority of terrorists and religious fundamentalists, misunderstandings about the cultural and religious significance of hijab, and confusion about the gender dynamics of contemporary Moroccan life. The Moroccan students' thoughts and ideas dominated these initial conversations. This workshop was the first of a number that occurred throughout the December 2011 trip to Morocco. Others, led and guided by the MHHE staff, focused on

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<sup>1</sup> Na Li, “Going Public, Going Global: Teaching Public History Through International Collaborations,” *Public History Review* 22 (2015): 2.

<sup>2</sup> I have worked as the Education and Outreach Manager at the Museum of History and Holocaust Education at Kennesaw State University since August 2011.; Sections of this chapter focusing on this partnership as an example of teaching transnational public history was published elsewhere: Richard J. W. Harker, “Teaching Public History through Transnational Museum Partnerships,” *Public History Review* 22 (2015): 59-71.

exhibition development, including the creation of a concept statement, identifying the exhibition's "Big Idea," and discussions about best practice in online exhibit development.<sup>3</sup>

Although these often-energetic conversations occurred nearly halfway through the second of two Museums Connect projects conducted between the MHHE and BMCM between 2009 and 2012, they epitomized the underlying dynamics at play in the two partnerships between these university museums. Open and energetic dialogue between the two museums and their students played a significant role, but the MHHE staff framed and facilitated the discussions, led instructional workshops, and guided the projects' progress, including the exhibition's development.

This chapter explores the Museums Connect projects—at that time known as Museums and Community Collaborations Abroad (MCCA)—conducted between the Museum of History and Holocaust Education (MHHE) at Kennesaw State University (KSU) and Ben M'sik Community Museum (BMCM) at the University Hassan II. These projects were not only used to practice transnational public history education but also allowed two very different university museums to build new audiences within their communities based on a shared exploration of Islam and Muslim identity. These projects were beneficial to both faculty and students engaged in the development of practical public history skills and their implementation in high-stakes, real-world environments. The pedagogical activities, though deeply rooted in American public history practices, were altered and negotiated due to the confines of the grants' structures, the local context of both museums, and the act of having to conduct oral histories and exhibition development workshops for two very different institutions and their students. The transnational partnership presented power imbalances around professional training and assumed expertise that

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<sup>3</sup> One of the required readings for both project teams was Beverley Serrell, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach* (Lanham, MD.: AltaMira Press, 1996).

emerged due to the very different cultures of museums and public history within the two countries, the choice of projects that placed public history pedagogy at the center, and the involvement of some MHHE staff in the creation of the BMCM. Importantly, the partnerships between the MHHE and the BMCM between 2009-2010 and 2011-2012 also emphasized a number of ways that the Moroccan museum, its staff, and its students negotiated power dynamics and project activities to make the project work within the cultural and museological contexts of Morocco to benefit the BMCM and its community. The next section locates the two museums, their pre-existing relationship, and their respective histories to understand the power dynamics at play.

### **The museums and the projects**

Situated in one of Morocco's poorest urban neighborhoods, the Ben M'sik Community Museum (BMCM), Morocco's first community museum, opened to the public in 2006. The mission of the University Hassan II museum, surrounded by walls that separate the large public university and its museum from the community, is "to preserve memory by interpreting, exhibiting, and promoting the stories and heritage of the diverse populations of its neighborhood and its region."<sup>4</sup> In seeking to connect the museum to the poor, mostly illiterate community, the BMCM proposed to use the Museums Connect grant shortly after it opened to develop "creative, sustainable, and meaningful ways to engage the diverse working-class neighborhood in which it functions. Many Hassan II students live in Ben M'sik, but other community residents are largely excluded from the campus and by extension the museum."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Samir El Azhar, "Preface," in *Ben M'sik Community Museum: Building Bridges*, ed. Samir El Azhar, (Casablanca: Force Equipement, 2012), 9.

<sup>5</sup> Museum of History and Holocaust Education and Ben M'sik Community Museum, Narrative, Timeline, Budget, Creating Community Collaboration Grant Proposal, Museum of History and Holocaust Education Archive, 2.

In addition to the long-standing history connecting Moroccan museums to “the West” that drives the BMCM’s modus operandi, discussed later, the Museums Connect grants between the BMCM and MHHE were also situated within the context of these two museums’ connected histories. This began when MHHE director Dr. Catherine Lewis and other KSU faculty and staff played an active role in the founding of the BMCM in 2006.<sup>6</sup> Lewis and Cindy Vengroff, then MHHE Program Coordinator, traveled to Morocco to help guide the university administration and faculty, as well as local business leaders, in the planning of the Ben M’sik Community Museum. Lewis explained, “When we got to Morocco it was clear that they wanted to build a museum, but they had no idea what a museum was, what it would look like, how it would unfold.”<sup>7</sup> Lewis ran a workshop that guided the development of the BMCM’s mission and initial plans, resulting in a proposal to develop its first exhibit, modeled on the MHHE’s own traveling exhibits. It was collaboratively developed but designed and fabricated in the U.S. because “a proficiency level in curation and fabrication techniques at Hassan II...is still emerging.”<sup>8</sup> The later Museums Connect grants, therefore, continued a pre-existing partnership between the two museums that inadvertently paralleled the historic connections between Moroccan museums and “the West,” while contradictorily also seeking to overturn the history of museums functioning as elite institutions in Moroccan life. Although the two partner museums were both relatively young institutions and were already closely linked before the Museums Connect projects began, they had very different origins and missions.

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<sup>6</sup> The MHHE and BMCM were offered the unique opportunity to apply for a second Museums Connect grant based on the success of their first grant because of additional funding becoming available after AAM and the State Department had made their selections for the 2010 grant cycle.; Museum of History and Holocaust Education and Ben M’sik Community Museum, Narrative, Timeline, Budget, MCCA 2008-2010 Creating Community Collaboration, Museum of History and Holocaust Archive, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Catherine M. Lewis, interview with author, digital recording, Kennesaw, GA, October 24, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Museum of History and Holocaust Education and Ben M’sik Community Museum, Narrative, Timeline, Budget, MCCA 2008-2010 Creating Community Collaboration, 3.

Writing about the decades-long contestation over the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington D.C., Edward Linenthal declared, “On April 22, 1993, the Holocaust became an event officially incorporated into American memory.”<sup>9</sup> The national museum opened after fifteen years of debate, deliberation, and contestations over the meaning and memory of the Holocaust in America. In the wake of USHMM’s initial creation in the late 1970s and a wider boom in Holocaust memory studies, dozens of museums, education centers, and state agencies with the mission to preserve the memory of the Holocaust opened across the United States. In Georgia, the Georgia Commission on the Holocaust was created in 1986, to promote “public understanding about the Holocaust.” The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum in Atlanta, opened along with its permanent exhibition “The Absence of Humanity: The Holocaust Years, 1933-1945” in 1996. In 2003, the Museum of History and Holocaust Education (MHHE) opened at Kennesaw State University (KSU).<sup>10</sup> The MHHE, called the Holocaust Education Program from 2003-2006, was created when KSU agreed to host the traveling exhibition “Anne Frank in the World” from the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam and the Georgia Commission on the Holocaust between 2003 and 2006. In January 2007 after the traveling exhibition completed its three-year tenure in a purpose-built space within the university’s Continuing Education building, the Museum unveiled a new permanent exhibition “Parallel Journeys: World War II and the Holocaust Through the Eyes of Teens.” Moving beyond the singular experience of Anne Frank, the MHHE led by history faculty member Dr.

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<sup>9</sup> Edward Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>10</sup> “About,” Georgia Commission on the Holocaust, accessed May 1, 2016, <https://holocaust.georgia.gov/about-us>; “History and Mission,” The Breman Museum, accessed May 2, 2016, <http://www.thebreman.org/About/History-Mission>; For a full exploration of this evolution and historiography see, Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 5-16.; Allison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 111-140.; and, importantly, Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Mariner, 2000).



Catherine Lewis “expanded its mission [in 2007] to a more inclusive emphasis on promoting greater cultural awareness, tolerance and diversity.”<sup>11</sup> The MHHE aligned itself with the deeply contested definition of the Holocaust decided upon by the USHMM, which moved beyond a Jewish-only interpretation of the term that some USHMM advisory council members advocated. Indeed, the MHHE is also a university museum and as such is driven by an impulse to educate rather than the desire to memorialize. The museum’s position within the university and Lewis’s leadership, moreover, has ensured that the MHHE has consistently sought best practices developed within the ideological frames of both American museums and the American academy.

Reaching out beyond the university campus and “ivory tower” to engage different communities in keeping with democratically derived ideas of civic society is at the center of the MHHE’s attempts to engage in a more sustained way with local residents and organizations. Situated at Georgia’s third largest public university in politically conservative Cobb County and half-a-dozen miles from the site of the 1915 lynching of Leo Frank—the United States’ most famous anti-Semitic lynching—the MHHE’s mission since 2007 is,

To present public events, exhibits and educational resources focused on World War II and the Holocaust in an effort to promote education and dialogue about the past and its significance today. Through educational dialogue about World War II and the Holocaust, our programs emphasize: Multiple and complex human experiences, Ethical and political consequences, Respect for difference and diversity of life, and Acceptance of civic and personal responsibility.<sup>12</sup>

In the original Museums Connect grant proposal, the authors situated the proposed exploration of Muslim identity on the American side of the partnership within this mission. The specific local political and social context of the museum and the wider historical context of World War II and the Holocaust also informed the American authors of the grant. This was explained in the initial

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<sup>11</sup> Museum of History and Holocaust Education and Ben M’sik Community Museum, Narrative, Timeline, Budget, Creating Community Collaboration Grant Proposal, 2.

<sup>12</sup> “Mission,” Museum of History and Holocaust Education, accessed July 30, 2015 <http://historymuseum.kennesaw.edu/about/mission.php>.

grant proposal, “The fears and ignorance that generated the genocide of 70 years ago [the Holocaust] did not end with that war...since September 11, 2001, the Muslim community has become a target of hatred in the United States. The MHHE would like to do more to create the conditions that will prevent hate-filled actions and attitudes on our campus and in our community.”<sup>13</sup>

Thus, between 2009 and 2012, these two very different university museums—the MHHE and BMCM—engaged in two Museums Connect projects. “Creating Community Collaborations” (2009-2010) was a comparative oral history project with both museums and their respective students conducting interviews with their immediate communities to explore the experiences of Muslims. It was designed to have “extended conversations” that were intended to “change the perspectives of the participants, dispel stereotypes and correct misinformation, and remind us that trust comes slowly.” The grant proposal argued that the oral histories would allow both museums to build a “foundation upon which additional activities will flow, notably ‘Coffee and Conversation’ programs to showcase what was learned from the oral histories.”<sup>14</sup> At the center of the proposal was the intention of both museums to engage in a process of “shared inquiry”: a collaborative, transnational public history project that sought the education of their respective university students through the practical experience of learning about and conducting community oral history interviews.<sup>15</sup> Fulfilling their mandates as university museums to contribute to the education of their particular university campuses, teams of undergraduate and postgraduate students from each university were the grant’s primary audience. The museums trained the students in oral history methodology via Skype, conducted interviews in their

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<sup>13</sup> Museum of History and Holocaust Education and Ben M’sik Community Museum, Narrative, Timeline, Budget, Creating Community Collaboration Grant Proposal, 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Katharine T. Corbett and Howard S. (Dick) Miller, “A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry,” *The Public Historian* 28, no. 1 (2006): 15-38.

respective communities, and presented public programs to share their findings. Students from both museums also traveled to one another's countries to engage in cultural exchanges and further develop their collaborative relationship.

The museums benefitted from a one-time surplus of funding at AAM to conduct a second project, "Identities: Understanding Islam in a Cross-Cultural Context" (2011-2012), that built upon the work conducted during the first grant. Engaging students from both universities, this project developed an online exhibition featuring the oral history interviews from the first grant and photographs taken by students and curated in exhibition development workshops. Two of the three stated outcomes in the second grant proposal also focused on the students at both universities. The first outcome stated, "Student participants will master theory and practice of exhibition development" and the second, "Student participants will develop a broader knowledge of one another's cultures."<sup>16</sup> Like the first grant, "Identities" also featured a travel component that not only furthered cultural exchange but also allowed in-person exhibit development workshops to supplement those that were carried out via Skype. The power relationships that emerged between the museums, however, and the modus operandi of the BMCM that shaped the nature of the partnership between the two museums during the Museums Connect projects were heavily influenced by the historical context of Moroccan museums and the BMCM's positioning against the country's traditional museology.

### **Something more than a "stinky cadaver"?**

The history of museums in Morocco and complicated relationships with the West and Western museology (especially vis-a-vis colonialism) informed the development of the Ben M'sik Community Museum, as well as its interaction with the MHHE throughout the Museums

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<sup>16</sup> Museum of History and Holocaust Education and Ben M'sik Community Museum, Background MCCA Continuing Grants Proposal: Identities: Understanding Islam in a Cross Cultural Context, Museum of History and Holocaust Education Archive, 6.

Connect projects. The history of Moroccan museums presents a significantly different trajectory from the gradual and complicated move of American museums toward a civic role and community-centered approach. These institutions have historically excluded Moroccans from Moroccan museums, both during and after colonialism, as well as marginalized minority cultures and perspectives.

A recent analysis of the late-eighteenth to late-nineteenth-century journals of Moroccan diplomats traveling to Europe highlighted a historically uneasy relationship between European museum practices and Morocco.<sup>17</sup> Reflecting time spent in many major European capitals and their early museums—including the Royal Library and the Louvre in Paris, excavations of Pompeii, and London’s Weaponry Museum—these journals illustrate a paradoxical mixture of reverence for and criticism of Europe’s varied early museological practices. Moroccan scholar Mohamed Jadour suggests that the language of respect that consistently appears in these journals between 1786 and 1922 reflects a deep imaginative and intellectual connection between Morocco and Europe.<sup>18</sup> He argues, “[I]t is clear that their [the journal’s] authors admit the superiority of the Other; the Christian, and his ability to organize and bring things to order, and to value highly not only the European cultural heritage, but also the heritage of other civilizations.”<sup>19</sup> Jadour’s analysis also suggests that the religious beliefs that formed the intellectual prism through which

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<sup>17</sup> Mohamed Jadour, “The Attitudes of Some Moroccan Diplomats toward European Museums From 1786 to 1922,” trans. by Ahmad Ech-Charfi, in *Ben M’sik Community Museum: Building Bridges*, ed. Samir El Azhar (Casablanca: Force Equipement, 2012), 65-72.

<sup>18</sup> A point emphasized by the oft-recited acknowledgement in Morocco as the first country to recognize the United States’ independence in 1776. See for example: “Morocco,” United States Department of State Office of the Historian, accessed June 13, 2015, <https://history.state.gov/countries/morocco>; “U.S. Morocco Relationship,” Moroccan Embassy in the United States, accessed June 13, 2015, <http://www.embassyofmorocco.us/USMoroccorelationship.htm>; and in more popular literature, Moulay Hafid Elalamy, “Why Morocco Matters to the U.S.,” *Forbes Magazine*, November 11, 2013, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/kerryadolan/2013/11/21/why-morocco-matters-to-the-u-s/>. This was also mentioned with great pride on a number of occasions to me throughout my visit to Morocco in December 2011 with the Museum of History and Holocaust Education.

<sup>19</sup> Jadour, “The Attitudes of Some Moroccan Diplomats,” 72.

these men viewed the world ensured that despite this reverence they still paradoxically viewed Muslim and Moroccan customs as superior, and regarded European practices of collection with contempt. For example, Ben Idriss Al-Amraoui, the envoy to Napoleon III, wrote in 1860,

A man of reason would be surprised to know how much money they [Europeans] spend uselessly on looking for animals and plants, and looking after them, and on the maintenance of the places where they are put, especially when he realizes how miserly and thrifty they are. They wouldn't spend any money if they were not sure they would make some profit or contribute to the magnificence and power of their nation. But what use or magnificence is there in collecting dogs, pigs, monkeys, wolves and insects! And why preserve a stinky cadaver that has no use.<sup>20</sup>

Reflecting on Al-Amraoui's disdain of "stinky cadavers" and European collecting habits, Jadour concludes that the Moroccan diplomats who wrote these journals "did not want to recognize explicitly the pedagogical goals of museums and their role in disseminating knowledge, mainly because of their religious backgrounds and their traditional culture based on the belief that Muslims are superior to unbelievers."<sup>21</sup> Ironically, this contempt mirrored the orientalist, racialized exhibition of "otherness" that defined European intellectual representations of North Africa and the Middle East, including those developed in museums.<sup>22</sup> Patrick Wolfe, commenting on this early period of European collection from colonies, argued, "If mapping fixed the world for European statesmen, museology brought it home to the European masses...the two most important discourses in which nineteenth-century museums involved their publics were those of citizenship and empire. Moreover, the two were inseparable. Given evolutionary anthropology's all-encompassing phylogenetic hierarchy, any ethnological display was necessarily a statement about rank."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

<sup>23</sup> Patrick Wolfe, "History and Imperialism: A Century of Theory, from Marx to Postcolonialism," *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 2 (1997): 410.

This uneasy relationship with Western museums and collection practices became even more deeply ingrained and complicated by the implementation of French museological practices throughout the forty-four years of French colonial rule in Morocco. Raymond Koechlin, president of the Friends of the Louvre and observer of Moroccan culture in the first years of the protectorate, wrote in 1917, “Let us not exaggerate, in truth Moroccan art is not dead, but it was sleeping. Without a doubt it was going to die when we intervened and taking it under our protection, we have awoken it.”<sup>24</sup> Koechlin’s idea of the French as saviors of declining, and supposedly homogenous, Moroccan culture—ignoring local reactions and negotiations of French policies and behaviors—reflected the colonial power dynamics and discursive realities of French rule in Morocco (1912-1956).<sup>25</sup> Scholar of Moroccan museology Katarzyna Pieprzak concludes, “At the discursive core of the museum project in Protectorate Morocco was a desire to create an institution that through collection and ‘re-education’ would save slumbering local art from a certain death.”<sup>26</sup>

These ideas formed the foundation of Morocco’s first museum: the Batha Museum, founded in Fes in 1915. Prosper Ricard, the head of the Protectorate Fine Art Administration, declared the mission of the Batha Museum to be the collection of “the most interesting specimens of both urban and Bedouin artistic production that could serve as models for the work

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<sup>24</sup> Trapped by own linguistic limitations, I am indebted to the work of Katarzyna Pieprzak. Without her comprehensive analysis of Moroccan museum history, with the benefit of French source material, my contextual analysis would not be possible. Readers should consult *Imagined Museums* for a much more thorough examination of the history of Moroccan museums especially in the colonial and post-colonial periods. Katarzyna Pieprzak, *Imagined Museums: Art and Modernity in Postcolonial Morocco* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 5.

<sup>25</sup> A full body of post-colonial literature has emerged both describing European approaches to the colonies and the approaches of the colonized to European rule. See, most notably, Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).; Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004).; Nicholas B. Dirks ed., *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).; and Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Culture in A Bourgeois World* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> Pieprzak, *Imagined Museums*, 5.

of restoration presently undertaken.”<sup>27</sup> And Pieprzak convincingly highlights the significant impact that French colonialism had on Moroccan museums and Moroccan ideas of taste, aesthetics, and authenticity in its new protectorate despite its deliberate neglect of Moroccans. “This classification and documentation of art also revealed an anxiety regarding the taste of local artisans, an anxiety that ultimately reflected issues of power and control and asserted who should exercise the authority to define what was authentic Moroccan art.”<sup>28</sup> She continues, “rhetoric on good taste and authenticity in Moroccan culture served as the discursive foundation for the museum in Morocco.”<sup>29</sup>

The arts and museum agenda of the Protectorate Fine Arts Administration was also intricately tied to and a mirror of similar elements of the larger French colonial endeavor.<sup>30</sup> Creating *Le Maroc utile* (a useful Morocco) “became a slogan in Protectorate Morocco that extended to all sectors of society, even to art. Indeed, the museum and its artisan ateliers worked to create both useful art and useful people.”<sup>31</sup> This movement reflected similar ideas of the role of the museum in nation-making and reinforcing governmental power that drove museum cultures in the United States and Great Britain at the same time.<sup>32</sup>

More than just a means of dictating taste and making Morocco useful to its colonial metropole, museums in Protectorate Morocco also were a useful tool for the French regime to engage tourists. Writing for the *Guide Bleu* in 1921, Ricard argued that the Fine Arts

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>30</sup> Janet Abu-Lughod was highly critical of how the “nineteenth century racism imbedded in noblesse oblige” informed French administrators urban planning ideologies in Morocco that has resulted in urban “apartheid” in Morocco. Janet Abu-Lughod, *Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), xvii.

<sup>31</sup> Pieprzak, *Imagined Museums*, 8.

<sup>32</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995), 19.

Administration had a “duty to help the tourist understand Morocco well.”<sup>33</sup> Ricard’s assessment of the role of museums vis-à-vis tourism—to speak for local voices while only showing tourists the colonial French representation of Morocco—was later supported by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s assessment that “Tourism needs destinations, and museums are premier attractions. Museums are not only destinations on an itinerary: they are also nodes in a network of attractions that form the recreational geography of a region and, increasingly, the globe.”<sup>34</sup> This argument for the museum as central to the tourist enterprise continued in post-colonial Morocco. The two most prominent scholars of Moroccan museums writing in English, Pieprzak and El Azhar, both argue that this has resulted in Moroccans both historically and more recently being neglected by museum administrators and the government in their understanding of the role of museums.<sup>35</sup> Citing the national museums under the control of the government, Pieprzak thus concludes, “museums created by the French Protectorate Fine Arts Administration as sites for the collection of authentic cultural prototypes turned into stagnant depositories and did nothing to reflect the post-independence energy and excitement to reassert and redefine what it meant to be Moroccan.”<sup>36</sup>

In the wake of post-colonialism and the establishment of Morocco as an independent kingdom, optimism existed that the stagnant national museums, which had played an important role in French colonial rule yet little role in the life of ordinary Moroccans, would be rethought and put to use in the newly independent country. It was hoped that these institutions would cast aside their role as depositories of antiquities and repositories of colonial intellectual power.

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<sup>33</sup> Pieprzak, *Imagined Museums*, 8.

<sup>34</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 132.

<sup>35</sup> Samir El Azhar, “The Ben M’sik Community Museum: Beyond Cultural Boundaries,” in *Museums in a Global Context: National Identity, International Understanding*, ed. Jennifer W. Dickey, Samir El Azhar, and Catherine M. Lewis (Washington, D.C.: AAM Press, 2013), 26.

<sup>36</sup> Pieprzak, *Imagined Museums*, 3-4.



However, while some post-colonial countries such as New Zealand and Canada sought to reinstate their aboriginal histories and wrestle with their national histories made more complex by post-colonialism, others struggled to negotiate the decolonization of national museums and histories.<sup>37</sup> Barriers emerged in independent Morocco that prevented Moroccan national museums from reflecting Moroccan history and culture or engaging a wider public beyond international tourists. Pieprzak argues that museum officials' "theoretical goals were never realized due to a lack of funding, trained personnel, public interest, and political will...By the end of the century, the museum had degenerated even further into an empty symbol used primarily in international prestige politics."<sup>38</sup> The long legacy of European colonialism in Moroccan museums and museum culture remained firmly entrenched.

These complex relationships between Europe, the "West," and Morocco continue to influence the changing nature of museums in Morocco in the twenty-first century. Reflecting on contemporary Moroccan national museums, Pieprzak argues, "state-run museums appear stuck in an intellectual mission that excludes the public and public life." The result, she argues, is that "this exclusion has led to the anemic presence of museums as resources for collective memory

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<sup>37</sup> See for example, Charlotte J. Macdonald, "Two People, One Museum: Biculturalism and Visitor 'Experience' at Te Papa- 'Our Place,' New Zealand's New National Museum," in *Contested Histories in Public Space: Memory, Race, and Nation*, ed. Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Maya Knauer (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 31-48.; and Ruth B. Phillips and Mark Salber Phillips, "Contesting Time, Place, and Nation in the First Peoples' Hall of the Canadian Museum of Civilization" in *Contested Histories in Public Space: Memory, Race, and Nation*, ed. Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Maya Knauer (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 49-70.; Shaila Bhatti traces the challenges of decolonizing the Lahore Museum, Pakistan when its genesis was tied to colonialism. Shaila Bhatti, *Translating Museums: A Counterhistory of South Asian Museology* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2012), 83-116.

<sup>38</sup> Pieprzak, *Imagined Museums*, 4.

and to their absence as central architectures working to promote access to and participation in Moroccan culture and history.”<sup>39</sup>

This analysis of Morocco’s relationship to its national memory and history was reflected in a 2004 survey, which revealed that seventy-five percent of Moroccans have never visited a museum.<sup>40</sup> Such a reality was deplored by El Azhar, who wrote in an essay for a published volume commissioned by AAM in 2013, “The Moroccan government needs to become aware of the important role such a museum could play, not only in the tourism industry, but also in making the Moroccan people proud of their history.” Central to both of these analyses is the longstanding comparative relationship between the Moroccan context and that of the United States and other so-called “developed” museologies. In keeping with the tradition of comparisons to Europe begun by the early diplomats, El Azhar pessimistically continued, “[v]ery few Moroccan museums meet even the most basic standards of museology common to North American, Scandinavian, European, or Asian institutions.”<sup>41</sup> He concludes, “the exclusion of the Moroccan public from their own cultural patrimony makes museums artificial institutions removed from the social, historical, and economic realities of their environment.”<sup>42</sup> And although some of this rhetoric may have been used to differentiate and elevate the significance of the Ben M’sik Community—a new approach in Morocco that Pieprzak terms a “tactical

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<sup>39</sup> Katarzyna Pieprzak, “Participation as Patrimony: The Ben M’Sik Community Museum and the Importance of the Small Museum in Morocco,” in *Ben M’sik Community Museum: Building Bridges*, ed. Samir El Azhar (Force Equipement, Casablanca, 2012), 12.

