



The
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of Public
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MUSEUMS AND COMMUNITIES

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Introduction: Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture

IVAN KARP

In 1988 and 1990 the Rockefeller Foundation and the Smithsonian Institution convened two conferences charged with examining how museums exhibit cultures and relate to the multiple communities in which they are situated. This volume is composed of papers from the second conference. In the first conference, published as *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*,¹ we considered how cultural diversity is collected, exhibited, and managed. Examples ranged from cosmopolitan art museums through world's fairs and folklife festivals. The essays were often cross-cultural, discussing topics such as the assumptions that organize Japanese exhibiting and the decolonization of the museum system in a "new nation," Zimbabwe. Many of the papers were concerned with exhibition contents and their associated politics. In the introduction we described exhibitions as political arenas in which definitions of identity and culture are asserted and contested.

The discussion of the poetics and politics of museum display illustrated how the selection of knowledge and the presentation of ideas and images are enacted within a power system. The sources of power are derived from the capacity of cultural institutions to classify and define peoples and societies. This is the power to represent: to reproduce structures of belief and experience through which cultural

differences are understood. *Exhibiting Cultures* showed that this power does not work in the same way for all types of museums. Art museums privilege visual experience, while museums of cultural history and natural history produce exhibitions with more narrative content, and festivals claim to embody experience. These differences are an integral part of the poetics of exhibiting cultures, which was examined in the first volume. The papers related differences in how exhibitions communicate their messages to the political subtexts of the exhibiting process.

Differences among museums are not without their political implications. Communities attempting to gain access to museums connect to different types of museums in distinct ways. Some African American artists, for example, are suspicious of attempts to deconstruct the aesthetic canon. They want a place in art museums, not a world in which art museums no longer assert claims of excellence.² Natural-history and ethnographic museums present different problems. African American activists rightly argue that while these museums have not excluded them, they have denigrated African achievements. Here the community demand is not for a place in an accepted scheme, but for revision of the scheme itself.³

In *Exhibiting Cultures* we did not devote as much space to the equally political questions of how museums relate to the changing configurations of communities that surround them, ranging from the neighborhood to the nation-state, from groups defined in ethnic and racial terms to social classes. Only one section of that book, containing essays about the exhibition *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors*, confronted the question of relations between museums and communities as a major dimension of the politics of cultural institutions.⁴ The essays in that section examined the issues that arise when a mainstream institution wishes to exhibit the art of a minority community. The debate over this exhibition raised fundamental questions about who controls the exhibition and collection processes, what happens when works of art from outside mainstream traditions are assimilated to the canon of dominant communities, and, finally, whose interests the multicultural activities of centrally placed museums actually serve.

None of these questions was highlighted in the first conference. The debates showed us, however, that the original title for our second conference, *Museums and Their Communities*, rested on the false assumption that the politics of museums and communities had easy solutions. We wanted to hold a conference on the changing ways

museums manage relations with communities, but the act of possession inserted in our original title unconsciously reproduced the acquisitive relationship we challenged in the first volume's section on *Hispanic Art in the United States*.

The discussions and interventions from the floor at both conferences taught us that while exhibitions and collections were contested, they were not nearly so contested as relationships among diverse museums and diverse communities. Furthermore, the contests that swirl around exhibitions and collections have increasingly become contests over relations between museums and communities. Inspect recent issues of any major museum journal, such as *Museum News*. Its contents include such hot issues as the repatriation of Native American materials, the proper relationship between artists and exhibitors, and the sometimes conflicting responsibilities of boards of trustees to the public and to the mission and mandate of the institution. This is the stuff out of which current museum debates are fashioned.⁵

These debates take their coloration not from the specific activities of museums—"collecting, preserving, studying, interpreting, and exhibiting"⁶—but from the way in which these activities relate to the other institutions and communities that comprise the social order. When people enter museums they do not leave their cultures and identities in the coatroom. Nor do they respond passively to museum displays. They interpret museum exhibitions through their prior experiences and through the culturally learned beliefs, values, and perceptual skills that they gain through membership in multiple communities. What Stephen Weil says of the United States is true for the world: "While American museums may be exempt from taxes, they are in no way exempt from history."⁷

