Legible Sovereignties

Rhetoric, Representations,
and Native American Museums

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days and provided love and care on the days when I struggled. Thanks to my husband, Thorsten, and our son, Julian, for walking with me on this journey, and for never doubting that I would get there in the end.

Introduction

Rhetoric, Sovereignty, and Legibility in Native Museums

Step inside any museum or cultural center, and you will find a series of stories designed to educate the public. Science museums, natural history museums, art museums, ethnographic museums, and community cultural centers all aim to shape our perception of the world and provide a narrative of how things are or how they came to be. We go there to learn, we send our children there on school trips, we make them a part of our vacations. We seek them out as bastions of knowledge, archives of history, and sites for entertainment. We take the stories they tell as truth.

Given this association, and the negative connotation the word frequently carries for the public, "rhetoric" is not a concept often associated with the institutions and exhibits we take for granted as presenting factual material in a straightforward and attractive way. Yet as a discipline, far beyond the connotation of political spin doctors, "rhetoric" more broadly addresses the ways we communicate, the choices we make in communicating, how we try to reach our intended audiences, and how meaning-making is accomplished together between speakers and listeners (or readers and writers, or designers and observers). Museum practices are rhetorical practices in that these institutions are always making choices about which stories to tell, how to tell them, and for whom to tell them toward a particular goal or consequence.

These choices are obviously not without weight, but for the populations and communities who have historically been left out of the choice-making, the selection of options and the ways their stories have been told in many museums have been damaging, because those stories were never put together with them in mind as constituencies or audience members.

Many museums have participated in forms of scientific racism and ethnographic debasement that have frozen Native peoples in time and erased them from the present, from their own stories.

While the past few decades have been productive in calling attention to such colonial practices and attempts to revise them, museums and cultural centers remain sites of both friction and potential in their endeavors to represent Native[1] cultures and sovereignties. The long-term rhetorical ramifications of presenting Native peoples as past history and not part of the present are damning: Americans—including Native Americans—over the course of nearly two centuries have been shaped by these stories, these choices. The reworking of these habits of mind will take generations. Merely remaking exhibits to include a few Native voices is not enough; because audiences have been trained to expect particular ideas and narratives, simply providing a different story or adding a Native perspective does not solve the problem. The entire rhetorical frame has to be reconsidered and reconfigured to do justice to Native nations, histories, and cultures.

To Self-Represent: Rhetorics and the Stories That Museums Tell

This book takes for granted the work already done in museum studies and Native and Indigenous studies that calls for a decolonization of museums—here, that is a foregone conclusion. Discriminatory, colonizing practices must be changed, and the stories need retelling. What this study is most interested in is *how* these stories are told and what the consequences (intended and not) have been in museums' attempts at a new kind of meaning-making with their audiences, especially when the museum or cultural center is under some measure of Native control. The telling of the story is only the beginning of the process, and *Legible Sovereignties* works to articulate how it happens in a variety of contexts. It brings together the scholarly conversations in three disciplines that, in their overlaps, can provide insight into how Native-owned or allied museums function and how they can strengthen their abilities to communicate. *Legible Sovereignties* theorizes how we can understand museums as a visual, material, experiential rhetorical act, but one particular to Native communities that seeks to claim rhetorical sovereignty. It is based on the premises that, first, museums are sites of communication; second, that Native peoples have the inherent right to choose and claim public discourses such as a museum to self-represent; and third, that doing communication in a museum, with

its particular structures, is a messy business that, by default, is rhetorical in nature. This study thinks through the overlaps of these claims in order to reveal the rhetorical reasoning behind Native museum exhibits, demonstrating the process of the enactment of rhetorical sovereignty and addressing how that sovereignty is—and isn't—recognized by visitors in how they experience and comprehend the exhibits. One could argue that a statement is sovereign regardless of whether or not an audience understands it. Native peoples do not need non-Native visitors to give them permission to or to confirm they exist. However, I argue that if stereotypes are to be overturned and if education is to happen—if Native peoples want to be heard and understood—then we need to be rhetorically savvy. We need to make ourselves rhetorically legible, and legibly sovereign.

"Legible sovereignties" are the key to this study. My primary argument is that Native communities in the United States are claiming museums' communicative structures to meet their own communicative needs—an act of rhetorical sovereignty (Lyons 2000)—but that Native museum sites are discovering that this is not enough: the act of rhetorical sovereignty must be accessible to a variety of audiences, or the communicative act fails. If museums are colonial institutions at their roots, then utilizing them as a means to rhetorical sovereignty means dealing with the doubled complication of visitors' expectations of museums *and* visitors' expectations of "Indians."