<sup>40</sup> No Author, “75 percent of Moroccans never visit a museum,” no date, <http://www.lavieeco.com/news/culture/75-des-marocains-n-ont-jamais-visite-un-musee-6681.html>, cited in El Azhar, “The Ben M’sik Community Museum,” 25.

<sup>41</sup> El Azhar, “The Ben M’sik Community Museum,” 29.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

museology”—it is clear the larger Moroccan milieu has traditionally not valued museums as educational institutions.<sup>43</sup>

Attempts to rectify these long-standing and deeply embedded issues have been made in the last five years. In 2011, King Mohammed VI created the National Museum Foundation to work under the Moroccan Ministry of Culture and led by prominent Moroccan artist Mehdi Qotbi.<sup>44</sup> This organization, which is responsible for the thirteen national museums in Morocco, has set out to reverse centuries of precedent. It seeks to make Moroccan museums a vital part of the everyday lives of Moroccan citizens as well as a central part of the country’s tourist industry. Qotbi ambitiously declared in a 2013 article, “We want these places to be accessible to all Moroccans, so they can take ownership of their culture.”<sup>45</sup> And although the tone of his comments in this article also reflects the challenges of changing a national culture and raising the necessary funds to achieve his ambition, Qotbi’s appointment was greeted with excitement by many in Morocco thinking critically about the role of museums in society. His and the National Museum Foundation’s challenge, however, is to combat the deeply and widely held perception, highlighted by Pieprzak, that “Moroccan museums are failed institutions.”<sup>46</sup>

Not all Moroccan museums have mirrored the trajectory of the thirteen national museums controlled by the government. A number of smaller museums—a recent estimate suggested that the country has a total of just over thirty museums—attempt to present historical narratives that rub against the official exclusionary Arab-Muslim national narrative.<sup>47</sup> Pieprzak’s analysis of the private Belghazi Museum suggests that despite the attempts of this “Ali Baba’s Cave” to appeal

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<sup>43</sup> Pieprzak, “Participation as Patrimony,” 11.

<sup>44</sup> Meryem Saadi, “New Foundation Set to Renovate All Museums in Morocco,” trans. Pascale Menassa, April 22, 2013, [www.al-monitor.com/pulse/culture/2013/04/morocco-culture-museum-plans.html/#](http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/culture/2013/04/morocco-culture-museum-plans.html/#).

<sup>45</sup> Mehdi Qotbi quoted in Saadi, “New Foundation Set to Renovate All Museums in Morocco”.

<sup>46</sup> Pieprzak, *Imagined Museums*, 3.

<sup>47</sup> El Azhar, “The Ben M’sik Community Museum,” 25.

to the average Moroccan by presenting a cabinet of curiosity that “reclaims riches from public bureaucracies and restores them to rightful owners,” it in fact does not offer a more accessible alternative. The price, methods of display, and reliance on traditional Moroccan class tropes all contribute to making this private space exclusive in a different way from national museums.<sup>48</sup> The Chaykh Omar Museum in Akka and the Jewish Museum of Casablanca also highlight what Aomar Boum calls the use of the “plastic eye” in viewing Moroccan history. This way of seeing, Boum argues, “refers to things that might be important but should be ignored because of what trouble the observer can experience if he made notice of them.”<sup>49</sup> And although these museums actively seek to present the discordant histories of Jewish Moroccans, they are largely ignored (viewed with “the plastic eye” that Moroccans are socialized to use) and/or ridiculed because they counter traditional Arab-Muslim national narratives. The neglect and struggles of these minority histories—also highlighted as important by the presence and active collection of Jewish artifacts at the Jewish Cemetery in Fes—suggests that national memory in Morocco is predominantly the domain of the Arab-Muslim majority, and that access to those histories remains the purview of elites and is inaccessible to the majority of that group.<sup>50</sup> Against this traditional Moroccan museology defined by an uneasy historical relationship with the West, a lack of public engagement, and the marginalization of representations of minority communities, the Ben M’sik Community Museum (BMCM) was founded in Casablanca in 2006 and engaged in two Museums Connect projects between 2009 and 2012.

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<sup>48</sup> Pieprzak, *Imagined Museums*, 68-69.

<sup>49</sup> Aomar Boum, “The Plastic Eye: The Politics of Jewish Representation in Moroccan Museums,” *Ethnos* 74, no. 1 (2009): 53.

<sup>50</sup> Emanuela Trevisan Semi, “Museums of Moroccan Jews in Israel: What Kind of Memory?” in *Memory and Ethnicity: Ethnic Museums in Israel and the Diaspora*, ed. Emanuela Trevisan Semi, Dario Miccoli, Tidor Parfitt (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 45-46.; See also: Michael Frank, “In Morocco, Exploring Remnants of Jewish History,” *New York Times*, May 30, 2015, accessed August 16, 2015. [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/31/travel/in-morocco-exploring-remnants-of-jewish-history.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/31/travel/in-morocco-exploring-remnants-of-jewish-history.html?_r=1).

## Teaching transnational public history

Despite the shared endeavor and intention of creating concurrent dialogue around Muslim identity in both Casablanca and Kennesaw while also engaging in a transnational conversation, the two projects had very different audiences and occurred within very different museological contexts. Both museums sought to reach out to their communities to engage them in dialogue about issues related to Islam and both the similarities and differences of what it means to be a Muslim in the American South and Morocco.

In keeping with the idea of museums acting as forums for community dialogue and spaces to discuss differences, the projects between the MHHE and BMCM conducted between 2009 and 2012 both set their goals in terms of community engagement. The first grant proposal stated that the project was intended to “educate individuals in Georgia about a culture and religion that is sometimes vilified by the local and community media.”<sup>51</sup> The necessity and timeliness of this work was emphasized by the public response online to the press release announcing the roughly \$73,000 second grant in a local newspaper. Referring to the outreach that would be conducted with Muslims both in the metropolitan Atlanta region as well as in Casablanca, one reader of Cobb County’s conservative-leaning newspaper *The Marietta Daily Journal* wrote in a letter to the editor dated September 14, 2011: “It does not benefit anyone to attempt to make a poisonous snake your pet, to feed it, nurture it, and welcome it into your home. The hope that you can change its nature of biting and killing you is akin to ignorance of the laws of nature.”<sup>52</sup> This letter and comments on the *Marietta Daily Journal*’s web version of the article reflected hostility to Islam that the grant would attempt to address.

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<sup>51</sup> Museum of History and Holocaust Education and Ben M’sik Community Museum, MCCA Final Proposal, KSU MHHE and Ben M’Sik[1], Museum of History and Holocaust Education Archive, 3.

<sup>52</sup> Larry Hogue, letter to the editor, *Marietta Daily Journal*, September 14, 2011.

Despite this nascent climate of anti-Muslim sentiment, both grant applications stated the centrality of public history pedagogy and identified university students as the grants' primary audiences. Based on both university museums' goals of serving their university audiences and the Museums Connect program's stated goals of engaging with new communities, the projects were designed to extend their work beyond the two museums' surrounding communities to university students as the primary audience. Teams of students from the American Studies and English departments at University Hassan II and the History and American Studies departments at KSU were therefore selected to conduct a comparative oral history project and curate an online exhibition respectively. During the first grant, "Creating Community Collaboration," both groups of students in Casablanca and Kennesaw were trained in oral history methodologies before conducting interviews with Muslim residents of their respective communities. During the second project, "Identities: Understanding Islam in a Cross-Cultural Context," different groups of students at both universities were trained in digital exhibition methodologies and used the oral histories to form the basis of a digital exhibition.

The reflections of the participating staff, faculty, and students in publications, on the project's website, and in interviews with the author underscore a high level of personal and institutional satisfaction with the projects. The MHHE has a particularly close relationship with KSU's undergraduate public history program. Dr. Jennifer Dickey, the Public History Coordinator and Associate Professor of History at KSU, was on the project team for both grants, and Dr. Catherine Lewis previously directed the Public History program at KSU and also holds a faculty position in the KSU history department. Reflecting on the success of the grant from the KSU public history program's point-of-view, Dickey later acknowledged that unlike the traditional internships offered by the MHHE for KSU public history students, the Museums

Connect projects—especially the second “Identities” project—“afforded [the KSU students] an opportunity to engage with students and faculty from our partner institution in an effort to reach out to new constituencies in both the United States and Morocco.” In so doing, Dickey explained that the grants provided the students with a range of public history skills in excess of a more traditional internship: “They read their assignments in advance, asked meaningful questions, and worked hard to become accomplished oral historians in a very short period of time.” Even allowing for an overly positive reflection on grants that provided thousands of dollars for her and her students to conduct innovative public history practices, Dickey’s reflections provide compelling evidence of the value of these projects for her public history students. This conclusion is endorsed by her acknowledgement that, “Although the acquisition of tangible skills was undoubtedly beneficial to the students, the opportunity to work with the faculty and students of the BMCM and their community in Morocco and in Washington, D.C. was perhaps the most thrilling part of the project.”<sup>53</sup>

Many of the students who participated in the projects cited working in a transnational environment as a particularly interesting and powerful way for them to engage in public history. Robyn Gagne, while remembering the visit of the American students to Morocco in 2011 during the second grant, recalled how her American public history sensibilities were shown as being only one example of interpreting the past while visiting Moroccan museums with BMCM faculty, staff, and students. Gagne’s reflection acknowledged differences in curatorial practice between the two countries, but she also inadvertently revealed an underlying Western-centric view that Moroccan museum practices are deficient or substandard compared to American interpretive standards: “It was so interesting how museums are curated differently in

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<sup>53</sup> Jennifer Dickey, “The World is Our Classroom,” in Julia Brock, Jennifer Dickey, Catherine M. Lewis, and Samir El Azhar, “Exploring Identities,” *The Public Historian* 34, no. 4 (2012): 19.

Morocco...there would be a case with some artifacts, a label written in French and Arabic with what the object was, and, if you were lucky, a date. There was very little interpretation.”<sup>54</sup>

In highlighting the intangible impact on college students from different countries working together on public history projects, Dickey’s reflections also suggest the potential for transnational work to develop students’ global sensibilities and their outlook on the world. For the American students this meant an increased critical awareness of America’s role in the world and a more significant empathy for their Muslim counterparts and the pernicious stereotypes often associated with Islam: “[T]hey [the students] developed an appreciation for the challenges and rewards of cross-cultural exchange as well as an enhanced awareness of the impact and perception of America, both good and bad, in the world.”<sup>55</sup> This evidence, and the observations recorded by the students in their journals and on the project blog, thus corroborated the U.S. Department of State’s sponsorship of this program as a vehicle of public diplomacy. For example, KSU student Matt Scott—who had never left the U.S. before traveling to Morocco during the second grant—reflected on this experience as transformative both in opening his eyes to a world beyond the nation and in terms of how that informed his understanding of the collaborative project with the BMCM. He recalled that traveling to Morocco, a predominantly Muslim country, completely transformed how he understood Islam at the time: “I was fortunate enough to be able to go to Morocco with the American travel team and that completely rocked my world in terms of how I even conceptualized the project that we are doing.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Robyn Gagne, “My Unexpected Journey: Forming Friendships across Cultural Boundaries,” in *Ben M’sik Community Museum: Building Bridges*, ed. Samir El Azhar (Casablanca: Force Equipment, 2012), 61.

<sup>55</sup> Jennifer Dickey, “The World is Our Classroom,” 17.

<sup>56</sup> “What we Learned,” *Identities: Understanding Islam in a Cross-Cultural Context*, accessed May 13, 2015, <http://marb.kennesaw.edu/identities/exhibits/show/personal-stories/what-we-learned/what-we-learned-ourselves>.



The Museums Connect projects between the MHHE and BMCM did not only serve the purpose of enhancing the KSU public history program. The Moroccan students and faculty were afforded an opportunity to travel to the United States and also developed skills as public historians with the oral history and exhibition development training sessions held for both groups of students concurrently via Skype.<sup>57</sup> Chaimaa Zamat, one of University Hassan II students selected to work on the BMCM team, reflected after the project, “I have...had the chance to get involved in many tasks, like doing transcription and translation of people’s testimonies recorded by the previous team. These were the citizens’ opinions about their daily life in the neighborhood, society, Morocco, and even the United States of America.”<sup>58</sup> Another Moroccan student, Soumaya Ezzahouani, reflected on the skills that she developed when she wrote, “We have worked side by side to finalize the online exhibit’s statement, to define the themes we have chosen and to select the exhibit’s photos. I have learnt so many new things about museums and good online exhibits. The workshops were very fruitful.”<sup>59</sup> While learning tangible skills, the Moroccan students also had a significant change in thinking about the potential role of museums in civic life, resulting from their exposure to a very different academic and public history tradition than that experienced by American students who took Introduction to Public History and Museum Studies classes while involved in the public history program at KSU. Meryem Bassi reflected, “Through the museum we knew [*sic*] how the previous generation lived. And through it the next generation will see us.”<sup>60</sup> And perhaps most poignantly, Chaimaa Zamat reflected on the central role that museums can play in Moroccan communities:

I was impatient to see this new approach of museums [offered by the BMCM], to understand how this project would develop the community in Ben M’sik, and to get

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<sup>57</sup> Samir El Azhar, interview by author, digital recording, by Skype, October 15, 2013.

<sup>58</sup> El Azhar, “The Ben M’sik Community Museum,” 37.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>60</sup> “What we Learned,” *Identities: Understanding Islam in a Cross-Cultural Context*.

involved in tasks related to the scholarship of museums. My expectations have come true because now I know that a museum is not only a place which displays artifacts to be shown to tourists and the elites but rather an open place for the public. It serves the community living in this neighborhood.<sup>61</sup>

These reflections that were offered after the grants were completed and were added to the online exhibit highlight the potentially transformative nature of conducting public history projects with undergraduates from two distinct countries that possess very different public history and museum traditions and who were encouraged to think about themselves and the roles of museums and the past in new and different ways.

### **From “imperialistic undertaking” to “a shared inquiry”?**

When applying for both grants, the MHHE and BMCM authors framed the projects as collaborative endeavors that engaged with recent literature in the fields of museum studies and public history on the implications of a shared intellectual authority.<sup>62</sup> In so doing, both projects sought to share the exploration of Muslim history and identity in the two communities among the two museums, their respective university students, and the wider community. Despite the aforementioned use of these endeavors as teaching tools, both of these grants also highlighted the challenges of engaging in collaborative endeavors across international boundaries.

The challenge of engaging in truly collaborative projects between the museums was most acute since the expertise to conduct oral histories, as well as the knowledge of how to utilize them for an online exhibition, resided with the MHHE staff and KSU faculty. Although both museums were new to transnational collaborative projects, the presence of trained public historians at the MHHE, a public history program embedded in the disciplinary practices of American academic public history—particularly community engagement—contrasted with the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> The original grant proposal cited Lewis, *The Changing Face of Public History*. Museum of History and Holocaust Education and Ben M’sik Community Museum, MCCA 2008-2010 Creating Community Collaboration Narrative, Timeline, Budget, Museum of History and Holocaust Education Archive, 1.

training of the faculty and staff at the BMCM and University Hassan II.<sup>63</sup> The students and faculty that volunteered for the project in Morocco were drawn from the English and History departments, reflecting the reality that work on the project would be conducted in English. These students' volunteerism reflected a significant personal commitment, as Moroccan higher education neither has internships nor rewards students for extra-curricular activities.<sup>64</sup> Professor Samir El Azhar, the director of the BMCM—officially called the “coordinator” of the museum—is also a member of the American Studies faculty yet possessed no formal public history or museological training prior to taking control of the BMCM in 2006. El Azhar's account highlighted the different levels of professional training and skills brought by the two museum's staff and university faculty to the partnership. While he was successful in negotiating the local elements of the projects and advocating for them within the complex politics of his university and local community, he also suggested that the public history education provided to the students was also beneficial to him. He recalled,

The project has marked a turning point in my professional life as coordinator of the Ben M'sik Community Museum. It has opened my eyes to the fact that museums should not be mere places where artifacts are displayed. They should be dynamic institutions that, on the one hand, maintain a dialogue with their local communities, and, on the other hand, establish international partnerships with museums around the world.<sup>65</sup>

These educational and skill imbalances, while neither detrimental to the success of the project nor diminishing of El Azhar's role in directing the Moroccan half of the project by himself, placed the onus of providing “public history training” for both the American and Moroccan students in the hands of the MHHE staff and KSU faculty. Lewis—who was the

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<sup>63</sup> For concise histories of Public History as an academic discipline in the United States and Canada see: The National Council on Public History, “What is Public History?” accessed May 16, 2015, <http://ncph.org/cms/what-is-public-history/>.

<sup>64</sup> Samir El Azhar, e-mail message to author, June 11, 2015.

<sup>65</sup> Samir El Azhar, “The Ben M'sik Community Museum,” 37.

driving force behind both grants—freely acknowledged the professional power differential that existed with her Moroccan colleague despite their deep friendship:

Samir [El Azhar] was deferential to us because of the power imbalance, because Samir had never done this... As we were writing the grant we were also giving Samir ‘The Handbook for Small Museums.’ It was professionalizing him [and] also the grant gave him credibility in a way that he did not have it before... The grant launched him into a much more national and international platform, and it became really important.<sup>66</sup>

Lewis was not the only member of the MHHE team to recognize and acknowledge the imbalances in professional training. Dickey was also aware of a gap in public history education that stood between the American project facilitators and their Moroccan counterpart. She acknowledged the American professionals’ attempts with the best possible intentions to “train” their Moroccan colleague, recalling that throughout the projects they tried hard “to help him [El Azhar] get up to speed in terms of being a museum professional.”<sup>67</sup> In attempting to correct the power imbalance between the museums, however, the MHHE faculty and staff were inadvertently acting out a form of intellectual colonialism by assuming the position of expert and teaching American public history and museum studies to their Moroccan counterpart.<sup>68</sup>

The reality of these power relationships was also realized in Morocco. Members of the faculty at University Hassan II levied the charge of “intellectual colonialism” at the Museums Connect projects and the partnership between the BMCM and MHHE. El Azhar explained that,

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<sup>66</sup> Lewis, interview with author.

<sup>67</sup> Jennifer W. Dickey, interview with author, digital recording, Kennesaw, GA, October 30, 2013.

<sup>68</sup> Ideas of intellectual colonialism and the inherent discursive imbalances of western intellectuals and academics attempting to provide a voice for the subaltern speak by speaking for them or teaching them the language of western intellectuals is a central theme of the Subaltern Studies Group. See, for example, the influential Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Macmillan, London 1988), 271-316.; Ideas of “intellectual colonialism” have also been wrestled with in other Museums Connect programs, see Elif M Gokcigdem and Michelle M. Seaters, “One Zellij at a Time: Building Local and Global Cultural Connections and Creative Thinking Skills through an Exhibit of Islamic Arts for Children in Saudi Arabia,” in *Museums in a Global Context*, ed. Jennifer W. Dickey, Samir El Azhar, and Catherine M. Lewis (Washington, D.C.: AAM Press, 2013), 168.

“In the Arab and Muslim world, people are suspicious of programs sponsored or financed by the U.S. and Western countries.” He concluded that his belief in the nature of the collaboration and the strong relationships between the two museums made this criticism irrelevant: “Convinced of the objectives of the [Museums Connect] projects, we did not pay attention to criticism.”<sup>69</sup>

Despite the education difference the cultural differences and tight timelines of the projects ensured that this teaching—while based in American public history practices—was truncated, practically oriented, adapted for the transnational context, and thus not solely a manifestation of American intellectual colonialism. Lewis recalled how she conducted oral history training for both groups of students via Skype: “We taught them [both groups of students] the very basic issues of oral history. And we talked about some of the complicating factors of it. But we couldn’t get too philosophical about it. We had to be just really, really practical: here is how you write questions, here’s the technology, here’s a consent form.”<sup>70</sup> The process of teaching oral history during the first grant, therefore, was not simply a reproduction of the American classroom but a new exploration in transnational public history that required adjustments and adaptations from both museums.

The immediate environment of the poor, working-class neighborhood of Ben M’sik required the BMCM team to adapt the oral history process and engage in the challenging process of working in an environment not used to oral history. Indeed, members of the BMCM team recalled that conducting oral histories was an “adventure” because, as a new museum that had only begun to establish itself, they were working in and attempting to share their authority with a

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<sup>69</sup> Samir El Azhar, e-mail message to author.

<sup>70</sup> Lewis, interview with author.

community that was neither used to having its voice heard nor to contributing to the historical record.<sup>71</sup> El Azhar recalled at length this experience:

People in Ben M'sik were not used to being interviewed. Working class people and the rate of illiteracy is very high. People think that you are interested in them only in times of elections, and people come to see them only in times of elections. So they were suspicious and skeptical in the first time. And when we explained the aims and objectives of the program, and when we told them that we are interested in hearing [their] voice and hearing what do [they] think and this is in an opportunity to tell their own stories they said 'why are our stories important?' Because they thought that it is only the powerful people, only the wealthy people, who can tell interesting things. But we told them that 'we are interested in your stories because your stories are important to the history of Casablanca and we cannot understand Casablanca without your stories.' ...And they were enthusiastic about the idea. Someone whose voice has never been heard before, and you tell him that someone is interested in you and someone would like to know about your stories not only in Morocco but elsewhere so he becomes twice important: here and over there.<sup>72</sup>

These adaptations and negotiations led to this portion of the grant—despite potential rejection from a community not familiar with this practice or method of shared historical creation—building support for the BMCM from within the community. This potential for rejection by the community and a serious level of personal risk was also exhibited when the BMCM students and staff sought to take photographs during the “Identities” grant. El Azhar was confronted by local citizens and the police and was threatened with arrest, due to the suspicion associated with taking photographs in the Ben M'sik neighborhood.<sup>73</sup> Despite the risk to El Azhar and the oral history portion of the project being rejected, it installed “a feeling of pride” in the community. El Azhar noted, “they became aware of their importance as citizens who contributed to the economic growth of Casablanca and the independence of their country from the French.”<sup>74</sup> And although this conclusion is anecdotal, it is supported by the way that the community's imagination was captured during the public dialogue event that showcased the oral

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<sup>71</sup> El Azhar, interview with author.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> El Azhar, “The Ben M'sik Community Museum,” 36.

histories and what was learned. Over a thousand people attended the “Conversation While Spinning Wool” program, detailed at length later in this chapter.<sup>75</sup>

The development of the online exhibit during the second grant rested on the work conducted in exhibit development workshops led by the MHHE staff during the travel of the two groups to Morocco and Washington, D.C. The online exhibit reflected the multivalent voices of the many participants involved in the project from both America and Morocco, both Muslim and not.<sup>76</sup> “Identities: Understanding Islam in a Cross-Cultural Context” set out to begin dialogue, “[b]y exploring Moroccan and American identity through photographs, oral histories, conversation, and personal reflection,” so that “we can learn about cultural commonalities and differences in a meaningful, open way.”<sup>77</sup> It reflects an approach that allows for multiple voices and decenters the central voice of an omniscient narrator. The photographic project featured an equal number of American and Moroccan photographs grouped loosely into sub-themes that spoke to facets of identity as determined by both museum teams in conversation with one another. They were accompanied by the placement of Moroccan and American oral histories side-by-side in the section titled “What We Learned.” This exhibitionary approach gave equal space to the voices of many different narrators interviewed in the first project, including Muslim residents of both the metropolitan Atlanta area and the Ben M’sik neighborhood reflecting on their own lives, the role of Islam in their lives and communities, and the different portrayals of

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<sup>75</sup> El Azhar, interview with author.

<sup>76</sup> For example, I participated in a number of exhibition workshops while in Morocco in December 2011, including initial discussions of ideas that we wanted to feature in the exhibit that I and Julia Brock led, and a workshop on exhibition concept statements led by Julia Brock.

<sup>77</sup> “Homepage,” *Identities: Understanding Islam in a Cross-Cultural Context*, accessed June 27, 2015, <http://marb.kennesaw.edu/identities/>.

Islam around the world.<sup>78</sup> Minimal interpretation of these segments of the website also allow the visitor to wrestle with how to interpret these findings, rather than through the lens of a dominant interpretive voice.

This approach to reflecting the multiplicity of voices was not without challenges for the curatorial teams of both museums. The imbalance in power between the two museums and their project teams emerged during the second grant when the BMCM team met the MHHE team in Washington, D.C., for exhibit development meetings. Sitting around a conference table in the Washington, D.C., offices of AAM in March 2012, six Moroccan students and ten American students frustratingly and tensely debated the style, content, and symbolism of the exhibit logo and graphic design for “Identities: Understanding Islam in a Cross-Cultural Context.” Because the logo would be the single graphic element that represented the entire year spent studying identity in Morocco and America, its importance was well understood by all participants. The MHHE project team had researched and prototyped designs created by the MHHE graphic designer that they considered effective website logos in the months preceding the D.C. workshops. In these preparatory meetings they settled on ideas that were largely driven by abstract symbols, shapes, and colors that spoke to what they thought described the project and that were also in-keeping with “best practices” in website design. In contrast, one of the Moroccan students had brought different logo designs to the meeting that included graphic elements such as the crescent and moon and more explicitly referenced design elements in the Moroccan flag and symbols common in Islam. Dickey later described the impasse and heightened tensions when she recalled,

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<sup>78</sup> “Oral Histories,” *Identities: Understanding Islam in a Cross-Cultural Context*, accessed February 23, 2016, <http://marb.kennesaw.edu/identities/exhibits/show/personal-stories/oral-histories/oral-history-transcripts>.