Every society can be seen as a constantly changing mosaic of multiple communities and organizations. Individual identities and experiences never derive entirely from single segments of society—from merely one of the communities out of which the complex and changing social order is made. An individual can in the space of a short time move from emphasizing the part of his or her identity that comes from membership in an ethnic community to highlighting his or her participation in a formal organization such as a professional society and then back to being an ethnic-community member again. We experience these identities not as all-encompassing entities but through specific social events: encounters and social settings where identities are made relevant by the people participating in them. Communities are often thought of as things and given thinglike names such as "the Irish," "the

blacks," "the Jews," "the WASPs." But they are actually experienced as encounters in which cultures, identities, and skills are acquired and used. These settings can involve communal groups as small and intimate as the nuclear family or as large and institutional as the convention of a professional society. People form their primary attachments and learn to be members of society in these settings, which can be referred to collectively as the institutions of *civil society*.

Museums and communities make up only a portion of civil society, the complex of social entities in which we act out our lives and through which we fashion our identity. Civil society is a perennial topic in the social sciences and political theory. Periodically a "crisis in civil society" emerges in discourse and thinking about society, generally in periods of social upheaval. The best recent discussions of civil society have been inspired by the way Antonio Gramsci defines the functional differences between civil society and political society. For Gramsci the institutions of political society exercise coercion and control, while civil society creates hegemony through the production of cultural and moral systems that legitimate the existing social order. From this point of view, the cultural parallel to coercion and control is hegemonic relations. If Gramsci were writing in the 1990s, I believe that he would think of civil society both as a site for the production of hegemony, that is, as an intellectual and moral commitment to the way a society is ordered and governed, and as a site for contesting assertions about who has the right to rule and to define the different identities in society. This is how museums are perceived in this volume: as places for defining who people are and how they should act and as places for challenging those definitions.

The key point here is that the institutions of civil society can be thought about separately from the agencies of government specifically charged with social control, such as the police and the courts. Taking the police as an example, one would say that when police act in their capacity as officers of the law, investigating crime, maintaining order, and so on, they are acting as part of political society. When the police form a professional association, they are acting as members of civil society, concerned with promoting the identities and interests of police officers. While some museums in the United States may be part of local, state, or national governments, they are not part of political society; they remain agents of civil society.

Civil society includes such diverse forms of organization as families, voluntary associations, ethnic groups and associations, educa-

tional organizations, and professional societies. These are the social apparatuses responsible for providing the arenas and contexts in which people define, debate, and contest their identities and produce and reproduce their living circumstances, their beliefs and values, and ultimately their social order.⁸

Economic activities, social life, and cultural affairs are all constructed within civil society. The movements of persons from one identity and/or institution to another connect these forms of organization and their practices. Institutional identities often overlap. Our talk continually makes connections among the institutions of civil society. Someone comes not just from a family but from an "old English family" or an "Orthodox Jewish family." A person is not simply a lawyer but a "Harvard lawyer" or a "feminist lawyer." Art can be called "mainstream," "black," "Chinese," "modernist," or "primitive." The last characterization, for example, suggests (among other things) that the artist making the object lacks formal training in an institution of civil society known as an art school or academy.⁹

Sociologists, anthropologists, and observers of society from the time of Alexis de Tocqueville, Karl Marx, and Max Weber to the present have argued that the strength and resilience of a social order resides in the capacity of civil society to aid in shaping the direction of change. Civil society is the crucible in which citizenship is forged. As integral parts of civil society, museums often justify their existence on the grounds that they play a major role in expressing, understanding, developing, and preserving the objects, values, and knowledge that civil society values and on which it depends. Arguments about the social significance of museums assert that museums can provide services that other institutions cannot. As repositories of knowledge, value, and taste, museums educate, refine, or produce social commitments beyond those that can be produced in ordinary educational and civic institutions. For example, museums are sometimes held up as the antidote to the failure of families to engage in moral education—or so the argument goes. Underlying this line of thinking is the assertion that museums play a unique role in civil society.¹⁰