To make my argument, I analyze three distinct contemporary sites over the course of a decade, including the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan's Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture & Lifeways in Mount Pleasant, Michigan; Haskell Indian Nations University's Cultural Center and Museum in Lawrence, Kansas; and the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC. Each site was selected because it represents a specific level and kind of influence from Native and Indigenous communities, a unique set of communicative exigencies, and a different target audience. Providing a perspective over a ten-year span that documents their inaugural permanent exhibits, audience reactions, and the institutions' consequent choices in strategic reaction, *Legible Sovereignties* offers longitudinal insights into how each institution originally hoped to reach its diverse audiences, the challenges and successes they have met, and the current changes they are making to keep their acts of self-representation legible. My goal is not a checklist for creating the perfect exhibit, but rather an analysis of the strategies that these three diverse sites have and

continue to develop in order to stay relevant, to deal with unexpected challenges, and to engage their visitors meaningfully through their exhibits. In the remainder of this chapter, I sketch the framework for understanding legible sovereignties, the circle of interdisciplinary scholarship from which my work emerges, and my methodological frame for the study.

Making Sovereignties Legible: The Framework

Legible Sovereignties theorizes what rhetorical-sovereignty-made-legible looks like by tracking the actual communicative development of the three institutions named above, the unexpected communicative challenges and opportunities these institutions encountered, and how they envision moving into the future based on their first decade of experience. For better or worse, many non-Native people form their ideas about Indigenous peoples based on what they see in museums; thus, museums and their study are of *vital importance*, both for the general public (to get the appropriate education about Native nations) and for Native nations and communities themselves (to exercise sovereignty in how they present themselves). Furthermore, this book argues that more than a statement of "we are still here"—the original clarion call of each of the inaugural displays—the exhibits that explain story, history, and culture in Native or Native-affiliated museums must do the rhetorical work to make their communicative acts of self-representation legible and accessible to audiences that may not know or fully grasp Native cultures and histories.

To show how I've arrived at legible sovereignties as a frame, a few key terms need explanation. Joanne Barker's analysis of "sovereignty" as a term reveals that far from a definite, fixed definition, sovereignty has roots in Euro-American discourses and has been adapted by Indigenous peoples in the service of self-governance, self-determination, cultural preservation, and more. Barker observes, "There is no fixed meaning for what *sovereignty* is. . . . Sovereignty—and its related histories, perspectives, and identities—is embedded within the specific social relations in which it is invoked and given meaning" (2005, 21).* For every new scenario an Indigenous community or nation meets, in which it needs to exert its rights, sovereignty will take on a new shade of meaning. As already noted, Scott Richard Lyons's work takes the concept of sovereignty into the realm of language and

* All emphases in quotations are original unless otherwise noted.

rhetorical practice. His pivotal argument in "Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want from Writing?" (2000) introduced the term "rhetorical sovereignty" into discussions about Native peoples' relationship to writing and rhetoric, defining it as "the inherent right of [Indigenous] *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse" (2000, 449–450). Lyons argues that public self-representation is tied to what he posits are the twin supports of broader Indigenous sovereignty: "the power to self-govern and the affirmation of peoplehood" (2000, 449–450, 456). Therefore, the articulation of rhetorical sovereignty is about self-representation, but a self-representation that reclaims identity and discursive power for Indigenous peoples. His original argument was situated primarily in the writing classroom, but I see the concept functioning in powerful ways outside the university, particularly in other sites for public education. Museums are one such site, even as deeply colonial as many of their histories are.

In fact, it should follow that if museums are potent public, rhetorical sites, then despite their colonial histories they can also potentially be turned to help undo the work of erasure and suppression of Indigenous peoples and can furthermore be sites for the enactment of rhetorical sovereignty. My previous published work on the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian's inaugural exhibits and the renovations of Hawaiian Hall at the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum in Honolulu, Hawai'i, has already extended the discussion into a consideration of the explicitly rhetorical nature of sovereignty and self-representation as a critical Indigenous-based framework for interpretation and revision (2011, 2014a, 2014b). While I agreed that cultural sovereignty is a necessary part of what the NMAI should embody, I argued that cultural sovereignty itself would not be understood unless curators and designers took rhetorical sovereignty into consideration: first make the purpose and role clear for visitors, and then follow with the rest (2011). Similarly, the results of the renovation of Hawaiian Hall at the Bishop Museum demonstrated the role of rhetorical sovereignty in creating a space that effectively communicates Native cultures, histories, and perspectives, especially when such a space is situated among other related and competing narratives, with a wide variety of visitors (2014a, 2014b). Simply stating "we are here and we are sovereign" is not necessarily the most persuasive argument for visitors, and furthermore, descriptions of the difficult histories and consequences of

colonialism is not exactly the stuff that non-Native museum visitors seek out. Connected to museum pedagogy and well-designed persuasion is the question of rhetorical legibility.