Both teams brought design suggestions to the table, and it quickly became obvious that there was a wide gap between the two sides in terms of design aesthetics—shapes and colors had vastly different meanings for each team. We debated, for example, about whether or not to include representations of our national symbols (such as flags and colors) and of our faiths (such as the crescent and moon) and how best to express visually our values of collaboration and partnership.<sup>79</sup>

El Azhar recalled that the impasse occurred because the two teams possessed fundamentally contrasting cultural perspectives and sensibilities. “I think it was a cultural perspective. Each one believed in certain things or believed that certain things should be in the logo or shouldn’t be in the logo. Some people believed a logo is a symbol but it shouldn’t bear any cultural significance. But others—especially the Moroccan team—believed that it should highlight cultural aspects.”<sup>80</sup> He generously suggested that this tense phase of exhibit development was negotiated because of the two teams’ close friendships and spirit of cooperativeness. “[I]t wasn’t a disagreement. It wasn’t a conflict. It shows how honest the two teams were, and the matter was discussed in a very calm, serious, serene way.”<sup>81</sup> Brock, the second project’s coordinator, however, critically reflected on the ultimate outcome of the tense interpretive debate over the logo, highlighting an awareness and unease about the underlying power dynamics at play:

Ultimately, though Moroccan students had created their own unique graphic pieces, it was the MHHE’s designer who merged our ideas into one creation. This made some participants rightly uncomfortable—how much did the logo really reflect a compromise? Though all participants agreed on the final version, were our Moroccan partners eventually silenced because of our executive decision to pass the logo to the MHHE designer?<sup>82</sup>

The end product that was used throughout the digital exhibition features some of the color and shape suggestions of the Moroccan students. The overall form utilizes abstract shapes to reflect the multivalent perspectives of the two teams and is much closer to the MHHE team’s

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<sup>79</sup> Jennifer Dickey, “The World is Our Classroom,” 19.

<sup>80</sup> El Azhar, interview with author.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Julia Brock, “Managing International Public History Work”, in Julia Brock, Jennifer Dickey, Catherine Lewis, and Samir El Azhar, “Exploring Identities,” *The Public Historian* 34, no. 4 (2012): 27.

original abstract concepts than the designs of the BMCM that incorporated more religious and Moroccan-specific imagery. The underlying power dynamics between the two museums and project teams in this moment originated from the relative professional capacities of the two museums and their staff members: the MHHE has a full-time graphic designer and the BMCM only has one staff member. Moreover, the specter of contractual American grants and timely completion of projects drove the desire to complete the workshop and continue working on other exhibition elements. The desire for a complete and punctually delivered end product to be reported to the program's funders and administrators, in this moment, replaced a more complicated process of negotiation and experimentation.

### **Misuse or “stone-soup diplomacy”?**

Despite the power imbalances in public history and museum expertise that played out during the oral history and exhibition development phases of the two grants, the Moroccan staff and participants actively negotiated and adapted the grants' activities to their local context to ensure that the projects reflected the Moroccan museum's different public history tradition and community relationships. The oral history project during “Creating Community Collaboration” highlighted one example of how grant activities were successfully negotiated and re-imagined to meet the needs of the BMCM and its community. The grant set aside money in the “Creating Community Collaboration” project for both museum teams to pay their oral history narrators to thank them for sharing their histories. Lewis explained that the \$50 designated for each narrator “was a small token but a token all the same.”<sup>83</sup> The way this money was actually spent this situation has been subsequently understood and re-told reflect the spontaneous and culturally specific ways that project components were altered when practiced by two different museums and their students in two countries across thousands of miles.

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<sup>83</sup> Lewis, interview with author.

The BMCM identified an acute need and spent the oral history money on computers for a local school rather than give it to the narrators as originally stated in the signed grant documentation. Knowing that the conditions as agreed to in the signed Implementation Agreement had been altered, the MHHE/KSU staff was concerned that despite the BMCM's best intentions U.S. Government money had been misused. This potentially put the MHHE at risk as the grant's "lead museum." Lewis, recalling genuine anxiety of legal recriminations from her perspective as the first grant's director, remembered, "[This] proved a big problem because it was not part of the grant."<sup>84</sup> Dickey also acknowledged the benefit of the BMCM's actions but highlighted the governing American grant culture of Museums Connect that understands the acceptance of grant funding—especially from the federal government—as contractual, noting the consequently serious impact of changing the way that money is spent in such a project.<sup>85</sup> While the situation was resolved after the MHHE staff contacted AAM and sought clarification on how to handle this change—apparently not a unique occurrence in this type of program—Lewis subsequently speculated that the situation might have arisen for cultural reasons. The oral history components of the grant occurred within a very different cultural understanding of history and oral history, by a society that does not value social history in the way as the United States. In addition there is not a well-established culture of grant-funding in Morocco nor a subsequent understanding of what it means to give and receive government funds that American museums often possess. Lewis reflected, "Somehow paying the informants felt like an insult. It was shameful in some way. So it became a very contested thing."<sup>86</sup>

Illustrating the different ways that project participants interpreted the same event, El Azhar's subsequent reflections did not share the anxiety over the legality of spending the grant

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Dickey, interview with author.; Jennifer Dickey, written correspondence to author, August 17, 2015.

<sup>86</sup> Lewis, interview with author.

money on computers for the local school rather than on the oral history narrators, nor did he mirror the interpretation of this as an “improper or inappropriate” action offered by Dickey and Lewis.<sup>87</sup> When asked about this phase of the project he spoke of the “adventure” of conducting oral histories in a community neither used to social history nor to having their histories officially validated. The challenge of conducting interviews in the style and form established by the grant was further exacerbated because Moroccan law prohibits public institutions from gifting cash to the public. Learning this after the interviews were conducted, El Azhar informed the narrators that money could not be given to them and, after a long debate that occurred over several meetings, it was decided by the BMCM team and their narrators that the money would be used to buy computers for a local elementary school. Differing significantly from Lewis’s and Dickey’s interpretations of these actions, El Azhar subsequently reflected on this episode: “There was a feeling of pride in our team because we contributed to building something from which children of the Ben M’sik community would benefit. I believe this action is far better than giving a meager sum of money to some individuals who could have spent it on futile things.”<sup>88</sup>

A third different interpretation of this situation was offered by Mary Jeffers, Foreign Service Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Morocco at the time of the Museums Connect projects, who suggested that the actions of the BMCM were in keeping with the types of situations that the Department of State hopes will come out of cultural diplomacy programs like Museums Connect. Likening the situation to the metaphorical story of the Stone Soup, Jeffers cited the BMCM and community’s decision to spend the oral history stipends on computer technology for the local school as the epitome of what, in her opinion, is so powerful about public diplomacy.

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<sup>87</sup> Dickey, interview with author.

<sup>88</sup> Samir El Azhar, e-mail message to author, June 4, 2015.

Speaking from her perspective as a DOS employee working on the ground in Morocco at the time, she recalled:

It was so impressive. So it was an outgrowth of the museum project, in a littler sense, because of the stipend, it was almost like the stone of the stone soup, but it was also an outgrowth of this kind of self-empowering feeling that I think that the museum project helped to encourage. I don't want to say that it, the museum project, generated the entire community sense of wanting to do something in the community. But I think that it played a role.<sup>89</sup>

The multiple interpretations of this part of the “Creating Community Collaboration” project highlight one way that the oral history project was negotiated and adopted within the local contexts of Casablanca and Ben M'sik by the BMCM. It also showed the multiple ways, regardless of power differentials and imbalances, that these planned and unplanned activities were negotiated and then later interpreted and understood.

Culturally specific methods of negotiating grant activities also occurred when the BMCM changed the name of the proposed “coffee and conversations” program that was planned for presenting the oral histories recorded in Casablanca during the “Creating Community Collaboration” grant. El Azhar explained that changing the name to “Conversations While Spinning Wool”—something more culturally Moroccan—allowed the BMCM to connect more effectively with its community. “This title has strong cultural connotations as it is borrowed from the oral tradition and heritage of the Moroccan people...[I]t is a proverb that evokes the idea of work and talk.” He explained that this terminology was highly appropriate because it has deep meaning in Morocco, “This proverb is used whenever a person indulges in a task and he/she speaks at the same time. In the past, women used to meet to spin threads of wool. While spinning, they discussed various topics related to their everyday life. Therefore, this social gathering enabled them to help each other, exchange information and discuss social issues.” He

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<sup>89</sup> Mary Jeffers, interview by author, digital recording, by phone, January 31, 2014.

explained that this adaptation did not change the underlying intention of the program as it was designed in the grant: “Notwithstanding, each team has chosen a title that springs from its social and cultural context; yet both teams strive to achieve the same objective that is to establish strong bonds of friendship and communication between their respective museums and communities. Despite the constraints of the contract, we were able to adjust some terms to our own cultural context.”<sup>90</sup> The name change, therefore, had the significant impact of appealing to a much broader public in the Ben M’sik neighborhood, an audience of nearly one thousand people, which in addition to local political officials included “students and their families, interviewees and their families, interviewers and their families, professors from the different departments, university administration staff and people from the Ben M’sik neighborhood.”<sup>91</sup> In so doing, the “Conversations While Spinning Wool” program provided an opportunity for the BMCM to enact its mission as a community museum by “function[ing] as a locomotive for the neighborhood by giving the opportunity to its inhabitants to develop an awareness of themselves as actors and participants in the development of our country as a whole.”<sup>92</sup> El Azhar later argued that the success of this program and the grants more broadly helped to convince his skeptical colleagues at the university that the museum should be actively engaged in the community rather than a static repository of artifacts as some had previously suggested.<sup>93</sup>

### **“Brothers and sisters”**

In addition to the benefits of the public history pedagogy in these two grants, Museums Connect’s people-to-people public diplomacy agenda (see chapter three) also had an important personal impact on the participants. Dara Vekasy, a student at KSU who participated in the

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<sup>90</sup> Samir El Azhar, e-mail message to author, June 11, 2015.

<sup>91</sup> Samir El Azhar, “Conversation While Sipping Coffee,” unpublished report, Ben M’sik Community Museum Archive, 1.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>93</sup> El Azhar, interview with author.

second grant, noted, “This project has been so integral to exposing me to different ideas and cultures than I have ever been able to experience before.”<sup>94</sup> And in a follow-up survey conducted in 2015, the Moroccan students who responded suggested their involvement in the Museums Connect project continued to shape the way they thought of themselves, their own identities, and what it means to be a Muslim. Ismail Chaki, for example, reflected, “I can say for myself that the project had an impact on me. Firstly, working on a professional project such as that, which was my first experience of such a kind gave me a certain maturity in the way I handled my life.”<sup>95</sup>

Deep and long-lasting friendships were forged between Moroccan and American students during the projects, which highlight the additional benefits of working on a transnational public history project with a public diplomacy agenda. Robyn Gagne later reflected that working side-by-side with the Moroccan students during the two travel portions of the “Identities” grant built deep friendships. “We all felt like we had made good friends, and it was hard to part, but we all exchanged Facebook information and have kept in contact since we parted ways. As I hugged Zineb, I told her that this was not goodbye but we would see each other again. Zineb and I cried together.”<sup>96</sup> In these ways the grant served its primary audience: university students. This met a goal written into the grants that sought to, “prepare project members on both sides of the Atlantic to educate others about cross-cultural and community-based museum partnerships.”<sup>97</sup>

This conclusion was also confirmed by the ruminations of all the project facilitators who independently cited the two projects’ ability to create deep personal bonds as a significant

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<sup>94</sup> “What we Learned,” *Identities: Understanding Islam in a Cross-Cultural Context*, accessed May 15, 2015, <http://marb.kennesaw.edu/identities/exhibits/show/personal-stories/what-we-learned/what-we-learned-ourselves>.

<sup>95</sup> Ismail Chaki, response to a follow up survey conducted by Dr, Julia Brock, April 2015, private possession of Dr, Julia Brock.

<sup>96</sup> Gagne, “My Unexpected Journey,” 63.

<sup>97</sup> Museum of History and Holocaust Education and Ben M’sik Community Museum, MCCA Final Proposal, KSU MHHE and Ben M’Sik[1], Museum of History and Holocaust Education Archive, 2.

highlight of the grants. Lewis's praise for this element of the grant was profuse, and she reflected that it was in the process of working together—and not necessarily the product that was developed—that the students learned the most and developed deep personal and professional relationships. Recalling the trip of the Moroccan delegation to Washington, D.C. during the second grant, she suggested,

I don't think the website for the second grant is the thing to celebrate. I think it was the process...seeing these working meetings, maneuvering through them, eating together, taking them around, traveling...that we would get out in the evenings and go to dinner, and people would still be talking about the website and the logo and what they had in mind. It just resonated more.<sup>98</sup>

El Azhar echoed these glowing reflections when he asserted, "With the travel component it was of paramount [importance] because not only do you see the person, you shake hands with him, you hug him, you talk to him, you spend days with him, and you share moments with him. And it was very important for the students."<sup>99</sup>

Despite the historically friendly relationship between the United States and Morocco, the development of these friendships was important because connections between Morocco and the rise in number of Moroccan-born terrorists gained significant visibility in the American media after 9/11. This included the terrorist attacks in Casablanca that killed thirty-three victims in May 2003, connections between Moroccan citizens and the Madrid terrorist bombings of March 2004, and a 2004 *New York Times* article concluding that many European countries expressed a significant interest in Moroccan affairs. Times journalist Elaine Sciolino placed Morocco within the West's anti-terrorist foreign policy sphere and added fuel to this point-of-view when she wrote, "Moroccan groups have been seen as central to the terrorist threat in Europe, forcing

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<sup>98</sup> Lewis, interview with author.

<sup>99</sup> El Azhar, interview with author.



intelligence and law-enforcement officials to adjust their strategies.”<sup>100</sup> Moreover, Morocco’s proximity to the Middle East—it is officially located within the State Departments MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region—and a fear of the potential role of young Moroccans joining Al-Qaeda were both cited as possible reasons why the MHHE and BMCM’s partnership made sense from United States Department of State’s perspective. While speculating about the reason why the MHHE-BMCM partnership made strategic sense for the Department of State, DOS Foreign Affairs Officer Mary Jeffers, who was located in Morocco in 2009, cited the 2007 *New York Times Magazine* feature article, “Where Boys Grow up to Be Jihadis.” The article explored in depth the connections between young Moroccan men and terror groups and Jeffers conjectured that “amongst ordinary Moroccans there’s anger at the United States about our policies in the region.”<sup>101</sup>

The people-to-people relationships developed during these two projects were not only between the students from both countries. In independent conversations with the two museum directors—Dr. Catherine Lewis and Professor Samir El Azhar—both used the same metaphor to describe the bonds of friendship that had developed between them as a result of three years of collaborative work. El Azhar sincerely recalled fifteen months after the second project ended in 2012, “Human relationships are important, they stay. We are more than friends, I always tell our colleagues in Morocco and America, with Dr. Jennifer [Dickey] and Dr. Catherine Lewis we have started as colleagues, then we became partners, and now we are brothers and sisters... We still exchange e-mails on family matters and we are ready to start another program if we have the

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<sup>100</sup> Elaine Sciolino, “Morocco Connection is Emerging as Sleeper Threat in Terror War,” *New York Times*, May 16, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/16/world/morocco-connection-is-emerging-as-sleeper-threat-in-terror-war.html>.

<sup>101</sup> Andrea Elliot, “Where Boys Grow Up to be Jihadis,” *New York Times Magazine*, November 25, 2007 [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/25/magazine/25tetouan-t.html?fta=y& r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/25/magazine/25tetouan-t.html?fta=y& r=0;); Jeffers, interview by author.

opportunity to do that.”<sup>102</sup> Lewis similarly emotionally recalled, “Frankly the absolute highlight was walking with Samir where he said to me—I think we were in D.C.—and he said ‘Catherine, we started as colleagues, then we became friends, and now you are my sister.’...And that told me we had done something right.”<sup>103</sup>

Despite the success and depth of the friendships forged, a fact subsequently cited by project participants and facilitators as well as AAM and DOS administrators and funders, sustaining the momentum built during the three years of the grants has subsequently proved challenging.<sup>104</sup>

### **Feeling forsaken: Questions of sustainability**

At the level of public history pedagogy, during the three-year period that the grants were conducted between the MHHE and the BMCM, the movement of students through their undergraduate programs and the public history certificate at KSU ensured that different students worked on the two projects. This resulted in challenges to achieving the depth of exploration sought by the two museums when using the oral histories in the development of the online exhibition. Lewis explained the two museums’ thinking when they applied for their second grant,

And we thought ‘what if we use the oral histories’—we don’t discard them—but we use them as the basis for an online exhibit, and really dig a little bit deeper into these questions of identity: What’s really shaping the way these students feel about who they are in the world? In their community? In their family? And in this global community? So it was a great idea, but I think one of the big challenges with it was that we didn’t have the same students.<sup>105</sup>

Her reflection acknowledged the challenge of sustaining the intellectual exploration over multiple years as one significant limitation on attempts to maintain a longer-term partnership

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<sup>102</sup> El Azhar, interview with author.

<sup>103</sup> Lewis, interview with author.

<sup>104</sup> Michele Peregrin, “Museums and Communities Connect,” *Dipnotes* (blog), United States Department of State, May 18, 2012, <https://blogs.state.gov/stories/2012/05/18/museums-and-communities-connect>.

<sup>105</sup> Lewis, interview with author.

between the two museums and their universities, and on the use of these projects as a vehicle to teach public history in a transnational context: “Our hope for depth was trumped by the reality of ‘We’ve got to start over.’”<sup>106</sup>

The one-year cycle of Museums Connect projects and the current restriction that prohibits museums from applying for additional grants until a three-year period has passed present significant financial challenges for these fledgling projects. The large and ambitious scope of Museums Connect projects and the cost of working across international boundaries—especially traveling staff and students—made replicating and sustaining the projects challenging. Dickey acknowledged, “We haven’t really done anything with the museums since the project ended because we haven’t had the money to really do much....We will continue to work together and continue to be friendly with him [El Azhar], but we will not be able to travel back and forth without grant money.”<sup>107</sup>

While El Azhar agreed with Dickey’s assessment that the lack of funds makes collaborations on the scale of those achieved during the two Museums Connect grants unrealistic, he discordantly suggested the absence of a continued collaboration between the two museums also resulted from a lack of imagination and commitment from his American partners. In 2015 he wrote, “To tell you the truth, I sometimes feel that I have been forsaken by my friends and partners....Some projects do not necessarily require money as the [Museums Connect] projects [do]. To illustrate the point, we had worked before the [Museums Connect] projects on a traveling exhibit. The whole work was done online. We can find other sources to finance these small projects.” He concluded, “I believe that there are a number of projects, although small, that

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Dickey, interview with author.

we can set up.”<sup>108</sup> While reflecting the deep personal connection developed between the two museums’ staff, his critique suggests that the challenges of sustainability are not only the result of limited finances.

The partnership between the two museums and their respective university students also shows that the community engagement element of Museums Connect grants—AAM explicitly challenges both museums to engage with new communities, which is a central facet of many public history programs in the United States—is difficult to maintain without the impetus for community engagement provided by the grant. Unlike the BMCM, which was founded with service to the community at its heart and continues to work directly within its community, the MHHE struggled to maintain the outreach to the Muslim community. In the eighteen months following the conclusion of the “Identities” grant, the MHHE took part in two different projects to continue its engagement with the Muslim community in Georgia. In a KSU undergraduate oral history class project taught by Brock, students interviewed members of a local mosque, and the MHHE also won an American Library Association “Muslim Journeys” Bookshelf grant. This brought a cohort of twenty-five adults from the community together over a three-month period in a book-club style roundtable. These two efforts allowed the museum to continue its exploration of contemporary issues surrounding Islam in the American South. Brock was quick to acknowledge that this work was limited in its ability to tie the larger community to the museum and also suffered from a lack of larger institutional support.<sup>109</sup> Additionally, the removal of the grant’s finances resulted in lack of dedicated staff time, and an institutional commitment to return to the MHHE’s core mission of interpreting World War II and the Holocaust and away

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<sup>108</sup> Samir El Azhar, e-mail message to author, June 11, 2015.

<sup>109</sup> Julia Brock, interview with author, digital recording, Kennesaw, GA, October 28, 2013.

from pursuing its broader mission of celebrating diversity and tolerance.<sup>110</sup> This has resulted in the MHHE struggling to maintain its burgeoning connections to the Muslim community in the metro Atlanta region in the period since the “Creating Community Collaborations” and “Identities” grants concluded.<sup>111</sup> These challenges were freely acknowledged and lamented by museum staff during interviews, who reflected critically that despite the aforementioned attempts and the additional time given to cement relationships because of the two grants, it was difficult to maintain the necessary energy, momentum, and community connections when resources were removed. Dickey concluded that the lack of support has had the impact of eroding the initial energy that the grants may have generated: “If you were to go out and talk to people in the Atlanta Muslim Community, most of them still aren’t going to know who we are, they’re not coming out here to see our programs or our exhibits. We don’t factor into the conversation. We’re just not a player in that world in the broader scheme.”<sup>112</sup>

## Conclusion

In a book published in 2012 in Morocco to accompany the “Identities: Understanding Islam in a Cross-Cultural Context” project, I optimistically reflected from my perspective as a project facilitator that the students involved in the project “not only developed the curatorial skills necessary to create an online exhibit, but they also developed a deeper understanding of Islam and what it means to be a Muslim both in the American South, and also in Morocco.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> These struggles are in keeping with the literature on community partnerships for museums that argue that building trust, rapport, and relationships is a long, time-intensive, and continuous process that is contested and politically charged. See, for example, the essays in: Ivan Karp, Christin Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine, ed. *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute, 1992).

<sup>112</sup> Dickey, interview with author.

<sup>113</sup> Richard Harker, “Educating Against ‘Islamophobia:’ Creating an International Exhibit to Counter Intolerance,” in *Ben M’sik Community Museum: Building Bridges*, ed. Samir El Azhar (Force Equipment: Casablanca, 2012), 44.

Even allowing for excessive praise of a grant that provided the MHHE and BMCM with nearly \$150,000 dollars to enact innovative and exciting museum partnerships, support the museums' and universities' pedagogical offerings, and also help their—and my—tenure and promotion (faculty) and career (staff and student) possibilities, the reflections of those involved in the two Museums Connect grants between the MHHE and the BMCM highlight a rich way of learning and enacting public history pedagogy. It allowed for the development of skills by the two student teams as well as provided a vehicle for expanding their global consciousness. The students' reflections also emphasize the role that these projects played in encouraging greater cultural awareness and better understanding of the impact that working in different communities has on public history projects. Furthermore, they provide evidence of the building of student friendships and relationships that mirror those developed between the two museums' staff and faculty.

“Creating Community Collaboration” and “Identities: Understanding Islam in a Cross-Cultural Context” also highlighted that the MHHE possessed significantly more professional training and operated within an appreciably different museological context. These conditions, as well as the MHHE staff's contribution to the creation of the BMCM, played a role in structuring the nature of the public history pedagogy and activities that occurred throughout both grants as the two museums served their primary audience of university students. The potential for these kinds of uneven distributions of intellectual power appears embedded in a program that places American museums funded by the American government and administered by the American Alliance of Museums on one side of a transnational partnership. However, the MHHE and BMCM's partnership also reveals that it is naïve to assume that American activities and ideas are passively absorbed abroad. Regardless of the power differentials and museological traditions, activities and ideas were negotiated on a local level to both function within a local cultural

context and to benefit the BMCM. The pedagogical activities, though deeply rooted in American public history practices, were subject to alteration and negotiation due to the confines of the grants' structures, the local contexts of both museums, and the act of having to conduct oral histories and exhibition development workshops for two very different museums and their students.

The discordant interpretations of the use of oral history money in Casablanca as well as the sustainability of the project not only highlight the difference in cultural and societal norms surrounding public history in the two countries, but also elucidate the different intellectual worlds occupied by the two museums. The challenges of sustainability that were acknowledged but interpreted differently by the two museums' staff and related faculty bring into question the long term impact of these grants. While all participants claimed that the projects were a great success, as did administrators at AAM and the DOS, the reality of two very different museums focusing on entirely different histories and missions with differing ideas of community work has resulted in a mixed legacy. In contrast, the next chapter focuses on "The International Legacy Youth Leadership Project," a Museums Connect project between two similar museums, the Apartheid Museum and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (and nominally the Mandela House Museum), which interpret similar histories of racial apartheid.