There is another side to civil society. It is not merely the benign agent of social reproduction and education. Its institutions can either support or resist definitions imposed by the more coercive organs of the state. Furthermore, elements of civil society need not fit amiably with one another. Class, ethnic, and racial conflict can be as characteristic of civil society as harmonious social reproduction. Commu-

nities are as often thought of as being separate and unequal as they are tolerated and respected in civil society. Henry Ford, for example, set up the Ford English School in Dearborn, Michigan,

and compelled his foreign employees to attend it before and after work two days a week. . . . The first thing [they] learned in the Ford school was how to say, "I am a good American." Later the students acted out a pantomime which admirably symbolized the spirit of the enterprise. In this performance a great melting pot (labeled as such) occupied the middle of the stage. A long column of immigrant students descended into the pot from backstage, clad in outlandish garb and flaunting signs proclaiming their fatherlands. Simultaneously from either side of the pot another stream of men emerged, each prosperously dressed in identical suits of clothes and each carrying a little American flag.¹¹

This is surely an image of civil society that asserts the value of some communities over others and strives to define the direction of cultural change. More than a mosaic of communities and institutions, civil society is a stage, an arena in which values are asserted and attempts at legitimation made and contested.

If civil society is a stage, then it has a script that the actors follow or at least use as a basis for improvising their performances. This script contains the social ideas of a society, the set of beliefs, assumptions, and feelings in terms of which people judge one another and which they sometimes use to guide their actions. Social ideas often set up hierarchies of moral values in which communities and institutions are interpreted. Social ideas embody notions people have about their differences and similarities, and these are organized in terms of which is good and which bad, which superior and which inferior. As significant elements in civil society, museums articulate social ideas. They define relations with communities whether they intend to or not. The processes of making meaning and of negotiating and debating identity—localized in institutions such as museums—provide the unwritten, ever-changing constitution of civil society. The social ideas of civil society are articulated and experienced through striving for consensus and struggling against the imposition of identity. Museums are one of a number of settings for these conflicting but simultaneously operating processes, which make social ideas understandable, but not always legitimate.

The very nature of museums as repositories for knowledge and objects of value and visual interest makes them key institutions in the

production of social ideas in many nations. Museum collections and activities are intimately tied to ideas about art, science, taste, and heritage. Hence they are bound up with assertions about what is central or peripheral, valued or useless, known or to be discovered, essential to identity or marginal. The history of debates about identity and the mosaic of communities that could or should constitute civil society is the central issue to which the presentations and discussions in the Museums and Communities conference returned. Conference participants considered how museums could accommodate multiple communities in their programs and why this process is critical to the production of a civil society that accommodates diversity.

The essays in this volume are divided into three parts. Part 1, "On Civil Society and Social Identity," inquires into how people make and experience identity in civil society and how identity is manifested in forms of public culture ranging from museums in India to festivals in Minnesota. The essays argue that the making of identity and its manifestations are really just two ways of looking at one process. The present moment in North American and European museums, which is characterized by experiments with museum-community relations, is described in part 2, "Audience, Ownership, and Authority: Designing Relations Between Museums and Communities." This moment emerges out of a specific historical context in the United States and, we suspect, elsewhere. Part 3 of this volume, "Defining Communities Through Exhibiting and Collecting," shows that the interrogation of cultural diversity is not a new concern for museums, and that the process of asserting and questioning can be seen most clearly by looking at the multiple ways the same objects are made to stand for different identities; for example, at different places and at different times the same object can be a piece of art, a sign of a culture's place in an evolutionary hierarchy, a sign of heritage, or a mark of oppression. The essays examine how identity is asserted in exhibitions, how such assertions change over time and are affected by specific relations among museums and communities, and finally how the audience itself can assert its own identity as part of its experience of exhibitions.

Most of the essays in the volume concern cases from the United States. U.S. museum history shares many features in common with that of other industrialized nations. But what happens over the long term in Europe is often compressed in the United States. As a result, the historical changes and circumstances that have produced the current concern about the relationship between museums and commu-

nities can be seen in sharper outline here than elsewhere. No one has outlined the cultural history of American museums better than Neil Harris, the master of museum historiography. He provides a historical scheme that describes how this moment emerged. Harris depicts extraordinary transformations in museums' attitudes toward their audiences in the twentieth century.¹² These changes are visible in many ways—for example, museums that were content to do a survey of audience demographics now sponsor in-depth focus groups that elicit visitors' responses to and feelings about exhibitions.

Harris also demonstrates the degree to which the perceptions of museums have changed along with the institutions themselves. In the 1950s, Harris tells us, cultural historians wrote histories of museums that were "self-confident and optimistic." "Almost any institution that managed to survive . . . was admired, a tribute to sacrificing founders bent on combining the democratic genius with obvious needs for enlightenment, recreation, standardization, or reform."¹³ The triumphalist history they told was a story of American modernization, a narrative of how cultural institutions helped to create the new forms of persons needed in industrial society.