In the introduction to their collection *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*, Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott outline the intersections of rhetoric, memory, and place as they conceive them to meet in museum and memorial spaces. One of the concepts that emerges from this discussion is "rhetorical legibility," or "a sense of readability or understanding of an expression" in public sites (2010, 4). But far from being transparent, rhetorical legibility is "predicated in publicly recognizable symbolic activity *in context*. That is, rhetoric typically understands discourses, events, objects, and practices as timely, of the moment, specific, and addressed to—or constitutive of—particular audiences in particular circumstances" (4). Rhetorical legibility also presupposes a multiplicity of meanings based on social norms, accepted cultural practices, accepted histories, and orientations toward the symbol or meaning-making in general (4). No object or sign is ever neutral in its meaning, and a rhetorical approach "takes discourses, events, objects, and practices to be activities of a partisan character, embracing some notions and despising others, willfully or not" (4).

Rhetorical legibility is useful in that it helps point out part of the work that has to be accomplished if Indigenous statements of self-representation in museum exhibits are to be understood by their audiences. While most Indigenous museums and exhibits often try to keep their Indigenous audiences in mind, and may even be constructed primarily for those audiences, those same museums and exhibits also frequently seek a broader cross-cultural set of audiences with whom to have the conversation and to persuade, and also often rely on outside or non-Indigenous audiences for support. Sovereignty, in all its forms, can be argued as a process of emergence in the presence of others; as Robert Warrior has noted, for Indigenous nation–peoples, sovereignty is "not a struggle to be free from the influence of anything outside ourselves, but a process of asserting the power we possess as communities and individuals to make decisions that affect our lives" (1995, 124). Similarly, Lyons asserts that "rather than representing an enclave, sovereignty here is the ability to assert oneself renewed—in the presence of others" (2000, 457). In the context of a museum, rhetorical sovereignty may not be sovereignty at all without the participation of the exhibit's audiences. Yet if there is a responsibility to tell the difficult

truths that will challenge non-Native museumgoers, what can be done? Sovereignty must be made legible.

What I set forward with the idea of legible sovereignties is a means to approach and think through public declarations of rhetorical sovereignty that acknowledge the communicative needs of all potential audiences but tell the difficult truths and assert positive Native and Indigenous presence. How can museum exhibits best accomplish this? As Malea Powell has argued in "Down by the River, or How Susan La Flesche Picotte Can Teach Us about Alliance as a Practice of Survivance," rather than the "us" versus "them" that shapes so much of our understanding and colonial discourses, we need new frameworks and new language for making sense of multiple histories and voices. She asserts, "We need a new language, one that doesn't convince us of our unutterable and ongoing differences, one that doesn't force us to see one another as competitors, . . . [one] that allows us to imagine respectful and reciprocal relationships that acknowledge the degree to which we need one another (have needed one another) in order to survive and flourish" (2004, 41). "Rhetorical alliance" could then be understood as work toward a mutual dialogue across cultures and communities that "honor[s] a complex notion of texts that encompasses both beadwork and books as artifacts produced by users who have 'the ability to act quickly, effectively, and prudently within ever-changing contexts' (Johnson 53), but that doesn't ignore the particular circumstances of their production and meaning within specific cultural discourses" (2004, 44). While Powell makes this argument within the context of rhetoric as a discipline, I understand it in terms of its broader applications for cross-cultural discourse and here for its consequences for conceptualizing how museum exhibits might function to support legible sovereignties. What kind of language do we need, can we create, to build alliances and tell the hard stories together?

A note on what I am not doing here: I am not about to argue for pandering to non-Native visitors, or for Indigenous rhetors to identify so far with their non-Native visitors that the impact of difference is lost (Stromberg 2006, 3). I am also not arguing for a prescriptive step-by-step checklist for Indigenous museums and exhibits. It should also be acknowledged that in some contexts, a given exhibit's rhetorical purpose may indicate a need for exclusion or, at the very least, a tailoring to very specific audiences. Sometimes public displays are meant primarily for one audience and not for another, or are meant to address the needs of one audience in particular and ask others to observe but keep their distance. Additionally, as Barker has

already argued, sovereignty will be enacted according to given situations, purposes, and communities, and so will not be the same sovereignty in every place or space (Barker 2005, 21). Museums shift over time with their missions, their goals, their funding, and their visitors' needs, and it will show in their exhibits—therefore, no absolute mandate will work here. Yet what I do argue is that these cross-cultural spaces are precisely where a legibly rhetorically sovereign practice would be useful, those places that seek to engage the widest possible audience or that must, by default, work with multiple audiences. Effective, understandable—*legible*—communication is key.