## 6 PARALLEL HISTORIES AND REFLECTION-IN-ACTION: THE APARTHEID MUSEUM, THE MANDELA HOUSE MUSEUM, AND THE BIRMINGHAM CIVIL RIGHTS INSTITUTE (2010-2011)

**“Public history is always situational and frequently messy; the case-by-case particulars of reflective practice, reflection-in-action, shared inquiry, and shared authority emerge out of experimental give-and-take. In the real world, unwavering pursuit of theoretical schemas often leads to dead ends. Sometimes the best strategy, observes one seasoned practitioner, is to stay flexible, ‘lay back, let it happen, try out different ideas.’”**  
**Katharine T. Corbett and Howard S. (Dick) Miller, 2006<sup>1</sup>**

During the 2010-2011 Museums Connect project between the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI), Alabama, and the Nelson Mandela House Museum and the Apartheid Museum, Johannesburg, students and museum staff from both communities traveled to the other’s country. Central to the grant was the shared exploration of the countries’ histories and their similarities and differences, including through visits to historic sites of conscience in both countries. During the Americans’ visit to Johannesburg, both groups of students visited the Apartheid Museum to explore the galleries and learn more about South Africa’s apartheid past. At that time, Ahmad Ward, the Head of Education and Exhibitions at the BCRI and one of the central facilitators of the project, admitted to having to “deal with a little bit of anger.” When reflecting on this powerful emotional experience, he suggested that the Apartheid Museum moved him more than other museums or the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, because, “I thought I had a fair knowledge of the apartheid situation, but it was an eye opener. This is absolutely ridiculous that this is one of things that happened in that country...I think everyone should go and see it.”<sup>2</sup> Ward’s experience while touring one of the BCRI’s partner museums emphasized the emotional impact of learning about the racist past of a country with which he was less familiar. It also simultaneously reflected a larger sensibility that permeated the whole grant for the American

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<sup>1</sup> Katharine T. Corbett and Howard S. (Dick) Miller, “A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry,” *The Public Historian* 28, no. 1 (2006): 19.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmad Ward, interview with author, digital recording, by telephone, November 14, 2013.



project facilitators and shaped its power dynamics. Ward demonstrated through his emotional reflection that he was open to exploring the two countries' histories of racial apartheid and the movements to overcome those systems alongside the two groups of students, and not act as an omniscient authority on the histories. He later suggested that despite having worked at the BCRI for over a decade, "It was a very enriching experience for me as well as the kids. At the end I got as much out of it as they did."<sup>3</sup>

The reflection-in-action of the BCRI staff was only one facet of the complex web of power relations that transpired between the museums and students during "The International Legacy Youth Leadership Project" (2010-2011). The BCRI staff shared their authority as project leaders with their South African colleagues at the Apartheid Museum after the initial administrative problems at the Mandela House resulted in the the Apartheid Museum assuming the role of lead-partner for the BCRI. Due to the two communities' similar histories and public histories, the dynamic between the two museums was more equitable than either of the case studies in chapter four and five. With the exception of notable discrepancies between the ways in which the two institutions approached youth programming, the BCRI and the Apartheid Museum were relatively balanced partners. Their similar interpretive approaches to their communities and countries' histories of racial apartheid allowed the students to engage in a deep, shared exploration of the Civil Rights and anti-Apartheid Movements that moved beyond the popular interpretations of the two movements' "great men" Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr. Ward's angry reaction at the Apartheid Museum and a few other comments from participants also moved beyond the shared histories to speak to issues of race.

These complex shared historical explorations engaged in by the students did not translate into the larger project outcomes. The grant's shortened time frame coupled with its focus on the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

two communities' histories resulted in an implicit celebration of both communities progress since the eras of Jim Crow and Apartheid. This inadvertently effaced any significant discussion of contemporary issues of race throughout the project. Wider discussions about race were mostly absent during interviews with participants and facilitators, as well as during the project at both communities' sites of conscience. This was particularly apparent during the one-off encounter of the wider Birmingham public at the BCRI's Nelson Mandela Day celebration, the capstone event of the one-year grant. During this program, the complex layers of exploration engaged in by the students were replaced with a focus on Nelson Mandela, whose popularity as an international figure of peace drove the program's success for the BCRI in its engagement with new communities in the city. The preoccupation with Mandela as a figure, however, effaced a deeper understanding of the two movements and their parallels. Although the longevity and impact of those particular encounters is inconclusive, the Mandela Day program's success in reaching new communities for the BCRI, as well as spontaneous encounters between the Apartheid Museum staff and members of the public in Birmingham during their trip, suggests the potential for a project between two museums and communities with shared histories and historic connections to forge deeper community bonds beyond the limited community of school students selected to participate.

### **“We had a glitch!”**

The presence of two similar-sized and interpretively-focused institutions in “The International Legacy Youth Leadership Program” emerged by accident. The original grant proposal specified the Mandela House Museum as the BCRI's partner museum in Johannesburg. Unforeseen internal politics in Johannesburg delayed the beginning of the project, making the partnership with the Mandela House problematic for the BCRI. The “International Legacy Youth

Leadership Project” allowed the BCRI to develop a program that pursued the international part of their mission and expanded upon their pre-existing Legacy Youth Leadership program. Priscilla Cooper, BCRI Vice President of Institutional Programs, explained, “Our mission is to promote civil and human rights worldwide through education. This was a unique opportunity for us to bring our mission to life. We have a strong commitment to young people. And we have been looking for ways to activate—programmatically—that portion of our mission. It’s a fabulous mission but how do you do that? This was a wonderful opportunity to make real connections.”<sup>4</sup> Despite constant guidance from AAM on ways to be reciprocal in nature and not reflect a type of American cultural imperialism, the BCRI’s Project Director Laura Anderson found her South African colleague deferential and willing to sign his name to anything she wrote. In describing a typical interaction that she had with Ishmael Mbhokodo, the Director of the Mandela House Museum, she paraphrased his normal response thus: “Anything y’all want to do will be fine. It would be beautiful. It would be wonderful. Just tell me what you want to do and we’re going to do it.”<sup>5</sup> And although the established tradition of oral history since the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions—a central part of the proposal—allowed the development of an oral history project to easily translate to their South African partners, the problem of reciprocity and equality of partnership also materialized in designing the project. The BCRI had a vibrant youth program (the Legacy Youth Leadership Project) upon which to build, but the Mandela House had not engaged in youth programming previously.<sup>6</sup> Mbhokodo suggested to Anderson that he would walk the poor, mostly black Soweto neighborhood where the Mandela House is located and pick children off the street to participate in the project if the proposal was

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<sup>4</sup> Priscilla Cooper, interview with author, digital recording, by phone, November 4, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Laura Caldwell Anderson, interview with author, digital recording, Birmingham, Alabama, October 11, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

successful. This reality created a power imbalance from the outset, as the expertise for youth programming and conducting a project of this scale, while intimidating for the BCRI staff, was much more central to their expertise than for their South African partners. This fact was reflected in interviews with BCRI staff who self-consciously acknowledged the development of these dynamics from an early stage. Anderson recalled, “we already had this vibrant youth program in place here, and graduates of it, alumni of it, [and] we’re going gangbusters over here. And all we’re going to do is add this wonderful new dimension to it, and he doesn’t have a youth program. But he thinks it’s the greatest idea ever. He’s totally onboard. But then we’re feeling guilty because it’s not reciprocal.”<sup>7</sup>

Issues of capacity and qualifications to run and manage a project of this nature evolved as the director of the Mandela House, who had co-authored the grant proposal with the BCRI staff, left the institution during the period between when the proposal was submitted and the funds awarded. Although the circumstances of Mbhokodo’s departure from the Mandela House remain unclear, his absence before the \$120,000 grant was awarded in the summer of 2010 caused a period of confusion and anxiety that significantly threatened the project before it began. Anderson recollected, “I sent Mr. Mbhokodo a ‘yippee!’ kind of an e-mail and [got] no response.”<sup>8</sup> Cooper later ruefully recalled, “We had a glitch!”<sup>9</sup> The BCRI was unable to get any response from its “partner” museum in South Africa. Anderson recalled it took many phone conversations, un-returned Facebook messages, and eventually a cryptic conversation with a member of Mandela House staff—who encouraged Anderson to reach out to the Standard Bank—to begin to piece together what had happened. The final grant report diplomatically stated, “For several months after receiving its MCCA award, the *International Legacy Youth*

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Cooper, interview with author.

*Leadership Project* was on hold due to changes in governance at the original non-US partner institution, the Mandela House Museum.”<sup>10</sup> The Mandela House had been removed from under the management of the Soweto Heritage Trust, a local organization established in 1997 to “establish a cultural precinct in and around Orlando West, Soweto, and an overall promotion of Soweto and Johannesburg, in the contest of identity, pride, public awareness, the encouragement of tourism and economic upliftment [*sic*].”<sup>11</sup> The Apartheid Museum, opened in 2001 to “illustrate the rise and fall of apartheid,” was given temporary custody of the Mandela House.<sup>12</sup> This change caused a labor dispute that created a particularly challenging environment for the BCRI staff to navigate as they tried to move ahead with signing the grant’s implementation agreement and start project activities in late 2010. Anderson, who as the Project Director had emailed, called, and used social media to try to understand the situation, invited herself and other colleagues from the BCRI to the Apartheid Museum to meet with their Assistant Director Ruwayda (Wayde) Davy in October 2010. This trip, conducted two months after the grant was meant to have begun and funded by money from a grant from the BCRI’s International Oral History Program, was an attempt by BCRI staff to understand the changing administration of the Mandela House and the feasibility of a project created within an entirely different institutional and political context.<sup>13</sup> Cooper was later adamant that the trip allowed the project to be rescued and proceed as planned with only minor modifications: “that [trip] was really crucial...it was invaluable to us, particularly given the shift that we weren’t aware of. We hadn’t talked to

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<sup>10</sup> Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, *The Mandela House, and the Apartheid Museum*, Final Report, unpublished manuscript, no date, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Archive, 464.

<sup>11</sup> “The Soweto Heritage Trust, Background,” *Mandela House*, accessed June 28, 2015, <http://www.mandelahouse.co.za/trust.asp>.

<sup>12</sup> “The Apartheid Museum’s Genesis,” *The Apartheid Museum*, accessed June 28, 2015, <http://www.apartheidmuseum.org/about-museum-0>.

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, interview with author.

anyone at the Apartheid Museum. We were really walking in to a situation not knowing what was going on.”<sup>14</sup>

Although the Apartheid Museum did not give a green light for the project until the four-person BCRI delegation of Anderson, Cooper, Coordinator of Youth Programs Angela (Michelle) Craig, and former President and CEO Dr. Laurence Pijaux had returned to Alabama, the visit allowed them to seek clarity and meet Apartheid Museum staff, particularly Davy, who oversees the Apartheid Museum’s educational programs. The team also realized the BCRI’s greater similarities with the Apartheid Museum than with the Mandela House, and thus how the new partnership would better suit the Museums Connect project. The Mandela House, like many house museums of important national figures, is in essence a shrine to Nelson Mandela. In contrast, the Apartheid Museum, like the BCRI, offers a much broader interpretation of Apartheid and the anti-Apartheid Movement.<sup>15</sup> The Apartheid Museum features “A series of 22 individual exhibition areas [that] takes the visitor through a dramatic emotional journal that tells a story of a state-sanctioned system based on racial discrimination and the struggle of the majority to overthrow this tyranny.”<sup>16</sup> This broad approach extends the interpretation of Apartheid and the anti-Apartheid Movement beyond the Mandela House’s mission “to provide an effective, efficient and meaningful experience to all visitors, informing them of President Nelson Mandela’s story, both in the context of his home, and in the context of his life as a whole, in a manner that promotes human rights, democracy, reconciliation, mutual respect and tolerance

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<sup>14</sup> Cooper, interview with author.

<sup>15</sup> For more on the way that historic homes can become gendered shrines, see Seth Bruggeman, *Here George Washington Was Born: Memory, Material Culture and the Public History of a National Monument* (Athens: University of Georgia, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> “About the Museum,” *The Apartheid Museum*, accessed November 14, 2015, <http://www.apartheidmuseum.org/about-museum-0>.

amongst the peoples of South Africa.”<sup>17</sup> This approach more closely aligned with the broader interpretive mission of the BCRI, which similarly moves beyond focusing on the “great men” of the American Civil Rights Movement to “enlighten each generation about civil and human rights by exploring our common past and working together in the present to build a better future.”<sup>18</sup>

Anderson recalled that in terms of physical size, the size of their staff, as well as their reliance on grant money for programming, the BCRI and Apartheid Museum were very similar: “[W]e just had a lot in common.”<sup>19</sup> However, Anderson noted the precarious nature of the partnership and possibility for failure. She later recalled, “Given that the Apartheid Museum had no youth programs in place, the commitment was tremendous, for staff would essentially build the South African side of the project from the ground up.”<sup>20</sup> From the perspective of the Apartheid Museum, soon-to-be Project Director Davy reflected that the museum’s initial approach to Museums Connect was determined by their inheritance of a project that they had not planned from the outset. She recalled, “We had taken over management of [the] Mandela House Museum and this project was on the table already. It initially was a project between Mandela House Museum and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. So in effect, we had inherited the project and therefore included the Apartheid Museum as a partner.”<sup>21</sup>

The BCRI maintained their desire to work with the Soweto neighborhood and build upon the historic connections between the youth of that neighborhood of Johannesburg and the youth of Birmingham: “the whole concept of the proposal was based around the whole idea of

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<sup>17</sup> “Mandela House,” *Mandela House*, accessed November 14, 2015, <http://www.mandelahouse.co.za/>.

<sup>18</sup> “About BCRI,” *Birmingham Civil Rights Institute*, accessed November 14, 2015, <http://www.bcri.org/information/aboutbcri.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Anderson, interview with author.

<sup>20</sup> Laura Caldwell Anderson, “Promoting Civil and Human Rights Worldwide Through Education: A Case Study of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute,” in *Museums in a Global Context: National Identity, International Understanding*, ed. Jennifer W. Dickey, Samir El Azhar, and Catherine M. Lewis (Washington, D.C.: AAM Press, 2013), 53.

<sup>21</sup> Ruwayda (Wayde) Davy, email message to author, August 5, 2015.

Birmingham-Soweto and their common histories, common experiences, and their histories.”<sup>22</sup>

Thus, although the Apartheid Museum and its staff became the central partner to the BCRI, Soweto youth and the Mandela House remained important to the project. Davy’s colleague in managing the project at the Apartheid Museum, Archivist Jacqui Masiza, reflected both the museum’s inexperience in youth programming and her excitement at the prospect of working with Soweto youth in her home neighborhood for the first time: “I also love working with the youth, and this was an opportunity to do exactly that. As the project was initially from Soweto and a first for our Museum, we had to make a selection from schools around the area, and I am quite familiar with the areas as I grew up there.”<sup>23</sup>

Thus, “The International Legacy Youth Leadership Project” between the BCRI, the Apartheid House, and nominally the Nelson Mandela House Museum, began in 2011 with the stated goal to “engage the youth, museum staff, veterans of both movements, educators, community leaders, and the local community in a series of activities designed to increase knowledge and understanding of the parallels between the Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham and the anti-apartheid struggle in Soweto, the dynamic role of museums in interpreting those struggles, and the implications for citizens today.”<sup>24</sup> As the language of the grant outlined, the shared histories and public histories of the two communities were central to both how the grant was conceived and to how the participating museums understood their relationships to one another.

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<sup>22</sup> Anderson, interview with author.

<sup>23</sup> Jacqueline (Jacqui) Nampi Masiza, e-mail message to author, August 5, 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, The Mandela House, and the Apartheid Museum, Final proposal. South Africa & BCRI, unpublished manuscript, no date, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Archive, 4.



## Shared (public) histories

The histories of racial apartheid in both the United States and South Africa, while occurring over different chronological spans, are very similar in both the impact that they had on the nations and individual people, as well as their interpretation at public history sites, especially in the last twenty-five years.

The system of apartheid that ruled South Africa between 1948 and 1994, Sean Field argues, “systematically legalized white domination through racial registration, separation, and control of all South Africans.”<sup>25</sup> During this period, museums and the exclusive histories and cultures they created contributed to the oppression of “coloured” South Africans through the implicit demonstration of power inherent in the creation of historical narratives. Michel Rolph Trouillot argues that the historical narratives constructed by those in power create a “particular bundle of silences” that marginalizes certain people, groups, and narratives.<sup>26</sup> Crain Soudien, citing recent South African scholarship, contends that during the era of Apartheid museums “both displaced and denigrated the experience of people who were not deemed to be white. Its [the South African museums’] project was essentially a white supremacist one.”<sup>27</sup> While Shamil Jeppe similarly argued that these histories were “those that privilege the wealthy, the famous, the heroic, the masculine, the white and the colonial.”<sup>28</sup> Museums, however, were not the only

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<sup>25</sup> Sean Field, “Imagining Communities: Memory, Loss, and Resilience in Post-Apartheid Cape Town,” in *Oral History and Public Memory*, ed. Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 107.

<sup>26</sup> Michel Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 26-27.

<sup>27</sup> Hillary John Deacon, “Heritage in African history,” in *Toward New Histories for South Africa: On the Place of the Past in our Present*, ed. Shamil Jeppie, (Landsowne, Cape: Juta Gariep), 117-29., cited in Crain Soudien, “Emerging Discourses around Identity in New South African Museum Exhibitions,” in *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, ed. Bettina Messias Carbonell, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 397.

<sup>28</sup> Shamil Jeppie, “Introduction: New history?” in *Toward New Histories for South Africa: On the Place of the Past in Our Present*, ed. Shamil Jeppie (Landsdowne: Juta Gariep, 2004), 4.

public history sites to reinforce the national government's racial binary. Monuments such as the Vortrekker Monument in Pretoria, although contested and not unproblematic, were also created as part of "an urban landscape of power" to reinforce white supremacy.<sup>29</sup> The Monument interpreted black Africans, Albert Grundlingh argues, as "barbaric savages standing in the way of brave and heroic Boers claiming to bring civilization to the interior," which further contributed to the origin myth of the Apartheid state and reinforced its racist politics.<sup>30</sup> The prominence and preponderance of these sites stood in contrast with the few public history sites presenting dissonant narratives. Such places remained limited to "only a handful of heritage institutions and initiatives...which deliberately focused on, and in some instances celebrated, the country's anti-apartheid and non-racial experience."<sup>31</sup>

Dominant dynamics of oppression and historical silences were challenged when the Apartheid regime fell in South Africa after the nation's first democratic elections in April 1994.<sup>32</sup> Non-white South Africans, demographically dominant, became central actors in re-shaping the nation's historical narratives and the way that public history sites interpreted the nation's past. In so doing, the voices of indigenous South Africans "ha[ve] been crucial in shifting the assumed political authority of earlier and predominantly white British settler communities."<sup>33</sup> However,

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<sup>29</sup> See Leslie Witz, "Solly Sachs, the Great Trek and Jan van Riebeeck: settler pasts and racial identities in the Garment Workers' Union, 1938-1952," in *Rethinking Settler Colonialism: History and Memory in Australia, Canada, Aotearoa New Zealand and South Africa*, ed. Annie E. Coombes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 24-44.; Albert Grundlingh, "A Cultural Conundrum? Old Monuments and New Regimes: The Vorketrekker Monument as Symbol of Afrikaner Power in a Postapartheid South Africa," in *Contested Histories in Public Space: Memory, Race, and Nation*, ed. Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Maya Knauer (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009), 159-160.

<sup>30</sup> Albert Grundlingh, "A Cultural Conundrum?" 158.

<sup>31</sup> Deacon, "Heritage in African history," 397.

<sup>32</sup> For a much more comprehensive history of the public histories of post-Apartheid South Africa see: Annie E. Coombes, *History after Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>33</sup> Annie E. Coombes, "Introduction" in *Rethinking Settler Colonialism: History and Memory in Australia, Canada, Aotearoa New Zealand and South Africa*, ed. Annie E. Coombes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 2.

writing in 1996 in the immediate aftermath of the new-nation, Andrew Hall and Cynthia Kros warned that to see the overthrow of Apartheid as the end of oppression was to ignore the “quieter” legacy of white supremacy. In the last years of the Apartheid regime, museum administrations were divided along the “tricameral” system adopted in 1986 by the Botha Administration, which gave limited power to the “Indian” and “coloured” populations along with the “white” population, although not to the “black” population. This had the effect of creating a complex web of political and institutional entanglements along Apartheid-era racial lines that were not quickly untangled or repealed as the nation transitioned to democracy after 1994. Hall and Kros argue, “whilst the multiplicity of administrative divisions within the realm of cultural administration in South Africa may not seem alarming to outsiders, it must be remembered that they are based on racial rather than geographical divisions and that several administrations, most of them representing narrow racially based interests, can and do operate within the same geographical area.”<sup>34</sup> It was only slowly after battling against this history until 1994 that museums, historic sites, and monuments came to play a significant role in the transition to a democratic government. These sites helped the wider population deal with the traumatic past and redefined the meaning of the new post-Apartheid state. Reflecting the new ideas of nation and community being created in South Africa’s nonracial democracy, Annie Coombes’ seminal account of public history in post-Apartheid South Africa argues that new public histories that were created “effectively inform[ed] changing definitions of ‘community’ and ‘nation.’”<sup>35</sup>

Within this transitory atmosphere, a “new exhibitionary landscape” emerged at important new museums like the District Six Museum (1992), Robben Island (1997), and the Apartheid

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<sup>34</sup> Andrew Hall and Cynthia Kros, “New Premises for Public History in South Africa,” *The Public Historian* 16, no. 2 (1994): 16.

<sup>35</sup> Coombes, *History after Apartheid*, 1.

Museum (2001) that reflected the new and complex inclusive national politics and memory.<sup>36</sup> At these important national museums and sites, the racially inclusive nation sought to process and interpret the traumatic past that for many South Africans included “the experience of detention, displacement, or unannounced police harassment in the dead of night.”<sup>37</sup> This new exhibitionary landscape has not been without critique. The reinsertion of non-white South Africans into the national story handles issues of race unproblematically, according to Crain Soudien, who argues that the nation’s new history, in attempting to produce “triumphant and redemptive” revisionist narratives, continually reproduces that era’s “artificial construction of apparently homogenous ethnic constituencies” with the effect of diminishing “other forms of viable community.”<sup>38</sup>

The interpretation of Apartheid across the country as told through its museums, monuments, and historic sites was also contested terrain in the periods immediately preceding and following the democratic elections, which swept Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress (ANC) into power and pushed the apartheid-enforcing National Party to the margins of South African political life. In addition to the fervent debates conducted in public through national and international media, monuments such as the large bust of National Party President J. G. Strijdom in Pretoria became symbolic sites for protest and counter-protest as the nation wrestled with the meaning of its exclusionary past. The monument was vandalized by those protesting the presence of pro-Apartheid monuments and covered for protection by those

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<sup>36</sup> Soudien, “Emerging Discourses around Identity in New South African Museum Exhibitions,” 398.

<sup>37</sup> Coombes, *History after Apartheid*, 9.; Moreover, the larger issues and challenges associated with expanding national histories to appeal to international tourists has been addressed at length by Leslie Witz, “Transforming Museums on Postapartheid Tourist Routes,” in *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, ed. Ivan Karp et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 107-134.

<sup>38</sup> Soudien, “Emerging Discourses around Identity,” 400-402.; and Coombes, *History after Apartheid*, 4.

attempting to defend the visibly diminishing values and racist history that these monuments represented.<sup>39</sup>

Contestations over the meaning of apartheid were not only manifest at long-standing monuments but also materialized during the creation of new interpretive sites to commemorate the physical landscape of the Apartheid regime's imprisonment, displacement, and abuse. Converting Robben Island from a prison that confined many ANC members, including Mandela, into a museum was particularly contentious given the numerous stakeholders with a share in the production of a national history at the site and the tension between public and private enterprise on the island.<sup>40</sup> Clashes ensued between the privilege of ex-prisoners' memories, desires by private businesses' to turn the prison into an economically-viable tourist attraction, and the objective of the new government's to commemorate the island as a symbol of national regeneration. The meaning and form of one of the new democratic nation's most important sites were very publically debated in national and international media.<sup>41</sup>

Reflecting on the complexity of this new national history, Annie Coombes argues that District Six, one of the country's most significant public history sites, did not easily fit into the "new South Africa." Given the complex class and racial dynamics of the neighborhood, the new national government did not embrace the site with the same vigor as Robben Island and other historic sites.<sup>42</sup> The culturally vibrant, "cosmopolitan," economically diverse, and mostly "coloured" neighborhood in Johannesburg became a defining symbol of Apartheid as residents were forced to leave and their property was demolished under the auspices of the Group Areas Act. Rather than accepting the traditional mode of public history presentation in South African

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<sup>39</sup> Coombes, *History after Apartheid*, 14.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-69.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

museums, the District Six Museum became “a significant venue for community regeneration” through a bottom-up challenge to traditional hegemonic and hierarchical narratives.<sup>43</sup> Using oral histories and engaging community members and visitors to share their experiences of this Cape Town neighborhood, the museum has sought to heal and regenerate a community that was decimated when the area was racially zoned, causing “more than sixty thousand people to be forcibly removed from their homes.” The majority of the homes were destroyed and leveled between 1968 and 1982.<sup>44</sup> The museum has sought to play an active role in the assertion of a land claim under the Restitution of Land Rights Act and in challenging traditional national histories and narratives. South African public historian Ciraj Rassool contends that this independent status has “enhanced the possibilities of constituting a vibrant, independent, contested public culture.”<sup>45</sup> Indeed, the museum has come to play an important role in post-Apartheid South African public history as “an independent site of engagement, a space of questioning and interrogation of the terms of the post-apartheid present, and the institutions, relations, and discourses embedded in its production and reproduction.”<sup>46</sup> Independence from traditional hierarchies of knowledge and power is essential for the District Six Museum as it seeks to represent silenced communities that were historically omitted from these institutions.<sup>47</sup>

Negotiating the meaning of the nation’s history and public history sites also occurred at the level of policy, with a bitter contestation between the outgoing government’s attempt to reify older, less progressive policies and practices and the ANC’s attempts to renegotiate the new

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<sup>43</sup> Ciraj Rassool, “Community Museums, Memory Politics, and Social Transformation in South Africa: Histories, Possibilities, Limits,” in *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, ed. Ivan Karp et al. (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 287-310.; Sean Field, “Imagining Communities: Memory, Loss, and Resilience in Post-Apartheid Cape Town,” in *Oral History and Public Memory*, ed. Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 108.