Current writing on museums takes a more critical approach. Left-wing points of view hold that cultural institutions such as museums can be perceived as instruments of the elite that are used to assert class-based claims to interpret and control "high" culture. At the same time, attempts to democratize them and open them up have been critiqued from the right because these processes are thought to promote values that degrade the great works contained in museums.¹⁴

One factor that helped museums resist change has been what Harris describes as "a professional reluctance to see how museums were linked functionally with other units concerned with market share." This attitude operated primarily at the ideological level of self-definition, as Harris has shown elsewhere.¹⁵ Actually, museums have always looked over their shoulders, albeit reluctantly, and been influenced by competing institutions of public culture, ranging from the world's fair to the department store and, more recently, the theme park. While this is not a line of influence that Harris traces, one could also add that museums have had their own influences on more commercial ventures: witness the way in which "total resort hotels" have been designed to attract clients by mimicking the cultural authority of the museum.¹⁶

Interestingly enough, the degradation argument, now perceived as a critique from the radical right outside of museums, was an atti-

tude that flourished inside museums before World War I. Harris describes this earlier time as a period of "authoritarian condescension" in museums, when upper classes presumed to speak for others. This was a period in which museum authorities "acknowledged the values of popularity, but not its priority."

In the 1920s and 1930s museums became more interested in diverse audiences and sought to design environments better able to educate them. No one raised questions about how collections were made, about how they reinforced elite taste and standards, or about the claims to knowledge embodied by the curator or asserted through the authority of the exhibition. Harris refers to this time as the period of "authoritarian experimentalism."¹⁷

Increasing concern over commercial and financial considerations had produced by the 1960s another phase of museum history, which occurred primarily in art museums. This was a period in which museums underwent a vast expansion, using market surveys to help them capture as large a share of the public's attention (and money) as possible. Harris sees museums as "absorbed by issues of reputation and promotion and [as a result] making some better accommodation to multicultural constituencies" that in general are poorly represented in museum staffs, collections, and exhibitions. I would add that the blockbuster art exhibition, which draws as large a public as possible into the museum (but usually for only that one time) is also characteristic of what Harris aptly terms "an age of populist deference," his third phase of museum history. As art museums go, so goes the museum world. Few major museums of any genre—natural history, cultural history, or science and technology—feel able to survive without public attention.

The impetus for museums to change their attitudes has often been economic, with members of the museum community arguing that their survival was at stake. The means of change have been social; major redefinitions of the audience were undertaken, and museums increasingly asserted that they were essential components of the social order. American art museums often justified their existence in the nineteenth century on the grounds that they exposed the urban working classes to objects that embodied "civilized" values. The result, museums claimed, was to make better citizens out of working men and women.¹⁸

But the claims museums make inevitably put them in a vulnerable position. Museums assert that they can compensate for the failures of other cultural institutions, such as schools, to perform the work of

social reproduction. These assertions define the museum as one of the central institutions of civil society; they also make museums answerable for how well they educate and represent the citizens who compose society. In other words, the very roles that museums desire to play in civil society leave them open to accusations that they are responsible for features of the social order such as pervasive discrimination and injustice. As definitions of inclusion and exclusion become more negotiable, museums are asked to explain their history of exclusion, and to fashion inclusive ways of going about their work.

This brings us to what Harris identifies as the current phase of museum history. He points out that "deference was one thing, power another." Now, he argues, we live in an age of "existential scrutiny, one in which the institution stands in an unprecedented and often troublesome relationship to its previous sense of mission." For Harris this is a period in which cultural deconstruction dominates the museum playing field, as elsewhere. "Throughout our entire culture the canons of taste and the assumptions of scholarship have been challenged and challenged from within. There is no reason to believe that museums can be immune from this any more than universities, libraries, or medical schools."¹⁹

Perhaps. Harris seems to me too confident about the end of museum history and too sure about how the contests will conclude. History does not necessarily proceed in a straight line. Nor are all claims to authority necessarily bad. Furthermore, the challenges to authority made on behalf of communities can be surprising, even disturbing, and come at museums from unexpected directions. The secretary of the Smithsonian Institution was recently "startled," according to the newspapers, when he was asked while giving testimony to the Senate to justify the National Museum of American Art's revisionist exhibition *The West as America*, which treated portraits of frontier experience as ideological tracts.²⁰ In this instance an establishment attempt to set the historical record straight (as that museum saw it) was challenged by elected representatives of the American citizenry.

An acute moral dilemma is raised by the acknowledgement that museums have responsibilities to communities. What happens when one community makes a request that will inevitably oppress another community? Who actually speaks for a community? Are all demands equally valid? If not, what procedure should be set in place to adjudicate among them?²¹

The Smithsonian experience provides just a single instance of

what is becoming a major issue for museums: how to manage the increasingly political relations between museums and communities. Repatriation is yet another case where communities are taking an intense interest in how museums conduct their affairs. Nor is this just a domestic issue in the United States. Museums with collections derived from overseas will soon have to justify their retention of the collections and their exhibition of them. Natural-history museums may be no more exempt than art museums. Biological type specimens are usually found in museums in the capital cities of wealthy, industrialized countries. Yet they are equally valuable to the scientific and museum communities of the states or countries in which they were acquired.

Harris is more than correct to assert that the relations between museums and audiences have also taken on more overtly political overtones, and that these relations take the form of questioning the claims to truth and beauty made by museums and their staff. The new relationship is not simply one in which museums make assertions and members of the audience challenge them. Claims to authority are countered by parallel claims made by different museum constituencies. A good example involves the fall 1990 meeting of the Smithsonian Institution Council, during which they considered problems of cultural diversity. On the very day that the council was meeting in the National Museum of Natural History, tours of the museum's exhibitions were being conducted by antievolutionist religious groups, who were enacting in the exhibit halls of the museum a diversity different from the kind the council was considering in another wing of the same building. But the claim to possess authoritative knowledge was no less apparent.

Political contests have the peculiar tendency of overflowing the boundaries that are designed to contain them. It is one thing for museums to try to broaden their audiences, and another for the public to claim the museum. The museum world tends to think of art museums as the site of controversy, but museums such as the National Museum of Natural History have had their moments as well. The claims made on the museum by different publics are instructive. Religious groups resist the assertions of science in the natural-history halls, while racial and minority groups resist the assertions about culture made in the anthropology halls.

The Smithsonian Institution has its apparatus for generating inclusion: it conducts audience surveys and has an outreach program, and the education departments of its museums schedule many commu-

nity events. In spite of these efforts, different segments of the public demand more. Presently they claim the right to assert their communities' point of view in the essential activities of the museums. Stephen Weil is right: museums are not exempt from history, and the communities that have been eliminated from museums or denigrated by them now insist that museums rectify their errors—errors that can be viewed in out-of-date exhibit halls.

This is a historic moment, not a unique one. It is a time in which audiences are claiming their rights as diverse communities. The current period of "existential scrutiny" described by Neil Harris is as much a response of the museumgoing public to changing museum practice as museum practice has been a response to policy changes within museums. The nature of what museums do, and their claims to a particular status in civil society, only create the possibility for the situation they now confront. Changes in civil and political society outside museums often provide the actual impetus for community requests and demands to museums. It cannot be accidental that in the United States communities are asking museums to accommodate themselves to cultural diversity at the same time as the courts are reducing the scope of affirmative action programs. Changes in political society are channeling the battle for equal opportunity into the cultural sphere of civil society.

Suddenly, communities that have not previously been thought about as communities have sprung uninvited into museum deliberations. National museums may have to answer even to communities in other nations. These newly emergent communities raise questions that museums often do not have the experience to answer. Many of the essays in this volume ask the fundamental questions of how museum experience becomes a community issue, and how museums accommodate communities. The museum experience is supposed to be intensely private and personally transforming. Communities are the setting in which the skills for appreciating museums are acquired, but museums' audiences belong to many communities, often simultaneously. Part of the politics of museum-community relations involves the politics of asserting and legitimating claims to identity. People speak on behalf of collectivities about an experience that they also think of as essentially private and individual.