<sup>44</sup> Field, “Imagining Communities,” 112.

<sup>45</sup> Rassool, “Community Museums, Memory Politics, and Social Transformation,” 288.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

nation's public history. Control of the membership of the National Monuments Council (NMC) became a central battleground for both those fighting to re-write and to preserve the nation's history.<sup>48</sup> The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) also played a significant role in shaping the form and content of national historical narratives of apartheid by illuminating the crimes against humanity committed under the Apartheid regime. The statements and public hearings, which generated significant controversy, granted amnesty for anyone who admitted through oral testimony their guilt in the state-sanctioned violence and oppression committed between 1948 and 1994. This acted as one method for the nation to unify and heal under Mandela's "national unity government."<sup>49</sup> In October 2002 the Minister of Education, Professor Kadwer Asmal also organized the conference, "History, memory and human progress" that brought together teachers, public historians, and policy makers to reflect on the multiple and diverse ways that history was studied and taught in the new South Africa, including in textbooks, music, and at public history sites.<sup>50</sup> Thus, public history has played an active role in attempts to confront and heal the nation's collective memory about Apartheid. This supports Sean Field's argument that, "Recognizing that 'remembering well a shared injury is something which people cannot do by themselves, but must be shared by a group of diverse voices,' oral and public historians have pragmatic contributions to make to regenerative forms of memory work."<sup>51</sup> Jennifer Wells' analysis of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the settlement of Grahamstown in 2012, however, reminds us that attempts to heal and confront the nation's complex and traumatic racist

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<sup>48</sup> Coombes, *History after Apartheid*, 14-17.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>50</sup> For a full discussion of the complexities that emerged from this conference see: Jeppie, *Toward New Histories for South Africa*.

<sup>51</sup> Field, "Imagining Communities," 117.

past in South Africa's nonracial democracy continues to be met with many who are unwilling to explore the past and still see a deep racial cleavage in the new nation.<sup>52</sup>

Still, the political marginalization of the National Party, the presence of a black majority who had been subjugated under Apartheid, and a very public debate over the renegotiation of the nation's past and its public presentation has ensured that the aftermath of racial apartheid in South Africa, while particularly contested, was addressed and approached with greater rapidity than in the United States. While both nations' public histories and national memories of racism and attempts to overthrow racial apartheid are contested, attempts in the United States to address this history have been much slower than in South Africa.

Unlike South Africa at the end of the Apartheid regime, "In the wake of the Civil War, there were no 'Truth and Reconciliation' commissions through which to process memories of either slavery or the experience of total war."<sup>53</sup> David Blight's seminal work on the complete fracturing of American collective memory in the fifty years after the Civil War (1861-1865) and the end of slavery convincingly argues that many white Americans favored reunion and the re-subjugation of African Americans over the pursuit of racial justice and the legacy of emancipation. Blight notes, "The memory of slavery, emancipation, and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments never fit well into a developing narrative in which the Old and New South were romanticized and welcomed back to a new nationalism, and in which devotion alone made everyone right, and no one truly wrong, in the remembered Civil War."<sup>54</sup> Thus the "Lost Cause" narrative, which presented slavery as a benign institution and remembered the war as the shared suffering of valiant and brave (white) soldiers on both sides came to dominate Southern

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<sup>52</sup> Julia C. Wells, "In the Shadow of the Butcher: The Limits to Remembering in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *The Public Historian* 36, no. 2 (2014): 51-74.

<sup>53</sup> David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.



and American history. This, Blight argues, had a long legacy that significantly silenced African American histories until the Civil Rights Movement and the concurrent introduction of the New Social History between the 1950s and 1970s began to challenge traditional and deeply ingrained unequal historical narratives of race in America. This silencing was made manifest in contestations over the Civil War centennial as the Civil Rights Movement gathered momentum in 1961, highlighting across the South, amongst other things, “that the Civil War remained unfinished.”<sup>55</sup> Reinforcing these silences were challenges from Southern heritage groups as well as National Park staff to broadening the interpretation at Harper’s Ferry National Park in the 1960s and 1970s to include African American history.<sup>56</sup> Reflecting on the legacy of these erasures, Southern historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage argued, “The civic landscape of the South looks the way it does because of both persistent inequality etched and erected in public spaces and dogged efforts to revise the same terrain.”<sup>57</sup>

Erasure of African American history from public spaces and relegation to private spheres such as churches and schools gradually changed as African Americans gained more economic and political power in the United States after World War II. This gain in momentum after the Civil Rights Movement reached its political apogee with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Like the changes to South African history after the 1994 election, early African American community and neighborhood museums were part of the Civil Rights Era’s challenge to white power. They presented significantly counterhegemonic challenges to reassert African American history and culture into the public sphere when they

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<sup>55</sup> Kevin Allen, “The Second Battle of Fort Sumter: The Debate over the Politics of Race and Historical Memory at the Opening of America’s Civil War Centennial, 1961,” *The Public Historian* 33, No. 2 (Spring 2011): 109.

<sup>56</sup> Teresa S. Moyer and Paul A. Shackel, *A Devil, Two Rivers, and a Dream: The Making of Harpers Ferry National Historical Park* (Plymouth, UK: AltaMira Press, 2008), 151-174.

<sup>57</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 7.

were founded in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>58</sup> The creators of early black museums, such as the DuSable Museum of African American History of Chicago, the International Afro-American Museum in Detroit, and the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum in Washington, D.C., drew explicit connections with the “often combative discourse of the black power movement” and understood the political and social power of their institutions.<sup>59</sup> Leaders such as Margaret Burroughs of the DuSable Museum led institutions that “emerged as the culmination of the spaces carved out by generations of local black community organizations.”<sup>60</sup> And these institutions and their communities not only challenged the traditional “temples of Euro-American hegemony” but also believed “that their institutions communicated a radical new agenda about power, memory, and identity.”<sup>61</sup>

Andrea Burns argues these ideas were grounded in the politics and ideology of the Black Power Movement. They illustrated different ways of representing African American history that was made more diverse during a newer wave of black public history, which included the creation of newer Civil Rights museums and public history sites since the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>62</sup> Sites wrestling with the historic oppression of African Americans as well as with more recent interpretations of African American historical agency, history, and culture have become more abundant since the early museums. Interpretations of slavery rapidly increased at public history sites throughout the United States since the 1980s as African Americans gained more political and economic power. Examples such as the Liberty Bell Center at Independence National Historic Park, the introduction of slavery to tours at Monticello that include discussion of

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<sup>58</sup> Andrea A. Burns, *From Storefront to Monument: Tracing the Public History of the Black Museum Movement* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 4.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-11 and 185-186.

Thomas Jefferson's slave and mistress Sally Hemings, and the controversy surrounding the "Back of the Big House" exhibit at the Library of Congress have led public historians to begin attempting to redress the historical erasure of African American history from the nation's historical sites, monuments, museums, and history.<sup>63</sup> As in the South African context, these new interpretations have continually provoked backlash from certain publics that feel *their* history is being threatened. Attempts to interpret slavery across the South also reflect more recent efforts to acknowledge African American history and culture more broadly, which has resulted in an increase in the number of museums and historic sites dedicated to interpreting the Civil Rights Movement.

Historians Leigh Raiford and Renee Romano have noted that at least fifteen museums interpreting the Civil Rights Movement have opened since 1990.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, over one hundred and fifty museums were identified in a 2008 survey by the Association of African American Museums to be "actively curating some aspect of black history...from [the] A. Philip Randolph Pullman Porter Museum in Chicago to the W.C. Handy Home and Museum in Florence, Alabama, honoring the famed blues artist."<sup>65</sup> Although these museums have attempted to correct the silences and erasure of African Americans and have assumed "a central place in American historical memory," divergent approaches and contestations over the interpretation of

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<sup>63</sup> For a full discussion of these case studies and an exploration of the ramifications of recent attempts to interpret slavery see the contributions to the edited volume James and Lois Horton, *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).; See also, Jill Oglie, "Creating Dissonance for the Visitor: The Heart of the Liberty Bell Controversy," *The Public Historian* 26, no. 3 (2004): 49-58.

<sup>64</sup> Leigh Raiford and Renee C. Romano, "Introduction: The Struggle over Memory," in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, ed. Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford (Athens, GA.: University of Georgia Press, 2006), xii

<sup>65</sup> Jeff Levine, "How Far Have We Come? Civil Rights Museums Evolve and Transform," *Museum* (January/February 2015): 28.

African American history, especially the Civil Rights Movement, have emerged.<sup>66</sup> Raiford and Romano critique the development of what they term the “consensus memory” of the American Civil Rights Movement. They lament that despite more recent attempts by scholars to add depth, texture, nuance, and complexity to understandings of the Civil Rights Movement, the “consensus memory offers that *the* ‘Civil Rights Movement’ began in 1954 with the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision...and ended in 1968 with the death of Martin Luther King Jr. and the rise of Black Power in the countries northern and western cities.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, it is argued that the epicenter of African American historic sites is in the South and that these sites are overly focused on what Owen J. Dwyer calls “the great men” of the movement such as Dr. King and Fred Shuttlesworth.<sup>68</sup>

This interpretive approach to the Civil Rights Movement is most notable at the National Park Services’ Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site in Atlanta, Georgia, which was established on October 10, 1980. The site’s mission is to “protect and interpret for the benefit, inspiration, and education of present and future generations the places where Martin Luther King, Junior, was born, where he lived, worked, and worshipped, and where he is buried.”<sup>69</sup> In case the mission of the National Historic Site was not evidence enough of Dwyer’s critique, the Historic Resource Study that situated the life of King within the physical landscape of the park placed him at the center of the Civil Rights Movement more broadly,

The assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 4, 1968, robbed the American Civil Rights Movement of one of its most effective and respected

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<sup>66</sup> Raiford and Romano, “Introduction: The Struggle over Memory,” xii.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>68</sup> Owen J. Dwyer, “Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement: Contradiction, Confirmation, and the Cultural Landscape,” in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, ed. Rennee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford (Athens, GA.: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 15.

<sup>69</sup> Public Law 96-428, October 10, 1980, quoted in, Robert W. Blythe, Maureen A. Carroll, and Steven H. Moffson, “Introduction,” Martin Luther King Jr. Historic Resource Study, National Park Service, August 1994, accessed March 8, 2016, [http://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online\\_books/malu/hrs/hrs0.htm](http://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/malu/hrs/hrs0.htm).

leaders. Following his death, SCLC and other black activist organizations continued civil protests. But these organizations' beliefs and tactics varied widely, and their subsequent campaigns never gained the cohesion which, although fragile at times, generally characterized the progressive campaigns led by King.<sup>70</sup>

Since its founding in 1992 the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI) has attempted to situate itself and Birmingham's civil rights history within a more recent, broader historiographical and international human rights context rather than abiding by the limited consensus interpretations of the movement lamented above. At the November 1992 opening of the first phase of the BCRI, ex-Executive Director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and United States Ambassador to the United Nations Andrew Young declared, "When I saw the Berlin Wall come down, when I saw the students in Tiananmen Square, when I saw the Polish shipyard workers and when they all were singing 'We Shall Overcome,' I know that what we did in Birmingham not only had an impact on human rights in the South of the United States, but really made an impact on the entire world."<sup>71</sup> Similarly, throughout the BCRI's early programming, including during the opening of its second phase human rights gallery and early celebrations of Martin Luther King, Jr., Day, the Institute "aimed at broadening the scope of the visitor experience beyond Birmingham."<sup>72</sup> Odessa Woolfork, the founding Board Chair of the BCRI, also acknowledged the international connections of the American Civil Rights Movement in the BCRI's institutional history. She wrote:

From its inception the Institute founders recognized the universality of human conflict. After all, Dr. Martin L. King had been deeply influenced by the religious and ethnic conflicts in India, parts of Africa and Eastern Europe earlier in the twentieth century. In time these and other nations drew positive lessons from the American Civil Rights Movement. Given this broad historical context, the Institute perceived human rights as a universal striving.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Andrew Young quoted in Anderson, "Promoting Civil and Human Rights Worldwide," 48.

<sup>72</sup> Anderson, "Promoting Civil and Human Rights Worldwide," 49.

<sup>73</sup> Odessa Woolfork, "History of BCRI," accessed November 30, 2013, [http://www.berci.org/information/history\\_of\\_berci/history6.html](http://www.berci.org/information/history_of_berci/history6.html), This argument was also posited by Laura

This international connection, while counteracting Raiford and Romano’s criticism of many American civil rights public history sites, drew on a long history of international connections between Birmingham and South Africa. Historian George M. Frederickson highlighted the similarity of experiences between the two countries when he wrote in 1981, “More than the other multi-racial societies resulting from the ‘expansion of Europe’ that took place between the sixteenth century and the twentieth, South Africa and the United States...have manifested over long periods of time a tendency to push the principle of differentiation by race to its logical outcome...in which people of color, however numerous or acculturated they may be, are treated as permanent aliens or outsiders.”<sup>74</sup> Historical connections between these two communities were so strong that Birmingham “came to be known, in later years, as America’s Johannesburg.”<sup>75</sup> This point of connection was also made by American civil rights leader Reverend Joseph Lowery when he declared in a 2007 interview, “Birmingham was probably the Johannesburg of the South. Apartheid was at its severest in Birmingham. And Fred Shuttlesworth was the man for the hour.”<sup>76</sup> The connections between Birmingham and South Africa were not only drawn by those in the United States. Nelson Mandela, during a visit to Atlanta in 1990, told Birmingham officials including Birmingham Mayor William Bell that

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Anderson, BCRI Archivist and Museums Connect project Director in an essay that she wrote about the BCRI and Mandela House partnership. Anderson, “Promoting Civil and Human Rights Worldwide,” 49.

<sup>74</sup> George M. Frederickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study of American and South African History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), xi.

<sup>75</sup> Bobby M. Wilson, *America’s Johannesburg: Industrialization and Racial Transformation in Birmingham* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 1.; A vast body of literature has drawn the explicit connection between South Africa and the American South. See for example, George Frederickson, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).; and Robert Trent Vinson, *The Americans Are Coming!: Dreams of African American Liberation in Segregationist South Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012).

<sup>76</sup> Joseph Lowery to Renee Poissant, “Interview for National Visionary Leadership Project,” (2007), quoted in Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, the Apartheid Museum, and the Mandela House Museum, *The International Legacy Youth Leadership Project Brochure*, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Archive, Birmingham, Alabama.

while he was imprisoned at Robben Island he drew strength from the images of Birmingham's moment in the international media in 1963.<sup>77</sup>

The international connections and historic ties between two sites dedicated to the interpretation of local and international movements against racial apartheid and human rights abuses were thus central to "The International Youth Legacy Project." In the narrative preamble to the grant application, the authors boldly highlighted this when they put the events of Birmingham and Soweto in direct comparison. It argued that the youth participants from minority schools in Birmingham and Soweto would take part in activities "designed to increase knowledge and understanding of the *parallels* between the civil rights movement in Birmingham and the anti-apartheid struggle in Soweto, the dynamic role of museums in interpreting those struggles, and the implications for citizens today."<sup>78</sup> [emphasis added] And in making the case for the grant to be awarded to the BCRI, then-BCRI President and CEO Dr. Lawrence Pijoux made the case for the grant to be awarded to the BCRI by arguing for the virtues of this approach: "For some time we have desired to collaborate with a partner outside the United States and particularly in South Africa, a place with which Birmingham, Alabama, shares experiences that *make it ripe for comparative study and analysis* by our youth and visiting public."<sup>79</sup> [emphasis added] It was within this context that the BCRI and the Mandela House Museum embarked on the "The International Legacy Youth Leadership Project."

### **Exploring parallel histories**

Due to the initial difficulties at the Mandela House Museum the project's beginning was delayed and the planned oral history portion of the grant "to collect and preserve intangible

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<sup>77</sup> Anderson, "Promoting Civil and Human Rights Worldwide," 46.

<sup>78</sup> Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and Mandela House, "Final Proposal International Legacy Youth Leadership Exchange," unpublished manuscript, no date, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Archive, 4.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

cultural heritage through oral interviews and movement music” was abandoned because the time allocated to train the students in oral history methodologies had passed.<sup>80</sup> The central activities of the grant thus became the concurrent study sessions of the two countries’ histories, the travel of the two project teams to the other countries, and a community celebration in each city during the students’ visits. The original grant proposal declared that the study sessions were “just as important as travel to one another’s country.”<sup>81</sup> These sessions included readings, discussion, film, debate, and field trips to other museums and sites and were hosted by both museums for their students. Each student read a combination of scholarship authored by historians such as Andrew Manis’s *A Fire You Can’t Put Out: The Civil Rights Life of Birmingham’s Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth*, *Foot Soldiers For Democracy: The Men, Women, and Children of the Birmingham* by Horace Huntley and John W. McKerley, and the autobiographies of Nelson Mandela’s (*Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*) and Steve Biko (*I Write What I Like*). After reading, discussing, and debating these books, both via weekly study sessions and Skype conversations with their international colleagues, the students also watched and discussed four films to expand their study of the two movements: *Sarafina* (1976), *Amandla! A Revolution in Four Part Harmony* (2002), *4 Little Girls* (1997), and *Mighty Times: The Children’s March* (2004). In addition to the activities conducted by the entire cohort the Birmingham students also participated in a public movie series of the seven-part documentary *Have You Heard From Johannesburg?*<sup>82</sup>

Reporting on one of the Skype meetings between the two teams of students during the grant Anderson suggested that the shared exploration of the two communities’ parallel histories

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<sup>80</sup> Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and Mandela House, “Final Proposal International Legacy Youth Leadership Exchange,” 4.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.



provided a rich avenue for discussion between the students. She recalled, “With a television camera rolling, ten students gathered in the Resource Gallery of the [BCRI] to talk with ten fellow teenagers gathered at the U.S. Consulate in Johannesburg, South Africa...After discussing similarities between the civil rights movement in the U.S. and the anti-Apartheid Movement in South Africa, the students quizzed each other about popular music.”<sup>83</sup> Even allowing for the overtly positive interpretation featured in a grant report to AAM, Anderson’s recollection suggested that the shared historical exploration undertaken by students and their facilitators across two continents encouraged empathy and connections among the students.

Reflecting the reality that Museums Connect is both a public history and public diplomacy program, Andrew Cedar, a senior advisor in the Department of State’s office of the Under Secretary of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, observed one of the students’ Skype meetings while traveling with Under Secretary Judith McHale in South Africa in May 2011. He extolled, “We witnessed a fascinating example of this-people-to-people exchange at the Apartheid Museum, where we were able to observe a Skype video chat between students in Soweto, South Africa, and Birmingham, Alabama.” Cedar noted the friendships and similarities that emerged from the Skype conversations. “Listening to these students exchange views on everything from race relations in their communities to Nicki Minaj demonstrated the power of readily-available technology to build bridges across oceans and cultures.”<sup>84</sup> Approaching this exchange from the perspective of public diplomacy, Cedar concluded that it was one example of what he described as “the U.S. government inviting citizens into honest dialogue.” Cohen’s retrospective analysis

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<sup>83</sup> Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and Mandela House, “International Legacy Youth Leadership Project, Final Report,” unpublished manuscript, no date, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Archive, 1.

<sup>84</sup> Andrew Cedar, “Strengthening Relationships with South Africa’s Young Leaders,” *Dipnote: U.S. Department of State Official Blog* (blog), May 12, 2011, accessed June 30, 2015, <http://blogs.state.gov/stories/2011/05/12/strengthening-relationships-south-africas-young-leaders>.

dismissed the shared discussions of the two communities' histories that Anderson recalled about the conversation, instead focusing on the popular culture conversations that suggested affinity between the students. "The International Legacy Youth Leadership Project," like this dissertation's previous two case studies, thus reflected the compatibility of dialogic museum programming and people-to-people public diplomacy from the Department of State's perspective.

In addition to exploring the histories of the two movements and their parallels and differences, both groups of students also visited their own communities' historic sites, by themselves and with each other. All of these activities attempted to move the groups of students and museum staff to continue to develop a more complex understanding of their own histories, as well as a more sophisticated view of the similarities between the two countries histories. This was intended to move beyond the "great men" interpretations of Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King, Jr., by exploring "the role of youth in these two movements for social change."<sup>85</sup>

Embracing these objectives, the Apartheid Museum's weekly study sessions emphasized the Black Consciousness Movement led by Steve Biko through the study of Biko's book *I write what I like*. This work formed much of the grassroots protest and opposition to the Apartheid regime in South Africa in the second half of the twentieth century and inspired the Soweto youth uprising in 1976. Indeed, both Masiza and Davy were quick to emphasize Biko's importance and centrality to South Africa's anti-Apartheid history, while Mandela's role, popularly seen as central to the movement and also studied by the students through Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom*, was contextualized within this broader framework. As Davy explained, "Nelson

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<sup>85</sup> Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and Mandela House, "Final Proposal International Legacy Youth Leadership Exchange," 4.

Mandela's story was told as part of the general apartheid history and of course his leadership."<sup>86</sup> Unlike for the American students, who had already graduated from the BCRI's Legacy Youth Leadership program, this history was new to the students in South Africa. Davy acknowledged, "We were shocked to discover that our students had very little knowledge of their own history and even less of the Civil Rights Movement. We had to start from scratch, teaching them the apartheid story and later the civil rights movement."<sup>87</sup> Despite this knowledge differential the South African students also moved beyond the dominant figures of their history.

By exploring the international similarities, the South African students learned a more complex story than they would have if they had only studied their own history.<sup>88</sup> This exploration empowered the students involved to understand the leadership of the anti-Apartheid Movement more deeply given the absence of a comprehensive or complex discussion of these issues in the school curriculum or wider popular culture. Suggesting the benefits that this had on the students as leaders, Masiza argued, "It was very interesting for our students to learn about the similarities in the shared historical struggles. For them it was an opportunity to learn comprehensively about their struggle icons. The curriculum does not cover Steve Biko and Mandela as much as it should... This project gave them a wealth of knowledge as they were able to shine in the classroom and were also able to share the knowledge with fellow students."<sup>89</sup> These intentions were supported by the Soweto students' recollections of what they uncovered throughout their shared exploration. Soweto student Ntombizodwa (Wewe) Buthelezi, for example, offered a deep analysis of the anti-Apartheid Movement, the Civil Rights Movement,

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<sup>86</sup> Davy, email message to author, August 5, 2015.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Jacqueline (Jacqui) Nampí Masiza, e-mail message to author, August 5, 2015.

and the similarities and differences between the two movements that she developed through the weekly meetings, readings, films, and field trips. She recalled,

During the project we learnt the differences that were faced by black people living in South Africa. South Africans were discriminated merely because of their different skin colour. We also learnt that one of many reasons that triggered the marches by students in Soweto during 1976 (which was a turning point for South Africa) was the students were forced to learn in Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, other reasons were that black people were forced to carry a *dompas* wherever they went. Black people were not allowed to share food, bars, sport area, restaurant and toilet with white people. The black people were not even allowed to get married to a person outside their race or even should live near the white people. Through all of those differen[t] projects and movements such as the Black Consciousness were established, that taught black people to be proud of who they are, to embrace their difference and accept them, to stop feeling inferior to the whites.

The American Civil Rights Movement was not that different to the Apartheid system, both countries faced the same treatments. Whites were more privileged than African Americans. We learnt that the goals of the civil rights movement were to end racial segregation through non-violent protests. Although there were boycotts such as the bus boycott, which took place in Montgomery, Alabama, when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white person. During the project we discovered that both movements used secret places such as churches to hold private meetings and discuss how they were going to try and end the segregation.<sup>90</sup>

Parallels between the two countries experiences were not all that was studied in South Africa.

Soweto student Abongile Kala disagreed with Buthelezi's conclusion that the movements were "not that different" when she suggested that "The slight difference would be that American history had much more religious leaders who were against the segregation as compared to South Africa."<sup>91</sup>

The similarities and differences of the two communities' histories explored by the Soweto students during the Apartheid Museum's study sessions, and the grant's intention to explore the complex layers of participation in the two movements, was also mirrored in the BCRI's study meetings. However, because the American students were all graduates of the

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<sup>90</sup> Ntombizodwa (Wewe) Buthelezi, correspondence with author, February 26, 2016.

<sup>91</sup> Abongile Kala, correspondence with author, February 13, 2016.

BCRI's Legacy Youth Leadership Program, the study sessions in Birmingham built upon the strong base of knowledge the students already possessed about the American Civil Rights Movement. Barry McNealy, one of the BCRI's instructors for the weekly study sessions, recalled "it wasn't a whole lot of a leap to apply what they learned already to another [geographical] setting."<sup>92</sup> Michelle Craig, Coordinator of Youth Programs at the BCRI, acknowledged that the parallel explorations of the two communities' histories revealed similarities that existed between both countries' and communities' struggles against racial apartheid but also highlighted some nuanced differences. Reflecting on the concurrent study sessions and exploration of shared learning materials, Craig similarly noted that the students "were able to find out that the histories [are] very parallel and in some ways more horrible over there than they were here."<sup>93</sup> Like the South African students, the recollections of the American participating students suggested that the lessons imparted by the BCRI's facilitators during these sessions met the grant's goals to "increase knowledge and understanding of the parallels between the civil rights movement in Birmingham and the anti-apartheid struggle in Soweto."<sup>94</sup> Birmingham student Jesse Bryant recalled, "I learned the true legacy of white supremacy and the power of unity...yet unity of all helped rid [*sic*] the injustices of the segregationist."<sup>95</sup> Another Alabamian student, Jhana Plump, acknowledged the differences between the two countries' historical experiences: "The kids here were beaten with batons and water hoses, but in South Africa, you would be shot. It was much more gruesome."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Barry McNealy, interview with author, digital recording, by telephone, October 12, 2015.