The best way to think about the changing relations between museums and communities is to think about how the *audience*, a passive entity, becomes the *community*, an active agent. This is a process in which self-appointed or delegated representatives of a community

contest a museum's perspective by articulating a community point of view. This is not so new a phenomenon. Thomas Crow's important study *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* describes how the early salons became scenes of contestation, where different actors fought over who was to represent the public. At the same time as contemporaries described the audience as being composed of individual fragments, the audience also was assigned unitary opinions and a single will. Crow sees this paradox as part of a political contest:

We can . . . arrive at empirical knowledge concerning the salon *audience* because an audience is by definition an additive phenomenon [that is, it can be counted]. . . . But what transforms an audience into a public, that is, a commonality with a legitimate role to play in justifying artistic practice and setting value on the products of that practice? The public . . . is a representation of the *significant* totality [of the audience] by and for someone. A public appears, with a shape and a will, via the various claims made to represent it; and when sufficient members of an audience come to believe in one or another of these representations, the public can become an important art-historical actor.²²

A community can be one form of what Crow here calls a "public," a "commonality" for which someone presumes to speak. Many of the essays in this volume describe contests between communities and museums over who is to speak on behalf of and to the commonality. Speaking for and speaking to are often combined, since the right to speak often depends on the creation of community consciousness and a sense of identity and mission. This is the only way in which a public can become an actor.

Some of the most telling accounts in this volume describe claims to the right to speak on behalf of a community. Jack Kugelmass's penetrating account in part 3 of American Jewish tours to former Nazi concentration camps in Poland shows that there are major differences between individual visits and organized tours. The tours are controlled by people who serve as guides and interpreters. In this guise they act out the political meanings of the visit to the camps, interpret the past and contemporary Poland to the tourists, and attempt to fashion a consistent sense of identity and opinion in their clients. They seek to be the representatives of a public as much as the critics of the salon did in the eighteenth-century context described by Crow.

This involves a process of paring down multiple voices and complex identities into relatively clear identities and messages. It often

involves challenges to accepted and sanctioned interpretations and wisdom, and often impassioned claims, counterclaims, and denials about who has the right to articulate a point of view. Vera Zolberg's account in part 1 of "contentious communities" of artists and museums, for example, describes the disputes between museums and artists about how to interpret the art displayed in museums.

No paper describes this political process better than Fath Davis Ruffins's history in part 3 of African American preservation efforts. She tells a complex story of resistance to hegemonic interpretations of African American life, the desire to tell an insider's story, competing claims over who has the right to represent African American experience, and finally, the development of a professional cadre of interpreters among curators and museum professionals. What Ruffins describes is a movement from outsider status vis-à-vis the museum to insider status within museums. It has had the consequence of putting former outsiders in the position of resisting the claims of other members of African American communities to speak on behalf of "the community." The political contests over who has the right to speak for whom are an inevitable result of the emergence of new communities that make claims on museums. This is how publics are created.

The acknowledgement by museums of the existence of publics entails the idea that these entities should be asked about their own opinions and interests and about the effects of exhibitions on their sense of who they are. Inevitably we will discover that audiences have multiple opinions and multiple identities. As a result, the audience becomes not a single commonality but many commonalities, called communities. The process Crow describes for eighteenth-century Paris has its parallels with Harris's history of museums in twentieth-century America. On one side are the museums, who query their audience about its beliefs, opinions, and desires; on the other side is the changing mosaic of communities, which seek to influence and control how museums act, what they examine, what they represent, and how they represent it.

This political process takes place in civil society. For communities, the struggle over identity is vital to their existence: they often feel that they live or die to the degree that they are accorded or denied social space. But museums are learning that members of communities are active agents. They can resist museum definitions of space and even redefine spaces in subversive ways.²³ Because museums are drawn into the process of according or denying identity to communities, they become embroiled in communities' struggles for public

recognition. The intensity of these debates in museums are directly related to their prominence in civil society. As privileged agents of civil society, museums have a fundamental obligation to take sides in the struggle over identity (and indeed cannot avoid it). In fact, this struggle is essential to the life of civil society. The essays in this volume recognize the situation of museums and seek to interpret and explain the role of museums in civil society at the same time as they also seek to describe how museums are currently experimenting with models for living in civil society.