<sup>93</sup> Michelle Craig, interview with author, digital recording, Birmingham, Alabama, October 11, 2013.

<sup>94</sup> Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and Mandela House, "Final Proposal International Legacy Youth Leadership Exchange," 4.

<sup>95</sup> Jesse Bryant, correspondence with author, February 2, 2016.

<sup>96</sup> Jhana Plump, quoted in John A. Brimley, "South African students in Birmingham celebrate Nelson Mandela International Day," July 18, 2011, *The Birmingham News*, [http://blog.al.com/birmingham-news-stories/2011/07/south\\_african\\_students\\_in\\_birm.html](http://blog.al.com/birmingham-news-stories/2011/07/south_african_students_in_birm.html) (accessed June 30, 2015).

### Activating sites of conscience

In keeping with both the Apartheid Museum's and BCRI's membership in the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC), learning about the two communities' histories was not the only goal of the project. A central goal of the grant was to use this history "to develop young people as leaders...[to] examine the implications for contemporary society."<sup>97</sup> This goal demonstrated what the ICSC highlights as its members' shared mission to activate "the power of places of memory to engage the public in connecting past and present in order to envision and shape a more just and humane future"<sup>98</sup> The project supported Graham Black's argument that museums "should also reveal to local people and communities the importance of having an active role in decision-making for the future."<sup>99</sup>

During their trip to Alabama, the South African students visited a number of the sites of conscience connected to the American Civil Rights Movement. In addition to the BCRI, the students visited the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church and Kelly Ingram Park in Birmingham, as well as civil rights sites in Selma and Montgomery, Alabama, including the Edmund Pettus bridge. These visits helped students understand the role of young people in the American movement and their particular experiences at those historic sites. Ward explained, "To come here, specifically to Birmingham, was big for them...And then they come here and see how many parallels there were and to go through the [16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist] church and have the opportunity to go through

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<sup>97</sup> Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and Mandela House, "Final Proposal International Legacy Youth Leadership Exchange," 4.

<sup>98</sup> "Mission Statement," International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, accessed October 1, 2015, <http://www.sitesofconscience.org/about-us/>.

<sup>99</sup> Graham Black, "Embedding Civic Engagement in Museums," in *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift*, ed. Gail Anderson, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Plymouth: AltaMira, 2012), 268.

the [Kelly Ingram] park. I think it was big. And we went to Selma and Montgomery and walked across that [Edmund Pettus] bridge.”<sup>100</sup>

Similarly, when the U.S. delegation traveled to South Africa, the students visited many of Johannesburg’s sites of conscience and met with veterans of the 1976 Soweto uprising. They explored at length the role of youth in the anti-Apartheid Movement in conjunction with the celebration of the Apartheid Museum’s community celebration of International Youth Day. After visiting Regina Mundi Church, Constitution Hill, and Market Theatre, in addition to the Voortrekker Mounument, Apartheid Museum, and Mandela House Museum during their trip to South Africa, the students reflected upon a deeper understanding of the anti-Apartheid Movement, as well as on more complex similarities and differences between Johannesburg and Birmingham. Despite the development of new knowledge about the parallels between the two countries’ shared histories, McNealy recalled that it was only in visiting each other’s countries, historic sites, and meeting young people from those places that the students truly developed a fuller understanding of the shared suffering in the two histories. He concluded:

Ultimately the trip there to Johannesburg, I believe, solidified in their minds how international the idea of discrimination and segregation was...I think that when they were able to take it out of a text book and talk to another human being that had experiences and ideas and a reference frame from which they could discuss it, I think it just made it much more powerful. And also when they were able to travel, they were able to see. We took them to many parts of South Africa, but I think some of the most telling parts was when they were able to see the shanties and the overwhelming poverty that exists as a result of the denial of people’s natural ability to flourish.<sup>101</sup>

Fortuitously, the combination of global celebrity and a historical site of conscience occurred during the American students’ trip to Johannesburg, and was later widely reported by project facilitators and all students as one of the defining memories of the year-long project.

Hearing American First Lady Michelle Obama “speak to young leaders about their role in

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<sup>100</sup> Ahmad Ward, interview with author.

<sup>101</sup> McNeally, interview with author.

promoting change” at historic Regina Mundi Church on Youth Day (in an event organized by the U.S. Consulate) combined the power of celebrity and fame with historical injustice through the choice of a venue in Soweto that was central to the anti-Apartheid Movement. Davy, who gave Mrs. Obama a tour of the Apartheid Museum during her visit to Johannesburg, later recalled, “We queued for hours in what was probably the coldest morning in Johannesburg, before we got into the venue to listen to Mrs. Obama speak. [It was a] Big highlight for all!”<sup>102</sup> Barry McNealy recalled that both groups of students were “transfixed” by Mrs. Obama’s remarks.<sup>103</sup> This unplanned moment connected the First Lady’s celebrity and message of youth empowerment to one of Johannesburg’s historic sites of conscience, further contributing to the project’s goal of using the physical sites of the anti-Apartheid and Civil Rights movements to learn about the struggles for racial equality and to encourage students to be leaders for change and social justice.

In a final evaluation for the project, Birmingham student Byrrh Bryant also acknowledged the historical and contemporary connections that emerged as a result of his deeper historical knowledge. He wrote, “The project broadened my knowledge of African history and allowed me to build friendships with youth from South Africa. *We also engaged in discussions about solving problems for the future.* This was the best thing that ever happened to me.”<sup>104</sup> [emphasis added] These discussions, South African Abongile Kala recalled, also provided one of the few opportunities for the students to connect their historical knowledge to current racial intolerance and injustice: “When we discuss[ed] about it, it all becomes emotional to imagine the

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<sup>102</sup> Davy, email message to author, August 5, 2015.

<sup>103</sup> McNealy, interview with author.

<sup>104</sup> Byrrh Bryant quoted in Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, *The Mandela House, and the Apartheid Museum, “Final Report,”* unpublished manuscript, no date, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Archive, 475.



pain that other people went through for us to be free. In all that we have learnt to embrace the colour of our skin and the freedom that we have.”<sup>105</sup>

The Apartheid Museum’s staff also suggested that using the past to talk and learn about social justice issues in South Africa was an important goal for their side of the collaboration. Masiza recalled, with the benefit of three years of hindsight, that learning about the parallels between the two movements and visiting historic sites in both countries—especially important for the Soweto students, many of whom had never left their part of Johannesburg—“made our kids appreciate themselves, their immediate environment their country and their Africanness...”<sup>106</sup> This reflection similarly suggests that Museums Connect facilitated a greater exploration of self through a deeper engagement with the past that challenged the participating students to consider their positions as potential leaders and forces for change.<sup>107</sup> In Birmingham, Craig also noted that the travel of the American students to South Africa and the work they did studying the anti-Apartheid Movement taught them “to be less arrogant about being from the United States of America. And for them to know that there are people just like them all over the world. People are people, period. It doesn’t matter where you come from.”<sup>108</sup> This lesson was significant considering the barrage of questions that faced the BCRI staff when they unveiled the project to the teens selected to take part and make the journey to South Africa. From queries about the logistics to other questions about the more mundane elements of South African life, the students and their parents mirrored friends and acquaintances who peppered Craig upon her

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<sup>105</sup> Kala, correspondence with author.

<sup>106</sup> Masiza, e-mail message to author.

<sup>107</sup> Other contemporary museum programming has sought to achieve these goals. See, for example, Ruth J. Abram, “Kitchen Conversations: Democracy in Action at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum,” *The Public Historian* 29, no. 1 (2007): 59-76.

<sup>108</sup> Craig, Interview with author.

return from South Africa with questions such as, “Do they have roads? Do they have animals walking up and down the street?”<sup>109</sup>

The virtue of visiting historic sites as a means of learning about their shared history was also reflected by BCRI facilitator Ahmad Ward, who speculated that visiting the sites of conscience in South Africa allowed a deeper understanding than classroom instruction. “For them [the American students] to go this far away and have that kind of cultural experience... a lot of those kids have never been the same... They still really are affected by being over there.” And he similarly recalled the group’s reaction of shock and horror upon seeing bullet holes in the walls of the Mandela House: “It was a very enriching experience for me as well as the kids.” This suggests that the experience was very powerful for the American students to understand the severity of feelings in Apartheid South Africa.<sup>110</sup>

For “The International Legacy Youth Leadership Project,” the shortened time frame of the project and the project’s focus on leadership and learning about the history of the two movements inadvertently avoided significant discussions about contemporary race relations. The focus on the historical exploration of the youth leadership in two communities’ struggles—addressed during the participants’ visits to both communities’ sites of conscience—created the unstated yet implicit conclusion that both communities have moved beyond deep racism since the Jim Crow and Apartheid eras. This conclusion was supported by participant and facilitator interviews. Despite a few notable exceptions that tangentially mentioned race while recalling their experiences, most participants neglected any discussion of race vis-à-vis this Museums Connect project. This marginalization of potentially dissonant discussions of contemporary race relations also occurred during the BCRI’s Nelson Mandela Day celebration.

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<sup>109</sup> Anderson, interview with author.; Craig, interview with author.

<sup>110</sup> Ward, interview with author.

**Mandela: “He’s just who he is!”**

The students’ study sessions moved beyond the “great man” narratives of Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King, Jr., to explore different layers of leadership and participation in the Civil Rights and anti-Apartheid Movements. Throughout their classroom study sessions and the travel portions of the grant to sites of conscience in both communities, the students focused on Biko, the grass-roots Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, the parallels and differences with Dr. Fred Shuttlesworth and the youth movement in Birmingham, and the role of clergy in the American movement. The main programmatic end of the grant, however, was the Nelson Mandela Day community celebration in Birmingham, where the figure of Nelson Mandela played a dominant role for the wider public.

During the visit of the South African students to Alabama, the BCRI hosted a brand-new community festival, Nelson Mandela Day, in adjoining Kelly Ingram Park to celebrate the project and connect the two countries’ histories. “I can’t describe the atmosphere in the park,” declared Priscilla Cooper, “It was electric.”<sup>111</sup> The success of the BCRI’s community festival in attracting new audiences—a point of great pride in the reflections of all BCRI staff involved—indicated both the significance of the historic connections between the two communities and their histories as well as the power of Nelson Mandela to inspire international audiences outside of South Africa. Laura Anderson reflected on this success and speculated about the draw of Mandela:

It [Mandela Day] somehow caught the attention of people who had never been here before and haven’t been here since. I mean the park was full of people with all different skin colors: that’s still pretty unusual, for that park or for our events. And, I got so many comments from people of all different types delighting in that, and I think it had a lot to do with how people feel about Nelson Mandela too...He’s just who he is!<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Cooper, interview with author.

<sup>112</sup> Anderson, interview by author.

A multiracial crowd of over a thousand was attracted to the festival—what Cooper called “a huge community impact”—while their usual annual Juneteenth festival attracted and continues to attract a much smaller and mostly African American audience. New corporate sponsorship was also attracted to support the event, with the connection to South Africa cited as the reason for the sponsorship. Amongst these organizations was a South African resident of Birmingham who invented the vuvuzela. For one day at least, this appeal allowed the BCRI to transcend its reputation as the “the black museum, [and that] white people don’t go there,” as Anderson suggested.<sup>113</sup>

Like Anderson, McNealy suggested that Mandela’s embrace of forgiveness and “the idea of working together, instead of trying to crush his enemies” may have had wider appeal in Birmingham. He speculated that in “a city like Birmingham, Alabama, with the history that it has, it’s very, very important to keep the idea of moving forward and not grinding axes or settling scores and trying to move forward in unity as a community, I think, in my opinion, that’s what appeals to Birminghamians about Nelson Mandela because we’ve seen it here, from what has taken place in the 1940s, and ‘50s, and ‘60s, to what takes place today.” He concluded that, “when you’ve lived it and see it first hand, and then to have an example, a living example at the time, such as Nelson Mandela, I just think that was just something that kind of called to people’s better nature.”<sup>114</sup> This analysis of Mandela’s broad public appeal is given further credibility by the large global outpouring of reverence and grief that followed his death in 2013. American news network CNN reflected the dominant interpretation of Mandela’s life when it reported after his death in December 2013: “His message of reconciliation, not vengeance, inspired the world

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> McNealy, interview with author.

after he negotiated a peaceful end to segregation and urged forgiveness for the white government that imprisoned him.”<sup>115</sup>

The centrality and importance of Mandela as a figure during the program was also reflected by the student participants who engaged in the year-long project and were at the center of Mandela Day festivities. “Mandela, the powerful man, the hero, the role model, he should be celebrated,” South African student Abongile Kala declared at the Mandela International Day Celebration in Birmingham, as reported in a July 18, 2011 story for *Birmingham News*. Reflecting a common sentiment about Mandela’s significance as both a South African and international icon of peace, Kala’s comment acknowledged his significance in the global struggle for human rights and the “The International Legacy Youth Leadership Project.” Highlighting how the BCRI’s celebration was similar to those occurring in South Africa on Mandela’s birthday, South African student Sibusiso Dube noted, “Because the same way you celebrate here, we celebrate him the same way in South Africa.”<sup>116</sup>

In his comments to a journalist at the Mandela Day celebration, Dube also moved beyond the “great man” interpretation of the festival and noted the historical parallels between the two movements: “In the civil rights movement, Americans had to put all they’ve got for their freedom... Like in South Africa, we had to sacrifice everything... The youth wanted changes in

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<sup>115</sup> Faith Karimi, “Nelson Mandela, anti-apartheid icon and father of modern South Africa, dies,” *CNN*, December 5, 2013, accessed November 13, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/12/05/world/africa/nelson-mandela/>; This was echoed in the British BBC’s, Canadian CBC’s, and Australian *Sydney Morning Herald* reports: “South Africa’s Nelson Mandela dies in Johannesburg,” *BBC*, 6 December 6, 2013, accessed November 11, 2015, accessed November 11, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-25249520>; “Nelson Mandela dead at 95,” CBC News, December 6, 2013, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/nelson-mandela-dead-at-95-1.2417872>; Leesha McKenny, “South Africa’s ‘greatest son’, former president Nelson Mandela, has dies at the age of 95,” December 6, 2013, accessed November 11, 2015, <http://www.smh.com.au/world/live-nelson-mandela-death-leaves-south-africa-in-mourning-20131205-2yuqt.html>.

<sup>116</sup> Sibusiso Dube, quoted in John A. Brimley, “South African students in Birmingham celebrate Nelson Mandela International Day,” July 18, 2011, *The Birmingham News*, accessed June 30, 2015) [http://blog.al.com/birmingham-news-stories/2011/07/south\\_african\\_students\\_in\\_birm.html](http://blog.al.com/birmingham-news-stories/2011/07/south_african_students_in_birm.html).

their community, they were fighting for freedoms.”<sup>117</sup> He also demonstrated an awareness of differences between the two movements, including the significance of churches and religious leaders in the American movement as compared to the South African movement.<sup>118</sup> Anderson also recalled that throughout the celebration, including during formal remarks that concluded the day’s activities, the students sought to educate the larger public about the connections between the two communities and their iconic leaders.<sup>119</sup>

It is difficult to know how successful the participants were in this endeavor. The attempts to draw conclusions about the parallels between the two movements highlight a movement away from the sole interpretation of Mandela, the “great man,” as the figure to be studied when exploring the two countries’ shared histories.<sup>120</sup> Barry McNealy optimistically reflected on what the audience took away from the program: “I’m sure people left with a greater knowledge of the story of South Africa and its connection to the history of Birmingham and the Jim Crow south. I’m sure they left with an appreciation of that connection, but then they also got the chance to come out and celebrate a public space, which was enjoyable.”<sup>121</sup> And the presence of both countries’ students on stage at the Mandela Day celebration listening to and singing songs of both the anti-Apartheid Movement and the American Civil Rights Movement, joined by veterans of the Birmingham movement, suggest that this was also possible.<sup>122</sup> Unlike the aforementioned reflections of the participating students and facilitators that showed a deep engagement with the two histories and their similarities and differences throughout the course of the project, the public engagement with this history is much less certain. Given the one-time public response to

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Anderson, “Promoting Civil and Human Rights Worldwide,” 54.

<sup>120</sup> Dwyer, “Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement,” 18.

<sup>121</sup> McNealy, interview with author.

<sup>122</sup> Cooper, interview by author.

“Mandela Day” and the community’s lack of any similar kind of response to subsequent programming by the BCRI, as reported by BCRI staff, it is unclear if the public moved beyond the “great man” interpretation of Mandela as an international figure of peace. The appeal of Mandela in Birmingham can certainly be explained by Owen J. Dwyer’s analysis of the “emphasis on individual greatness and dramatic events” that attracts “visitors in an entertainment market saturated with the spectacular and hyperreal.”<sup>123</sup> Dwyer argues that the larger focus on international human rights by the BCRI and the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis “shifts attention away from the contemporary and local towards the spectacular and global.”<sup>124</sup> This analysis can be extrapolated to the BCRI’s success in attracting diverse publics to their Mandela Day celebration. It is quite possible, therefore, that the Mandela Day program offered a one-time celebration of a near-universally praised figure considered safe and comfortable for a city in which politics are still wrapped in the complexities of race.<sup>125</sup>

In addition to the public’s interpretation of Nelson Mandela at the Mandela Day program in Birmingham, the public festival proved to be a one-off opportunity for the BCRI to engage with new audiences. All BCRI staff involved with the Museums Connect project lamented the Institute’s inability to replicate the public excitement that the Mandela Day program created. This outcome, similar to issues of sustainability seen in chapter four and five and addressed more fully later, contradicted the approach to serving diverse community audiences. Mindy Duitz argues it “is critical that all museums realize that serving their communities does not mean just a seasonal program or an annual exhibition in the ‘community gallery.’ It is an ongoing activity

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<sup>123</sup> Dwyer, “Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement,” 14.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>125</sup> For fuller discussions of the politics of commemoration, and the politics of commemoration and celebration versus a complex and nuanced interpretation, see John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).; and John R. Gillis, *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

that requires clear policy and sufficient resources. It is also a reflection of an institution's mission and its vision of its role as a public educational institution."<sup>126</sup> Although a lack of "sustained resources" and a "clear policy" beyond Museums Connect existed for both museums, additional moments of vibrant and spontaneous, but perhaps harder to quantify, community engagements occurred when both museum staff members and the students traveled to the other country.

Beyond the student activities and the one-time public event of the Mandela Day Celebration in Birmingham, the project's international subject matter, collaboration with a city and country with historic connections to Birmingham, and opportunity for international travel to Alabama created additional opportunities for spontaneous moments of community engagement. While exploring Birmingham during a break in scheduled activities, Apartheid Museum project facilitator Masiza recalled a moment when she met local community activists and coffee shop owners Yvonne Thomas and Yvette Chatman [also BCRI Parent Educator & Curriculum Facilitator] "and other ladies having a discussion in a community where literacy was taught to homeless people and all the projects done in that small environment."<sup>127</sup> Masiza recalled this encounter with joy and suggested that it was inadvertently one of the highlights of her time in the United States as it allowed for genuine dialogue and community exploration. From her perspective, Chatman similarly recalled the power of these short conversations and the quick relationships that developed. She noted, "They were so full of laughter. Jacque [*sic*] said that the shop was full of Ubuntu, a South African philosophy that loosely means 'humanness, connectiveness [*sic*] and 'I am because you are'. I thanked her and promised that I would use that term whenever I talked about my business." Chatman concluded, "It was really wonderful to

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<sup>126</sup> Mindy Duitz, "The Soul of a Museum: Commitment to Community at the Brooklyn Children's Museum," in *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, ed. in Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute, 1992), 242.

<sup>127</sup> Masiza, e-mail message to author.



meet both of them. It's always a pleasure to meet someone that has made a difference in your living, and life. I am better for meeting the two [Jacqui and Wayde] of them.”<sup>128</sup> Although this encounter was brief, the passion of Masiza's and Chatman's responses suggests the possibility that Museums Connect can foster spontaneous moments of encounter and engagement by facilitating foreign participants' exposure to the other museum's community. While hard to quantify, this can have positive impacts for both museums and their community members. It certainly serves as an example of the Department of State's people-to-people diplomacy, and the potential to further the BCRI's standing within a community that it had little relationship with. It also drew attention to the Museums Connect program, and connected Birmingham's wider public with South Africa and the Apartheid Museum. In so doing, it shows the potential of a project between two museums and communities with shared histories to forge deeper community bonds that extend beyond the expected benefits of participation in a year-long project.

### **“Wow! I'm in Africa!” Reflection-in-action**

Unlike the two previous case studies analyzed in chapters four and five, “The International Youth Legacy Leadership Project” featured shared inquiry between the two groups of museum professionals in Johannesburg and Birmingham. The shared histories and relative size and scope of the two museums, as well as the abandonment of the oral history project, contributed to the relatively equitable power relationships between the two museums and their staff. Despite their role as the lead museum, the willingness of the BCRI staff to be reflective and not assume expertise in working with the Apartheid Museum staff and some of their own local community members further reduced the power differential between the two museums and contributed to the sense of shared exploration. Both museums' staff reflected upon the experience of working on a comparative project with a country that has a shared historical

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<sup>128</sup> Yvette Chatman, e-mail message to author, September 1, 2015.

subject matter and with a museum of a similar size, mission, and capacity. They suggested that the BCRI staff did not consider themselves the “experts” in this shared endeavor and that they, both museums’ staff and the student participants, were learning together. This approach to transnational public history project facilitation also had the unintended impact of making a deep personal and professional impact on the project facilitators, who recalled that they often felt like they were learning as much as their students.

Many of the BCRI staff reported that working on a comparative transnational project with two museums in South Africa expanded their knowledge and perspectives on their shared histories, while readily admitting that they didn’t know everything about these historical topics. In addition to Laura Anderson’s aforementioned desire to share the planning process with her South African colleagues, Ahmad Ward posited:

I think that once you get past the whole thing of “Wow! I’m in Africa!” which was big for me. Every night I used to stand there like “Wow I’m in Africa!” It’s a place where I’ve always wanted to go and “I’m here,” that needs to not be understated. Well once you get past that it was really about the history for me. I think, I’m always looking at ways that I can tie it, I do a lot of talking for the Institute, that’s one of the things that I do, and I do a lot of programming, and it just helped me to really get a handle on the human rights aspect of this...And I think it has helped me to expand my knowledge base in a way that I think I’m doing a better job of describing what the power of segregation was. And how it was necessary to end it.<sup>129</sup>

Ward’s lengthy response highlighted the project’s power to challenge him to think in new ways, provide him additional context for how he interprets the American Civil Rights Movement, and connect that movement to a wider international context as the public face for the BCRI. He continued to suggest that visiting the sites in South Africa and his experiences facilitating the project provided a larger, more nuanced, and less American-centric approach to civil rights, connecting it to wider human rights. “It helped me to get a handle on the [wider] human rights aspect of this [the American Civil Rights Movement]...It has helped me to expand my

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<sup>129</sup> Ward, interview with author.

knowledge base in a way that I think I'm doing a better job of describing what the power of segregation was and how it was necessary to end it."<sup>130</sup>

Ward's openness to new experiences and perspectives and his willingness to place himself in the position of fellow student alongside the school-aged participants was also particularly obvious in his description of a number of powerful emotional responses to visiting South Africa with the students from Birmingham. He recalled,

Wow, 'we are actually here!' And, [co-facilitator] Barry [McNealy] and I have been friends for a long-time, so we had this experience like I felt like I was at home. Most of the people that met us over the first couple of days were like 'Welcome home brother!' And, wow, that is something. And especially if you are a young black male—to be in the area where for the first time in your life you're in a majority...I've never had that experience before. It was powerful.<sup>131</sup>

Ward's enthusiasm was matched by Priscilla Cooper, who, although she did not work on the day-to-day operations of the grant, reflected on the virtues of working with like-minded colleagues in South Africa in a shared, balanced, and collaborative way. "To work with museum professionals in another country was very professionally rewarding. I think, the big piece being, being able to work through the potential problem and to collaboratively come up with solutions on how we were going to make it happen in spite of—that was great."<sup>132</sup> Like Ward, Cooper's reflections on the project also suggest that she embraced the role of facilitator rather than knowledge giver as she acknowledged how much she learned throughout the year-long project. "Personally because I am actually a student of African history and culture...to have that experience was both personally and professionally rewarding."<sup>133</sup>

In Birmingham, the admission of ignorance about South Africa and the willingness to confess to limitations in their professional knowledge and practice led the BCRI to welcome in

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Cooper, interview with author.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

community members, who acted with much more authority about the project's historical subject matter than Anderson, Ward, and the BCRI staff. One South African woman who lived in Birmingham, Nonhlanhla Jones, became a mentor to the American students as they learned about the two countries' histories. She shared her own experiences and knowledge of the Apartheid era and anti-Apartheid Movement with the students. In addition to talking about Apartheid in South Africa, Jones also helped prepare Ward, McNealy, and Craig to take the students to the country.<sup>134</sup> The extent to which the BCRI embraced this new community voice in its programming and welcomed the input of community members was reflected in the number of recollections of the project that illustrated Jones' involvement and expertise. For example, Anderson later recalled, "[s]he's like one of the staff almost."<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, unlike the community participants of Birmingham who were only attracted to the BCRI's Mandela Day celebration, Jones has remained engaged with the BCRI as a community supporter and advocate as well as unofficial mentor and facilitator of the BCRI's youth programs beyond the Museums Connect grant.

The level of cooperation between the two groups of staff was a reoccurring theme in each of the facilitator's reflections on the project. The level of cooperation as well as the deep personal friendships that evolved out of the two staff's shared inquiry was perhaps best epitomized by Masiza's recollection of celebrating her birthday in Birmingham. Masiza recalled, "My birthday fell on the day of our departure [back to South Africa from Birmingham] and everyone made a big deal of it. It was what we call the Spirit of Ubuntu (Human Kindness) in

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<sup>134</sup> Craig, interview with author.

<sup>135</sup> Anderson, interview with author.

South Africa and Barry's [project facilitator, Barry McNeally's] wife made a caramel cake for me, my favorite, and I got gifts."<sup>136</sup>

While the BCRI staff demonstrated a willingness to share their control of the project activities with their South African colleagues, and despite the aforementioned relative parity between the two nations' public history contexts, in the realm of youth-oriented programs and community engagement a significant differential still existed between the BCRI's and Apartheid Museum's programmatic capacities. As Museums Connect was created within the American public history paradigm of community-engaged museums, and given the BCRI's role in developing the project out of their own Legacy Youth Leadership Project, the Apartheid Museum staff were able to develop a new method of community engagement and experience how to engage with youth through the Museums Connect project. Davy reflected on the Apartheid Museum's first forays into working with young people in Johannesburg: "On a professional level, a similar feeling of pride and sense of achievement that through the auspices of the museum, we were able to achieve a successful intervention and project. We really need to do it on an annual basis so that more students can be impacted."<sup>137</sup> Her reflection highlighted that working with the BCRI's established youth program through Museums Connect confirmed the importance and potential benefits of community engagement for the Apartheid Museum and the young people of Soweto and Johannesburg. Masiza also suggested that seeing the work that the BCRI did with students in its local community inspired her in her own professional work, declaring that she really benefited from understanding "how museums work in other countries."<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Masiza, e-mail message to author.

<sup>137</sup> Davy, email message to author.

<sup>138</sup> Masiza, e-mail message to author.

The imposition of community-based programming on the Apartheid Museum due to the parameters of the Museums Connect program encouraged the South African museum to engage in a practice developed within the American public history context. Unlike potentially more nefarious practices that might be exported through a program like Museums Connect, the exchange of ideas regarding museums and community engagement was seen as a positive development for the Apartheid Museum staff rather than a sinister foreign imposition. Indeed, both Masiza and Davy lamented a lack of funds, given the originality of this idea to South African public history, to continue this method of engagement. Masiza reflected a positive embrace of community engagement: “I managed to help the youth from my community achieve their full potential in life. I built a very good relationship with the students, which are still going strong. I still learn so much from them, and I am humbled by their gratitude for the role I played in their lives...every milestone in their lives is shared, and I get teary every time!”<sup>139</sup> Davy similarly suggested that the virtues of the type of engagement enacted during the project could act as a catalyst for the Apartheid Museum to begin more community programs: “On a personal level, I have a sense of pride and feel a bit like a Big Mama! To see the students excelling as they are, knowing that the programme has much to do with it, makes me proud and fills me with a need to do more.”<sup>140</sup>

Michelle Peregrin of the Department of State also subsequently applauded this impact on the translation of the American professional practice of community engagement to the Apartheid Museum as a result of Museums Connect. Unlike Cedar’s previous recollection of the students’ Skype conversations that neglected the public history aspects of the grant in his whole-hearted praise of the people-to-people conversations, Peregrin concluded:

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Davy, email message to author.

I heard about the impact that Museums Connect has had on its alumni. A museum team from The Apartheid Museum in South Africa was so impressed by the Birmingham Institute of Civil Rights' [sic] inclusion of high school volunteers in its activities and operations that they decided to launch their very first volunteer program, with the Museums Connect participants as its first cohort, upon their return. Almost a year after this exchange took place, I learned that the South African students not only continue to volunteer, but were so inspired by their trip to Alabama that they are now focused on actively pursuing scholarships to study in the United States.<sup>141</sup>

While emphasizing the over-reliance that DOS and also AAM have on the participating museums to report their grants' impacts, this reflection by Peregrin championed the common exchange of ideas, with special emphasis on the impact of the BCRI on the Apartheid Museum, which led to an embrace of the BCRI's practices and behaviors through Museums Connect. This outcome of the project exemplified the larger shift in American public diplomacy that places exchange and dialogue at the center, and appreciates the foreign participants' agency to make their own decisions rather than have Americans attempt to overtly sell America's ideas and culture.

### **Conclusion**

Within similar historical and public history contexts, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and its two South African partners successfully overcame challenges at the beginning of the project to engage their respective high school students in a shared exploration of both countries' histories, and the similarities and connections between them. The inclusion of the Apartheid Museum inadvertently helped the project move beyond the "great men" of the Civil Rights and anti-Apartheid Movements and explore their complexities by providing an institution that in size and interpretive scope more closely resembled the BCRI. The willingness of the BCRI staff to collaborate with rather than dominate their South African counterparts throughout

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<sup>141</sup> Michelle Peregrin, "Museums and Communities Connect," *Dip Notes U.S. Department of State Official Blog* (blog), May 18, 2012, accessed June 8, 2015, <https://blogs.state.gov/stories/2012/05/18/museums-and-communities-connect>.

the project, and also to understand their role as facilitators, contributed to the shared environment for the project.<sup>142</sup> However, even though these relationships existed between the two museums, the capacity of the BCRI to engage in youth programs—the Museums Connect grant grew out of their annual Youth Legacy Leadership Program—drove the form of the grant and challenged the Apartheid Museum to overcome this barrier to begin a youth program, a point that was celebrated by both the South African museum professionals as well as Department of State officials.

After the tangible oral history project was abandoned, the shared exploration between the two groups of students through weekly study sessions and visits to historic sites of conscience became the central grant activity. While the students engaged in a deep and complex shared exploration of the two communities' histories, time constraints, the need to study two complex histories, subsequent progress, and a focus on leadership mostly prevented a deeper discussion of contemporary issues of race during the project. The Mandela Day celebration hosted in Birmingham, moreover, emphasized the different impacts of the grant on two “publics”: 1) the public at the center of the grant proposal, the participating students, who engaged in the longer and more in-depth study of the two movements, and 2) a wider general public in Birmingham who, for a few short hours, came together to celebrate Nelson Mandela. The spontaneous moments of encounter between Apartheid Museum staff and a wider public while in Birmingham, in addition to the positive reception of the Mandela Day celebration, also suggest one model for engaging a wider community beyond the narrow circle of students at the center of the Museums Connect project.

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<sup>142</sup> Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski, “Introduction,” in *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*, ed. Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski (Philadelphia: Pew Center for the Arts & Heritage, 2011), 13.



Much like the other case studies explored in this dissertation, a sustained, long-term engagement with these new publics was precluded by the one-time Museums Connect funding. Priscilla Cooper acknowledged these challenges from the BCRI's perspective. Eighteen months after the grant ended she recalled, "We've been able to continue the relationship with other funding, but those kids would love to come back, and our kids would love to go back. Some of them have questions about trying to come here to school and college. Being able to get tied in to other resources once a project is over, that would be very helpful."<sup>143</sup> However, she acknowledged, "It's given us a model for how we may look at building other international collaborations," a significant outcome for a museum that self-reflectively struggled to "activate its international mission" prior to the award of a Museums Connect project.<sup>144</sup> While noteworthy, this was acknowledged as somewhat limited by the financial and human resource costs of conducting a transnational partnership. Mirroring the sentiment of the directors of the MHHE and BMCM in chapter five, Cooper resignedly acknowledged, "money and staff resources, those are the challenges."<sup>145</sup> Ward similarly noted that since the project ended, "we get a lot of requests if we're going to do it again. People [the broader public] asking us if we'll do it again, and it all depends on money, obviously. If the opportunity opened itself again, I don't think we'd hesitate to try and do it again."<sup>146</sup> The BCRI, however, has not continued to engage with the same partners and create a similar level of community excitement in Birmingham as was generated by Mandela Day, and the project has not been replicated.<sup>147</sup>

The similar laments of the Apartheid Museum staff in 2015, three years after the end of the project, also highlighted the challenges of sustainability of "The International Legacy Youth

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<sup>143</sup> Cooper, interview with author.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ward, interview with author.

<sup>147</sup> Anderson, interview with author.

Leadership Project.” Davy recalled that like the BCRI, the Museums Connect partnership “fulfill[ed] one of the key objectives of the [Apartheid] [M]useum, which is partnerships with other similar institutions to spread the word of reconciliation and peace.”<sup>148</sup> She continued to lament: “I wish we had more [money] as there is so much to do, learn and share. The continuation of the program and the consistency is of vital importance.” Masiza’s commentary also suggested a much greater sense of urgency to continue the work begun during the project. She continued, “Even if we don’t take kids to the US but have joint programs to keep the project alive. We have produced Youth Leaders and possibly future country leadership and they need to share their experiences and to impart the knowledge to the next group.”<sup>149</sup>

In contrast to the two institutions’ inability to develop a sustainable longer-term relationship beyond personal friendships and exchanged correspondence (a parallel of the other case studies analyzed in chapters four and five of this dissertation), the student participants extended the work they began during “The International Youth Legacy Project.” A number of the Birmingham students, and one of the South African students, participated in the 2012 eleventh annual Birmingham Teen Pledge Conference.<sup>150</sup> These students not only reflected on their Museums Connect experience in a session that they organized and hosted called “International Stereotypes,” but also were able to speak to larger issues of overcoming stereotyping and intolerance that they themselves had experienced through their connection to the museums and their experiences activating the memory of the Civil Rights and anti-Apartheid Movements.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Davy, email message to author.

<sup>149</sup> Masiza, e-mail message to author.

<sup>150</sup> Craig, interview with author.

<sup>151</sup> Anderson, “Promoting Civil and Human Rights Worldwide,” 56

Both museums' staff speculated that the project empowered the students as leaders and advocates for the museums. Reflecting on the students who were nominated for the project due to their leadership qualities, Davy mused hopefully, "This project was the catalyst for them to pursue their leadership qualities in a far more informed manner. They realised that there was a bigger world out there and most of them are now at University, or distance learning working at the same time. We believe that the programme enabled their own thinking about their lives, dreams and potential. A few of them have really grabbed their opportunities and are running with it."<sup>152</sup> The sense of potential among these leaders was mirrored by Masiza who optimistically suggested, "Our students are excelling in their chosen fields...the sky is the limit...anything is possible. They are now leaders at College and are involved in leadership programs to enhance that skill...A quest for learning and future leadership was extended."<sup>153</sup> The only note of caution in Masiza's reflection was a need for these young people not to squander the opportunity that the grant afforded them to effect change in their community. "We have produced Youth Leaders and possibly future country leadership, and they need to share their experiences and then impart the knowledge to the next group."<sup>154</sup> Anderson similarly suggested that both museums gained advocates and supporters from both the students and their friends and families. "These same students also serve as docents at BCRI, incorporating their experiences and knowledge of South Africa's history into comments they offer visitors as they guide them through the Human Rights Gallery."<sup>155</sup> Craig suggested that the impact was mutual on both sides of the partnership. In paraphrasing a South African student who was interviewed while in Birmingham, she enthused: "It makes me inspired to know that I can go back home and go to the Apartheid Museum of the

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<sup>152</sup> Davy, email message to author.

<sup>153</sup> Masiza, e-mail message to author.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Anderson, interview with author.

Mandela House and do the same thing, I want to do what they do [give tours].”<sup>156</sup> This empowerment emerged out of the BCRI’s and Apartheid Museum’s facilitation of a shared exploration of Birmingham’s and Johannesburg’s shared histories during the Civil Rights and anti-Apartheid Movements.

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<sup>156</sup> Craig, interview with author.

## CONCLUSION

**“[T]he construction ‘Sharing Authority’ suggests this is something we do—that in some important sense ‘we’ have authority, and we need or ought to share it. ‘A Shared Authority,’ in contrast, suggests something that ‘is’—that in the nature of oral and public history, we are not the sole interpreters. Rather, the interpretive and meaning-making process is in fact shared by *definition*—it is inherent in the dialogic nature of an interview, and in how audiences receive and respond to exhibitions and public history interchanges in general. In this sense, we don’t have authority to give away, really, to the extent we might assume.” Michael Frisch, 2011<sup>1</sup>**

### A shared authority?

“International public history is attracting increasing attention within the wider discipline of public history,” declared William Willingham in 2015 reflecting a broader sentiment about the global spread of a field that has its origins in the United States. Willingham continued, “Attendance at the annual meetings of the National Council on Public History (NCPH) now includes historians from a variety of nations, and the meetings contain increasing numbers of sessions devoted to various aspects of public historical practice from an international perspective.”<sup>2</sup> The idea that Public History is becoming more international reflects the growth in public history as a discipline in countries other than the United States. This gradual shift led to the 2011 creation of the International Federation for Public History-*Fédération Internationale pour l’Histoire Publique* that was established “to create international linkages between public historians and promote the development of a world-wide network of Public History practitioners. The federation’s purpose is to encourage, promote, and coordinate, at an

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Frisch, “From A Shared Authority to the Digital Kitchen, and Back,” in *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*, ed. Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski (Philadelphia: Pew Center for the Arts & Heritage, 2011), 127.

<sup>2</sup> William Willingham, “International Collaboration and comparative research,” *Public History Commons*, June 22, 2015, accessed March 9, 2016, <http://ncph.org/history-at-work/international-collaboration/>.

international level, contacts, teaching and research in public history.”<sup>3</sup> The recent inclusion of scholarship, perspectives, and reflections on public history practice in other countries has caught up with the reality that public history practitioners, whether calling themselves “public historians” or not, have been practicing their craft in other countries for as long as public historians in the United States. The use of the term “international”—whether in formal articles, conference proceedings, or website metadata to tag posts and comments—suggests public history practiced *within* the boundaries of the nation state. The American Alliance of Museum’s 2016-2020 Strategic Plan also reflected this understanding. The plan stated AAM’s belief, “In active participation in the global community and embracing international perspectives.”<sup>4</sup> And it set out the goal, “Global Thinking: connect US museums to the international community.”<sup>5</sup> In analyzing public history projects within the Museums Connect grant, however, this dissertation explores public history *across* the nation-state boundary and the consequences of pairing it with public diplomacy, a practice premised on the idea of the nation-state. And in acknowledging the long and complex history of the term “international” this dissertation turns instead to the oft-used, but little-defined term “transnational” to label the process of flow, movement, interconnection, negotiation, and multiple agencies present in Museums Connect.

This analysis of Museums Connect locates the program’s origins as both a museum and as a public diplomacy program. The public history and public diplomacy contexts coupled with the moment of the program’s creation featured similar intentions to achieve a deeper community impact for the amount of money spent. It is argued that despite the confluence of immediate factors, Museums Connect was created by the convergence of two paradigms—public history’s

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<sup>3</sup> “About,” International Federation for Public History- Fédération Internationale pour l’Histoire Publique, accessed March 20, 2016, <http://ifph.hypotheses.org/sample-page>.

<sup>4</sup> “Strategic Plan, 2016-2020,” American Alliance of Museums, accessed May 6, 2016, <http://www.aam-us.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/english.pdf?sfvrsn=0>, 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

shared authority and public diplomacy’s people-to-people diplomacy—that are driven by different imperatives. Thus, the seeming mimesis between the more recent dialogic public history paradigm and the idea of people-to-people diplomacy extends only so far.

In museum projects principally sponsored by the United States government with the purpose of furthering U.S. interests abroad, there cannot be a truly shared authority between the two sides of the partnership, however “soft” the methods of persuasion used. This dissertation, therefore, challenges Michael Frisch’s 2011 argument that “the interpretive and meaning-making process is in fact shared *by definition*—it is inherent in the dialogic nature of an interview, and in how audiences receive and respond to exhibitions and public history interchanges in general.”<sup>6</sup> [emphasis added] In some respects, Museums Connect continues the long but slow-moving trend of American history museums “giving community members more say in what stories the museum showcases and how they get told,” as well as the more recent movement of public history sites and museums engaging the knowledge and expertise of the “public” and “communities” while decentering the authoritative voice of the curator.<sup>7</sup> Although AAM administers the program and the museums are left alone before and during the project, the Department of State’s involvement in dictating the audiences for the program, the geographic areas most likely to receive funding, and the requirement that the American “lead museum” control the financial and administrative aspects of the grant creates power dynamics that inform how these programs function. Museums seek to share their authority with the non-American museum and their audiences, yet the Department of State, motivated by the goal of improving America’s standing in the world, gives the power to the American museums and continually

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<sup>6</sup> Frisch, “From *A Shared Authority* to the Digital Kitchen,” 127.

<sup>7</sup> Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski, “Introduction,” in *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*, ed. Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski (Philadelphia: Pew Center for the Arts & Heritage, 2011), 11.

reinforces it throughout the Museums Connect grants. This framing of the program and the centrality of the American museum as the “lead museum” complicate Katharine T. Corbett and Howard S. (Dick) Miller’s idea of “shared inquiry.” They build upon Frisch’s idea of shared authority “in which practitioners and stakeholders joined in give and take discussions to set mutually acceptable questions and to find mutually satisfying answers.”<sup>8</sup> The case studies in this dissertation highlight moments of “give and take discussions” and attempt to “set mutually acceptable questions and to find mutually satisfying answers.” The structure of Museums Connect with its emphasis on young people and marginalized groups and the American-run dynamics of the program where the American museums act as the “lead museum,” however, shape the nature of the complex web of relationships in this program between the museums and their communities.

### **Approaching more and less equitable distributions of power**

Within the program’s established power dynamics the three case studies analyzed in this dissertation reveal different factors that either promote or preclude more equitable power dynamics in these transnational public history projects. Emerging out of the specific local, institutional, and personal contexts that shape each of the participating museums and participants, these case studies highlight the heterogeneity of the museum field and emphasize the virtue of looking at three different case studies to see Museums Connect through what Corinne A. Kratz and Ivan Karp call a “prismatic view.”<sup>9</sup>

In the United States, despite some innovative school instruction methods, broadly speaking, the adult is still the teacher and the young person the student. Given these didactic

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<sup>8</sup> Katharine T. Corbett and Howard S. (Dick) Miller, “A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry,” *The Public Historian* 28, no. 1 (2006): 18.

<sup>9</sup> Corinne A. Kratz and Ivan Karp, “Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations,” in *Museums Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, ed. Ivan Karp et al (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 17.



power relations in working with young people, the DOS's insistence on young people as one of their target communities meant that the power relationships between the museums and their communities of students were often unequal, as reflected in all three of the case studies. Only in the case of the National Museum of Afghanistan's partner school in Kabul, Marefat High School, did the relationships between the school, students, and project facilitators, resemble a shared inquiry. In that particular case, the selection of a school focused on civic education and student empowerment rooted in the history of the persecution of the Hazara ethnic group, in addition to Project Director Jeff Stern's sympathies and biases towards the school and its students, created conditions for the students to assume significant agency. In so doing they guided the terms of the dialogue both during their trip to the United States and in their own country vis-à-vis the National Museum of Afghanistan.

The influence of the NCC facilitators over the Philadelphia students, leading to the effacement of their minority status in keeping with the NCC's normative and celebratory narratives of American pluralism, was similarly reflected in the other two case studies. Throughout the "International Youth Legacy Leadership Project," despite the fact that the BCRI and Apartheid Museum staff learned alongside their students, the instruction remained hierarchical from the two museums' staff. And this approach to education was mirrored by the two projects between the MHHE and BMCM. Although these museums worked with slightly older undergraduate and some graduate students, the framing of the projects as a vehicle for public history pedagogy created the conditions for didactic instruction that also impeded power being shared between the museums and their students. In reflecting on a number of case studies in a special edition of *Public History Review* about public historians working in an "international" context, Chinese public historian Na Li argued: "While collaboration is a regular

component of public history programs, going global poses further challenges...different pedagogic philosophies make some basic assumptions in our field not so basic. Sharing authority, for example, does not come easily in classrooms that have long been dominated by one authoritative voice.”<sup>10</sup> While Li’s comment is directed toward international higher education classrooms, her argument is too optimistic about the hierarchical power relations of American classrooms and youth programming more broadly.

In addition to the Department of State’s preferred audience of young people that shapes the power relationships of the projects, Museums Connect functions as a public diplomacy program. It has the intention of building affinity between participants in order to promote consensus and celebrate the commonalities between participants and museums. This approach stands in contrast with another significant mode of transnational public history, the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience. Since 1999, the ICSC has connected a coalition of historic sites of trauma and memory from around the world for programming. Its members seek to uncover dissonant and traumatic historical narratives of injustice with the intention of “transforming places that preserve the past into dynamic spaces that promote civic action on today’s struggles for human rights and justice.” The ICSC is a group of “sites, individuals, and initiatives” whose mission is to use dialogue to activate “the power of places of memory to engage in connecting past and present in order to envision and shape a more just and humane future.” By creating an international network of historical sites, the ICSC has sought to begin transnational conversations about the present that arise from the past. This includes the importance of reconciliation, preventing historical erasure, and engaging in complex dialogue rather than

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<sup>10</sup> Parts of chapter three were published in the same special edition. Na Li, “Going Public, Going Global: Teaching Public History Through International Collaborations,” *Public History Review* 22 (2015): 2.

interpreting overly reductive narratives about particular sites.<sup>11</sup> In this way, the ICSC and its sites and programming are engaged in public history pursuits intended to use dialogue to disrupt dominant interpretations of the past, thus causing uneasiness. The two modes of transnational public history were combined by the “International Legacy Youth Leadership Project,” which partnered two members of the ICSC to interrogate the counter-hegemonic narratives of racial apartheid in their respective countries. The project, under the auspices of the Museums Connect, was far more reconciliatory and mostly avoided difficult discussions of contemporary race relations in favor of the historical exploration of the two communities struggles to overcome racial apartheid. The unstated yet implicit conclusion emerged in this project that in the present the communities have greatly improved race relations that efface a discussion of any contemporary issues in either country.

Membership of the ICSC reflects the BCRI and Apartheid Museum’s shared interpretive approach to their countries’ histories that, combined with parallel public history contexts, allowed those museums to achieve a relatively equitable partnership, with the exception of the Apartheid Museum’s embrace of youth programming. This was created only through the inclusion of the Apartheid Museum to solve the problem created by the Mandela House’s leadership and governmental changes. In contrast, the dynamics between the museums during “Being We the People” was exacerbated by the particular public history context of the National Museum of Afghanistan that has suffered from decades of civil war, looting, damage, and dependence on international aid. Despite the museum’s enthusiasm for the project and the opportunity to interact with their community, the physical and human capacity of the museum to do more than act as an exhibition space for the photography project was severely limited.

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<sup>11</sup> “Mission Statement,” International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, accessed October 1, 2015, <http://www.sitesofconscience.org/about-us/>.

Discrepancies between the ways that history is understood and put to use in society, and the different functions that museums have in reflecting public memories and meanings within the non-American and American contexts, provided challenges for project activities that were assumed to be entirely manageable within an American context. Understanding the foreign public history context, therefore, is centrally important to understanding the larger context in which this American program is conducted abroad and how this might shape the relationships between the collaborating museums and their staff and project facilitators.

In the two projects conducted by the Ben M'sik Community Museum (BMCM) in Casablanca and the Museum of History and Holocaust Education in Kennesaw, Georgia, the context that the BMCM emerged from was central to understanding its actions throughout the grant. In its attempts to engage the previously neglected community of Ben M'sik, the BMCM engaged with audiences and communities in ways that museums in Morocco previously had not because of their colonial and post-colonial history. Because of this legacy of creating homogenous national narratives to serve tourists and French colonial powers at the expense of local and marginalized Moroccans, the BMCM negotiated the activities of the grant to best suit the needs of its communities.

Understanding the foreign public history and museological context alone does not guarantee a shared endeavor, or equitable relationships between the participating museums. The sensibilities of the American museums' staff and how they understand their role as project leaders and public historians was seen in all three case studies to have a significant impact on the process of the grants. The reflections of the facilitators at both the BCRI and the National Constitution Center, the urge to collaborate with their foreign museum colleagues and learn alongside the student participants in the Johannesburg-Birmingham example, and the desire to

create space for dialogue between the participants in the Kabul-Philadelphia project, consciously or perhaps unconsciously illustrate a positioning of the public historian as “facilitator” rather than knowledge giver. In so doing, the staff practiced what Miller and Corbett called “reflection-in-action.”<sup>12</sup> They thus demonstrated what Linda Shopes observed: “collaborative work is personally and intellectually demanding, requiring an ability—even the courage—to deal with people and situations that can be difficult.”<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the BCRI and NCC facilitators, especially Ahmad Ward in Birmingham and Jeff Stern in Philadelphia, confirmed the virtue of Belinda Bozzoli and Susan K. Burton’s challenge for public historians to reflect on their own subjectivities, processes and positions of power – including discursive power and language – when working in a cross-cultural context, which is similarly instructive in considering how to confront power differentials such as those emerging from the transnational Museums Connect program.<sup>14</sup>

The relationships between the museums and the students in those projects were much more dynamic and equitable than in the project between the MHHE and BMCM. The impulse of two university museums to use Museums Connect as an opportunity to teach their undergraduate and graduate students the American public history practices of oral history and digital exhibition development shaped the power dynamics of those particular grants. Additionally, the MHHE staff’s and KSU faculty’s formal training and practice in public history methodologies led their institution to assume the role of expert throughout the grants, which precluded any truly shared inquiry between the two museums. Reflecting on their own experience, Corbett and Miller

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<sup>12</sup> Corbett and Miller, “A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry,” 18.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-37.