NOTES

1. See Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).
2. Patricia Failing, "Black Artists Today: A Case of Exclusion," *ARTnews*, Mar. 1989, 124-31.
3. This issue has recently crystallized around literature on the Egyptian roots of African and Western civilizations. For a summary of the current positions on this debate, see Joyce Mercer, "Nile Valley Scholars Bring New Light and Controversy to African Studies," *Issues in Higher Education* 7, no. 26 (1991), 1, 12-16.
4. See the following essays in Karp and Lavine, *Exhibiting Cultures*: Carol Duncan, "Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship"; Jane Livingston and John Beardsley, "The Poetics and Politics of Hispanic Art: A New Perspective"; and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, "The Chicano Movement/The Movement of Chicano Art."
5. Museum professionals reading this passage may experience *déjà vu*. We have indeed been here before. In 1971 Stephen Weil delivered an address to the annual meeting of the Western Museums Association in which he described "the multiple crises in our museums." He examined three crises, involving money, power, and identity. The fiscal crisis is obvious and perennial. Crises of power crystallized in struggles among trustees, staff, artists, and communities. Crises of identity had to do not only with the future shape of the museum and its role as a definer of culture, but with the museum as an arena in which "forces contend to determine museum identity." Reflecting on his analyses in 1983, Weil saw himself as having been too caught up in current debate and too "millenarian." In 1992 it is possible that he would think that the 1970s have come around once again, for it now appears that his 1971 address needs little revision today. See Stephen E. Weil, *Beauty and the Beast: On Museums, Art, the Law, and the Market* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983).

6. This list of museum goals is taken from Joseph Veatch Noble, "Museum Manifesto," *Museum News* 48, no. 8 (1970), 16–20. It is cited in Weil, *Beauty and the Beast*, 71.
7. See Weil, *Beauty and the Beast*, 3.
8. See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quinton Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971). For an excellent discussion of how different authors' use of the concept of civil society compares to Gramsci's formulation, see Norberto Bobbio, "Gramsci and the Conception of Civil Society," in Chantal Mouffe, ed., *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971).
9. See Ivan Karp, "High and Low Revisited," *American Art* 5, no. 3 (1991), 2–7, where I describe how producers of "low" art tend to be divided into two categories: the popular, savvy artist versus the naive, unconscious amateur. This is a way of distinguishing between commercial art and so-called folk or primitive art. It creates a false opposition between trained artists and spontaneous artists. The result is that so-called folk and primitive artists are presented as if they had not painstakingly acquired their skills or as if they had no predecessors.
10. See the fall 1990 issue of *New Perspectives Quarterly*, "The Stupidification of America," in which conservatives, liberals, and radicals debate the causes of the declining standards of American education. This is just the sort of debate in which museums increasingly insert themselves, and in terms of which they justify their existence. This line of reasoning has unexpected consequences. Museum professionals are uncertain whether museums should be repositories of objects or conduits of information. The very claims that museums increasingly make open them up to this sort of debate.
11. John Higham, *Strangers in the Land* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 244, 247–48.
12. Neil Harris, "Polling for Opinion," *Museum News*, Sept./Oct. 1990, 46–53.
13. *Ibid.*, 97.
14. For left-wing critiques, see, for example, Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum," *Art History* 3, no. 4 (1980), 448–69, and Lawrence Lavine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988). For the critical right-wing position, see the arts writing found in such neoconservative journals as *The New Criterion*.
15. Neil Harris, *Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
16. Ivan Karp and Corinne Kratz, "The Fate of Tippoos Tiger: A Critical Account of Ethnographic Display" (Los Angeles: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1991).

17. Harris, "Polling for Opinion."
18. See Lavine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow* for a spirited account of how elites appropriated culture from the lower classes in nineteenth-century America. Stephen Weil points out that although the Metropolitan Museum of Art was started to make reproductions of European and classical art available to New York's working class, it was closed on Sunday "out of deference for the religious sensibilities of members of its board" (Weil, *Beauty and the Beast*, 4).
19. Harris, "Polling for Opinion."
20. "View of West Raises Hackles in Congress" read the headline in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (16 June 1991).
21. These are not hypothetical questions. Each of them is raised by the current debate over the repatriation of Native American materials. There are cases in which two competing tribal groups have claimed the same objects. There are instances in which requests have been made in the name of religious sensibilities to exclude people from access to collections on the grounds of gender. All of these raise painful moral dilemmas and also produce situations that could conceivably engender resistance to lawful and morally correct requests from Native American communities. Civil society is never wholly coherent, and responsible persons are often forced to take difficult stands.
22. Thomas Crow, *Painting and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 5.
23. The best account of "everyday forms of resistance" is James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).