<sup>14</sup> Belinda Bozzoli, “Interviewing the Women of Phokeng,” in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 155-165.; Susan K. Burton, “Issues in Cross-Cultural Interviewing: Japanese Women in England,” in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 166-176.

similarly reflected on the contradictory impulse at the heart of sharing authority for university faculty, “Honest sharing, a willingness to surrender some intellectual control, is the hardest part of public history practice because it is the aspect most alien to academic temperament and training.”<sup>15</sup>

How Museums Connect projects are framed and the type of activities embarked upon also shape projects, as certain types of public history activities and outcomes, such as photography exhibitions, are more easily opened to multiple interpretations and multivocality, for both the curators and the audience, than traditional interpretive text or community festivals, for example. The work of the Moroccan, Afghan, and American students in the partnerships between Kabul and Philadelphia and Casablanca and Kennesaw, therefore, regardless of the established power dynamics, reflects just two examples of what Tom Satwicz and Kris Morrissey call “public curation.” “Opportunities for audiences to shape and add to the stories and messages museums present—to participate in the ‘curation of the visitor experience’ (both their own experience and that of other onsite or online visitors)...”<sup>16</sup> The creation of an online exhibition that included student photographs and community oral histories reflected on the connections between the historical and contemporary ramifications of minority Muslim identity in both Casablanca and Georgia in an open, multivocal way. In the project between the NCC and National Museum of Afghanistan, the use of a photography project similarly ceded varying amounts of curatorial power to the students in both project teams while allowing for the viewer to form their own interpretation given the limited interpretive text accompanying the exhibition. These examples, therefore, suggest that Kathleen McLean’s idea of the museum staff needing a

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<sup>15</sup> Corbett and Miller, “A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry,” 36.

<sup>16</sup> Tom Satwicz and Kris Morrissey, “Public Curation: From Trend to Research-Based Practice,” in *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*, ed. Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski (Philadelphia: Pew Center for the Arts & Heritage, 2011), 196.

“broader expertise” within this new museological and public history environment is apropos. McLean argues, “We [public historians] need to embrace the contributions of expert knowledge and at the same time expand our definition of ‘expert’ and ‘expertise’ to include broader domains of experience.”<sup>17</sup>

The embrace of the idea of public historian as facilitator rather than knowledge-giver in each of the three projects was enhanced because the participating American museums embraced the paradigm of the museum as forum rather than temple, and elevated processes of dialogue over the development and care of a collection. Reflecting each of the museums’ creation within the last thirty years, each institution and its staff embraced a willingness to engage in a collaborative process, where the idea of an objective truth was marginalized in favor of multiple truths. This alone does not guarantee a balanced or reciprocal relationship. As Rebecca Conrad reflected on my analysis of the BMCM-MHHE partnership in *Public History Review* and another essay about the projects between the two museums published in *The Public Historian*, she proposed, “had there been more collaboration on the planning end, the American and Moroccan partners would have confronted early on the cultural differences over paying oral history narrators.” Conrad also suggested, “Planning, of course, takes time, which is always in short supply when an application deadline is looming. But something as simple as involving all key partners in constructing the budget could at least flag issues that need further discussion before a project.”<sup>18</sup> While this American grant context is often familiar to American museums that are reliant on grant funding to help enact their missions, and it is often unknown to non-American participants it is not impossible. Further study of the involvement of American museums in a

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<sup>17</sup> Kathleen McLean, “Whose Questions, Whose Conversations?,” in *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*, ed. Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski (Philadelphia: Pew Center for the Arts & Heritage, 2011), 71.

<sup>18</sup> Rebecca Conrad, “Take-away Thoughts: Reflecting on Four Case Studies.” *Public History Review* 22 (2015): 74.

Museums Connect project that do not so whole-heartedly embrace the idea of dialogism and museum as forum is warranted.

### **De-centering “the West”**

Unlike Natalia Grincheva’s important analysis of Museums Connect, which considers the program from the perspective of American public diplomacy and excludes the agency of the non-American museums and participants, this dissertation shows the agency of both the non-American museum staff, operating within distinct museum and public history contexts, and the non-American students and participants. In moving beyond a western-centric view of museums and public history, the case studies also caution against painting with a broad brush regarding institutional and individual behavior. In each of the case studies, participants on all sides of the grants acted, interpreted meaning, and drew conclusions based on myriad contexts that were rarely replicated by their colleagues and peers in their own country, let alone at their partner institution abroad. In all of these case studies, and in the broader discussion of Museums Connect, understanding the agency of the multiple involved stakeholders provides a more balanced, nuanced perspective on the program. While this dissertation certainly does not claim to have included the voices of all those involved in the project, it attempts to illustrate a sample of museum staff and student participants.<sup>19</sup>

During each of the three case studies explored herein, the non-American participants and museum staff exercised agency within their own local contexts. In the projects between the MHHE and BMCM in Morocco, where the power relationships broadly speaking were strongly

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<sup>19</sup> For example, Jana Greenslit, “Museums Connect: The Next Chapter of International Collaboration” (master’s thesis, University of Washington, 2015), [https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/bitstream/handle/1773/33429/Greenslit\\_washington\\_02500\\_14792.pdf?sequence=1](https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/bitstream/handle/1773/33429/Greenslit_washington_02500_14792.pdf?sequence=1); Natalia Grincheva, “Democracy for Export: Museums Connect Program as a Vehicle of American Cultural Diplomacy,” *Curator: The Museum Journal* 58, no. 2 (April, 2015): 137-150.



in favor of the American museum, the actions of the Moroccan team reflect how they negotiated the project, including the oral history money and the title of the signature program, to make it function within their own particular community and public history contexts. In the Afghanistan context, the actions of the non-American participants were more in keeping with the intentions of the grants as they were originally planned. Where Jeff Stern created conditions for a more equitable project dynamic, the Hazara students and project facilitators interpreted the American-created project differently from their American colleagues. Throughout their trip to the United States and in exhibiting their photographs at the National Museum of Afghanistan, the participants' reflections highlighted that they used the American-driven museum program to negotiate their own ethnic identity both at home and abroad. Within the project between the BCRI and the Apartheid Museum, the two museums interpreted the two communities' histories similarly, and the two groups of students came to comparable understandings of their histories. Because the tangible oral history portion of the grant was abandoned the opportunity for the Soweto students to exercise their own agency was somewhat precluded when the central grant activity became the didactic instruction of the two communities' histories in study sessions and field trips to the sites of conscience in both communities.

In considering the multiple agencies of the different publics involved in each grant, as well as those excluded, this dissertation also provides a new lens with which to consider the very conceptualization of the public sphere that underpins the democratic notion of the museum as forum. Nancy Fraser's notion of multiple, competing, stratified, and unequal publics is borne out in Museums Connect projects, where certain publics are elevated while others relegated and excluded. The success of the Mandela Day celebration in Birmingham in 2011, in reaching a broader public, suggests that if Museums Connect embraces Fraser's conception of public

spheres, wider publics can be engaged with projects. The transnational public spheres of Museums Connect, however, are not unique. Reflecting on her own experience of working on a transnational public history project between students from the United States and China, Chinese public historian Na Li similarly lamented the Chinese students' attempts to negotiate the exclusionary public sphere of their particular public history project. Li recalled, "We were not struggling for a frontal attack on the controlling and univocal official narratives in a particular culture, but for a public space that engages different cultural voices."<sup>20</sup>

In the instances where power in the particular "public sphere" of each grant was less balanced or excluded from the "dominant public," it has been shown that "subaltern counterpublics...constitute[d] alternative publics" in which they created "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs."<sup>21</sup> In each of the case studies, moments of meaning-making and negotiation of the power dynamics at play reflected Fraser's conceptualization of "subaltern counterpublics" where the subaltern public, whether Afghan students or the Moroccan museum, inserted themselves into a counterpublic that challenged the dominant discourse of each project. Museums Connect thus supports Fraser's conceptualization of the public sphere where, "In principle, assumptions that were previously exempt from contestation will now have to be publicly argued out. In general, the proliferation of subaltern counterpublics means a widening of discursive contestation, and that is a good thing in stratified societies."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Li, "Going Public, Going Global," 5.

<sup>21</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 67.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Museums Connect: Sustainability and the future**

AAM's September 2013 tweet, "#MuseumsConnect by the numbers: 6,000 participants, more than 250,000 people reached in 33 countries & 33 U.S cities" while highlighting what the Department of State hopes is the wider outward ripple effect of people-to-people, also showed the different publics of the program: the "participants" and the wider "people" reached.<sup>23</sup> It also raises the related issue of how to measure Museums Connect's impact beyond the immediate participants. Almost without exception, those interviewed for this dissertation reflected on their experience with Museums Connect in effusive, positive language. The analysis of the three case studies featured in this dissertation reflected favorably on Museums Connect's ability to bring participants together and form lasting friendships and relationships, the goal of the Department of State's people-to-people diplomacy.<sup>24</sup> And although each of the participants interviewed for this dissertation had diverse experiences, and approached the program with disparate analytical lenses, they all spoke with fervor and enthusiasm about the ability of the project to create deep human bonds. The ability to travel and meet and work in-person as well as the widespread use of social media, e-mail, and blogs to facilitate these relationships throughout and after the projects were also oft cited as one of the most successful results of these projects. The effusive positive tone and tenor of these recollections, while highlighting the clear personal impact of the projects for the participants and museum professionals involved, at times masked a complex public history perspective that included the more subtle and nuanced power dynamics that existed. This

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<sup>23</sup> American Alliance of Museums, September 24, 2013, Twitter post, 4:19 p.m., <http://twitter.com/AAMers>.

<sup>24</sup> Nina Simon, for example, questions the value of considering "what" counts at a museum rather than "who" counts. Nina Simon, "Who Counts? Grappling with Attendance as Proxy for Impact," October 16, 2013, (online) accessed October 1, 2015, <http://museumtwo.blogspot.com/2013/10/who-counts-grappling-with-attendance-as.html>.

represents the fundamental contradiction between public diplomacy and public history's views of power, as well as the absence of tangible and institutional sustainability.

In each of the three case studies presented partners struggled to develop sustainable institutional relationships or public history activities beyond the personal friendships, Facebook messaging, and e-mail exchanges that almost all of the participants recalled they have continued since the end of their projects. And even the promising work begun by the students in Soweto and Birmingham could not be sustained, as the BCRI and Apartheid Museum staff, unintentionally mirroring their fellow museum professionals in the other two projects, recalled. In its current form, therefore, Museums Connect more closely resembles the type of one-off domestic community project described by Mindy Duitz in her 1992 essay in *Museums and Communities*. Duitz cautioned, "it is critical that all museums realize that serving their communities does not mean just a seasonal program or an annual exhibition in the 'community gallery.' It is an ongoing activity that requires clear policy and sufficient resources."<sup>25</sup> Unlike this particular suggestion for sustained community engagement, Museums Connect creates projects that cost a lot of money and in all three case studies the projects served as an extension of the mission of the participating institutions rather than central to the mission. The one-year structure of each grant also is too short a period of time to build and sustain trust and engagement with a particular community beyond their initial one-year period.<sup>26</sup> Dr. Jennifer Dickey, in recalling the challenge of sustainability between the MHHE and BMCM called this the problem

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<sup>25</sup> Mindy Duitz, "The Soul of a Museum: Commitment to Community at the Brooklyn Children's Museum," in *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, ed. in Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1992), 242.

<sup>26</sup> John Kuo Wei Tchen's reflection's on the Chinatown History Museum highlights the length of time and level of sustained, engaged interaction necessary for successful community engagement. John Kuo Wei Tchen, "Creating a Dialogic Museum: The Chinatown History Museum Experiment," in *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Levine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 285-326.

with Museums Connect funding acting as “seed money” that allowed a unique, transnational public history project out of the MHHE’s every-day operations. Laura Anderson at the BCRI reflected a similar sentiment when discussing the challenge of sustainability.<sup>27</sup>

These challenges are not only something that has been observed by the participating museums and their staff. Madeline Vadkerty, who replaced Heather Berry as AAM’s Manager of International Programs in 2015, reflected in June 2015 that even after only a few months working at AAM the issue of sustainability was a big concern. She suggested, “Up until now it’s been a bit hit and miss.” And in attempting to make a substantial change to the program in order to make the projects more sustainable, she speculated,

One of the things that we’re planning to build into future grant projects, next year [2016], is a more consistent and systematic view towards sustainability of projects. It will involve working with an organization that is focused on social entrepreneurship and connecting museums and the communities that they’re working with, helping to reorient their thinking so that they can connect with their communities after the project ends. But it remains to be seen how it is going to be worked out...We’re adding a component to [the colloquium that all project directors attend each year] so that they will think about how to sustain their project. And hopefully that will be built into their projects in a way that will generate success in the future.<sup>28</sup>

The impact of these seemingly small changes, and how they manifest in a program that funds one-year projects that are designed on a tension that precludes a truly shared authority and the “buy in” that that would foster, remains to be seen.

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<sup>27</sup> Jennifer W. Dickey, interview with author, digital recording, Kennesaw, GA, October 30, 2013.; Laura Caldwell Anderson, interview with author, digital recording, Birmingham, Alabama, October 11, 2013.

<sup>28</sup> Madeline Vadkerty, interview with author, by telephone, in possession of author, June 3, 2015.

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American Alliance of Museums, International Programs papers

Ben M'sik Community Museum, Unpublished papers

Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Museums and Community Collaborations Abroad papers

Dr. Julia Brock, Unpublished Museums Connect Files

Museum of History and Holocaust Education, Museums and Community Collaborations Abroad papers

National Constitution Center, Files in possession of Hugh Allen

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**Newspapers and Magazines**

Forbes Magazine

National Geographic

The Birmingham News

The New York Times

The Washington Post

South Philly News

## APPENDIX

### Museums Connect Projects 2008-2015<sup>1</sup>

#### 2008

##### **Dear Mr. Mandela, Dear Ms. Parks**

Michigan State University Museum, East Lansing, Michigan  
Nelson Mandela Museum, Mthatha, South Africa

##### **Indo-U.S. Science Center Diversity**

New York Hall of Science, Queens, New York  
National Council of Science Museums, Kolkata, India  
Science City, Bangalore, India

##### **Inside/Outside/North & South**

Museo de las Americas, Denver, Colorado  
El Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore, La Paz, Bolivia  
Gallery “Casa del Caballero Aguilla,” Puebla, Mexico

##### **Promoting Volunteerism in Dushanbe**

Black Pine Animal Park, Albion, Indiana  
Dushanbe Zoo, Dushanbe, Tajikistan

#### 2009

##### **Carrying Traditions Across the Waters of Time: Ainu & Pacific Northwest Cultural Collaborations**

Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, Seattle, Washington  
Ainu Association of Hokkaido, Sapporo, Japan

##### **Creating Community Collaboration**

Museum of History and Holocaust Education, Kennesaw, Georgia  
Ben M’sik Community Museum, Casablanca, Morocco

##### **Not Just Another Brick in the Wall: Engaging Italian & American Teens**

Sci-Port: Louisiana’s Science Center, Shreveport, Louisiana  
Parco Astronomico InfiniTo, Pino Torinese, Italy

##### **Water: Using the Common Tie that Binds**

Rodger Ehnstrom Nature Center, Wahpeton, North Dakota  
Bendery City Museum of Ethnography & Natural History, Bendery, Moldova

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<sup>1</sup> American Alliance of Museums, “Museums Connect: Current and Past Projects,” (accessed May 22, 2016) <http://www.aam-us.org/resources/global-partnerships/museumsconnect/projects>.

**We, the People: Afghanistan, America & the Minority Imprint**

National Constitution Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
National Museum of Afghanistan, Kabul, Afghanistan

**2010****Building a Transatlantic Bridge**

Westmoreland Museum of American Art, Greensburg, Pennsylvania  
LVR-Industriemuseum, Oberhausen, Germany

**Connecting Finnish and Adirondack Communities**

The Wilde Center, Tupper Lake, New York  
Heureka, the Finnish Science Centre, Vantaa, Finland

**From the Adirondacks to the Middle of the World**

World Awareness Children's Museum, Glens Falls, New York  
Museo de la Ciudad, Quito, Ecuador

**International Legacy Youth Leadership Project**

Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Birmingham, Alabama  
The Mandela House, Soweto, South Africa  
The Apartheid Museum, Johannesburg, South Africa

**In Their Own Voices**

Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio  
National Museums of Kenya, Lamu, Kenya

**iShare: Connecting Museums and Communities East and West**

University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, Boulder, Colorado  
National Taiwan Museum, Taipei City, Taiwan

**Navigating Difference: Transatlantic Dialogues on Immigration**

Ellis Island Immigration Museum, New York, New York  
International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, New York, New York  
Galata Maritime Museum, Genoa, Italy  
Le Bois du Cazier, Marcinelle, Belgium

**Sharing Biodiversity and Culture**

The Discovery Museums, Acton, Massachusetts  
Tin Main Children's Museum, San Salvador, El Salvador

**Young Women Speaking the Economy**

International Museum of Women, San Francisco, California  
The Women's Museum in Denmark, Aarhus, Denmark

The Ayala Museum, Makati City, Philippines  
Sudanese Women's Museum, Omdurman, Sudan

## 2011

### **At the Table: Connecting Culture, Conversation and Service in Latvia and the U.S.**

National Constitution Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
National History Museum of Latvia, Riga, Latvia

### **Community of Conservation: Research Exchange Experiences for Global Youth**

Lincoln Park Zoo, Chicago, Illinois  
National Museum of Niger Boubou Hama, Niamey, Niger

### **Identities: Understanding Islam in a Cross-Cultural Context**

Museum of History and Holocaust Education, Kennesaw, Georgia  
Ben M'sik Community Museum, Casablanca, Morocco

### **Not Just Another Building on the Street**

Sci-Port Louisiana's Science Center, Shreveport, Louisiana  
Parco Astronomico InfiniTo, Pino Torinese, Italy

### **Nuclear Weapons Testing Legacy: The Tale of Two Cultures**

National Atomic Testing Museum, Las Vegas, Nevada  
Karaganda Ecological Museum, Karaganda, Kazakhstan

### **Rainforest Leadership Academy: Cross-Cultural Teacher Training and Mentoring**

California Science Center, Los Angeles, California  
Maloka, Bogota, Colombia

### **Two Museums, Two Nations, One Identity**

Art Museum of the Americas, Washington, D.C.  
Museo de Arte de El Salvador, San Salvador, El Salvador

### **Watch Your Waste e-Museum**

Arab American National Museum, Dearborn, Michigan  
The Children's Museum Jordan, Amman, Jordan

## 2012

### **Coral Reef Ambassadors**

Birch Aquarium at Scripps, La Jolla, California  
National Museum of Marine Biology and Aquarium, Checheng, Pingtung, Taiwan

### **Digital Skies Student Partnership**

Chabot Space & Science Center, Oakland, California  
Hong Kong Space Museum, Hong Kong

**Girl Ambassadors for Human Rights**

International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, New York, New York  
 The Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation, Fayetteville, New York  
 Corporacion Parque por la Paz Villa Grimaldi, Santiago, Chile  
 Sri Lanka Plantation Workers' Museum, Paradeka, Sri Lanka

**Muslim Women's Art and Voices**

International Museum of Women, San Francisco, California  
 Museum of Islamic Civilization, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates  
 The Women's Museum in Denmark, Aarhus, Denmark  
 The Ayala Museum, Manila, Philippines

**Next Stop: Brooklyn/Dakar**

Brooklyn Children's Museum, Brooklyn, New York  
 ImagiNationAfrika, Dakar, Senegal

**North-South: Art as a Tool to Mediate Political and Social Conflict**

Sonoma County Museum, Santa Rosa, California  
 Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art, Gyeonggi-Do, Korea

**Object Stories Exchange**

Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon  
 Museo Nacional de San Carlos, Mexico City, Mexico

**P.A.U.S.E.: Pollinators/Art/Urban Agriculture/Society/and the Environment**

Tohono Chul Park, Tucson, Arizona  
 St. Louis Zoo, St. Louis, Missouri  
 National Museums of Kenya, Nairobi, Kenya

**Past to Present: U.S.-Sino Bridge of Connection**

Pacific Aviation Museum Pearl Harbour, Honolulu, Hawaii  
 Jianchuan Museum Cluster, Chengdu, Sichuan, China

**Written in Rock: Collaboration among Azerbaijani and Pueblo Indian Communities**

National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.  
 Office of Policy and Analysis, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.  
 Gobustan National Historical Artistic Preserve, Baku, Azerbaijan  
 In collaboration with the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, Albuquerque, New Mexico

**2013****A Journey through the African Diaspora**

Prince George's African American Museum & Cultural Center, North Brentwood,  
 Maryland  
 Museu Afro-Brasil, Sao Paulo, Brazil

**Ancient Shores, Changing Tides—Developing Local Archaeological Heritage Expertise**

Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, Seattle, Washington  
 Palawan State University Museum, Palawan, Philippines

**Design Diaries International**

Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul, Minnesota  
 Palestinian Heritage Museum, Jerusalem

**Empower Parents: Fostering Cross Cultural Networks between Families with Autism**

Queens Museum of Art, Queens, New York  
 Museo ICO, Madrid, Spain

**Flag Stories: Citizenship Unbound**

SOMArts Cultural Center, San Francisco, California  
 Islamic Art Museum of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

**Forest Guardians**

Working with Three Mountain Alliance, Līhu'e, Hawaii  
 Sicán National Museum, Ferreñafe, Peru  
 Zoological Society of San Diego, San Diego, California

**From the Ground Up: Nutritional Values and Cultural Connections**

Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
 Gidan Makama Museum Kano, Kano, Nigeria

**Rethinking Home: Climate Change in New York and Samoa**

American Museum of Natural History, New York, New York  
 Museum of Samoa, Apia, Samoa

**Scaling the Walls/Escalando Paredes: Creating Urban Green Spaces**

Children's Museum of Pittsburg, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
 Interactive Science Museum, Quito, Ecuador

**Turning the Table: Understanding Cross-Cultural Movements**

Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, San Antonio, Texas  
 Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Ateneo de Yucatán, Mérida, Mexico

**2014****By the Work of Her Hands: Textile Arts in Morocco and the United States**

The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
 Tangier American Legation Institute for Moroccan Studies, Tangier, Morocco

**Citizen-Led Urban Environmental Restoration**

Patricia and Phillip Frost Museum of Science, Miami, Florida  
 Natural History Museum of Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica

**City of Peace: Chicago and Phnom Penh**

Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, Chicago, Illinois  
 Kraing Ta Chan Community Peace Learning Center, Kus Commune, Cambodia

**Common Ground: Connecting Community through Gardens**

Monterey County Agricultural & Rural Life Museum, King City, California  
 Casa K'inich Children's Museum, Copan, Honduras

**Common Notes: Connecting Folk Traditions Through Technology**

Clay Center for the Arts and Sciences of West Virginia, Charleston, West Virginia  
 "Alexandru Stefulescu" Gorj County Museum, Târgu Jiu, Romania

**Cultural Repercussions of Climate Change in Two Communities: A Teenage Viewpoint**

Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
 National Museum of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

**Defining Culture in Popular Culture**

Pearl S. Buck House National Historic Landmark, Perkasi, Pennsylvania  
 Pearl S. Buck Museum, Zhenjiang, China

**e-Mammal International**

North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, Raleigh, North Carolina  
 Bombay Natural History Society, Mumbai, India  
 Museo de Paleontología in Mexico, Guadalajara, Mexico

**Stories from the Home Planet (Historias de nuestro Planeta)**

James Ford Bell Museum of Natural History, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota  
 Corporación Parque Explora, Medellin, Colombia

**2015****Confront Violence through Youth-Oriented Media**

IZOLYATSIA, Kiev, Ukraine  
 AS220 (a non-profit community arts center), Providence, Rhode Island

**Connecting Coastal Communities: An International Dialogue about Ocean Conservation & Ecotourism**

Old Dartmouth Historical Society – New Bedford Whaling Museum, New Bedford, Massachusetts  
 Husavik Whale Museum, Husavik, Iceland

**Dialogues in the African Diaspora: Youth Reclaiming Community, Identity and Memory**  
Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute, New York, New York  
National Museum Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica

**Girls Design the World: Supporting Green Communities with STEAM**  
Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, Minnesota  
National Museums of Kenya, Nairobi, Kenya

**Hacking Space: A Student Exchange to Sustain Life on Earth**  
Chabot Space and Science Center, Oakland, California  
Science City, West Bengal, India

**Youth Empowerment through Social Practice Art: Strategies for Coping with Violence and Trauma**  
Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, La Jolla, California  
Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporaneo, Mexico City, Mexico

**Youth Mission to Mars: Exploring Space to Address Sustainability on Earth**  
Space Center Houston, Houston, Texas  
Cite de l'espace, Toulouse, France  
Science Center, Singapore