To summarize, a study predicated on legible sovereignties recognizes the flexibility of the term "sovereignty" to encompass multiple routes and means to self-determination, and the intrinsic right of Native and Indigenous peoples, communities, and nations to self-represent in whatever means, modes, and public stages they choose as appropriate. It accepts the multiple possibilities of meaning-making in a given rhetorical act or display, and that care must be taken to make the communicative act comprehensible in its intended way. It acknowledges the grim truths and colonial histories that precede any present communication, but also desires to build alliances with its audiences, for without alliance and recognition the communicative act may fail. Finally, such a study seeks, in each given rhetorical situation—and its particular histories and specific set of variables—to find the most effective opportunities both to communicate the Indigenous community's self-representation and to assist audiences in grasping that statement of rhetorical sovereignty.

Taking the above into account, legible sovereignties as a framework for rhetorical action seeks to

1. Take Indigenous self-determination in communication first and foremost as the primary goal;

2. Understand and examine the communicative intent of a given act or display in support of the represented Indigenous communities;

3. Observe how the communicative act functions in reality, that is, assume it does generate multiple meanings for different audiences and take those multiple meanings into consideration of its total effect;

4. Analyze the tensions between the communicative intent and the multiple meanings generated;

5. Provide constructive rhetorical critique toward eliminating disconnects and strengthening communicative alliances between an exhibit's goals (and the community it represents) and its audiences.

Bringing All Our Relations Together: Completing the Circle as an Interdisciplinary Conversation

Understanding legible sovereignties goes beyond one disciplinary purview, and the work I seek to accomplish locates itself at the intersection of rhetoric studies, museum studies, and Native American and Indigenous studies. The overlaps between each scholarly community create a kind of exigent chain or circle, and in order to fully contextualize the relationships that support legible sovereignties, it helps to imagine them as a Venn diagram (figure 1). The three major circles represent the three fields, but the conversations that interest me most happen in the spaces where these scholarly communities touch and overlap. These interdisciplinary intersections meet fully in the center, where this book makes its claims about legible sovereignties and the significance of museums as a site of Indigenous public display and self-determination. For the sake of context, I briefly outline here some of the major perspectives from these disciplinary overlays in order to demonstrate their shared interests and to frame the enactment of legible sovereignties in museum spaces at the center.

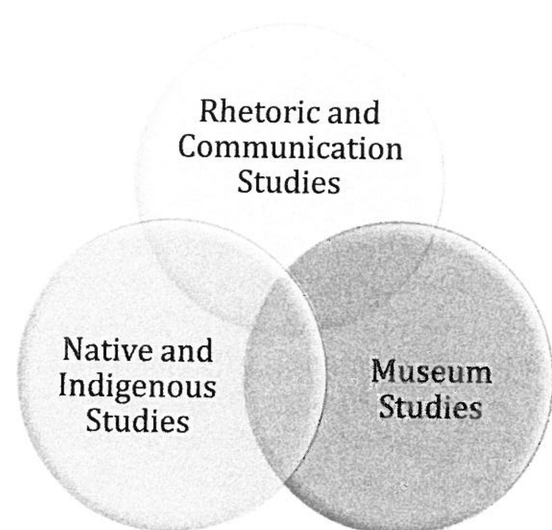

Fig. 1: Disciplinary Overlaps Venn Diagram

In the field of rhetoric and communication studies, legible sovereignties builds on and extends the work already developed in visual and material rhetorics, with an added emphasis on cultural specificity and representation. If rhetoric has traditionally been defined as persuasion or communication through speech or writing, the last several decades have seen a decided turn to the consideration of the rhetorical nature of the visual and material that demonstrates how visual and material elements participate in displays as a series of choices toward meaning-making and representation. Germinal collections of scholarly work in Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley's *Rhetorical Bodies* (1999) and Charles Hill and Marguerite Helmers's *Defining Visual Rhetorics* (2004) have brought the visual and material aspects of communication into focus, foregrounding the nature of communication as visual and material and calling for a reconsideration of traditional perspectives that consider the spoken or written word as the primary or even only form of rhetorical or communicative practice. Bodies, architecture, performances, and grocery store layouts all communicate to the people in their presence. This work is broad in its range, but does not yet fully engage with Indigenous peoples or cross-cultural communication.

At the same time, rhetoric studies has been building connections to museum studies, and rhetoric elucidates some of the key questions about how museums and memorials *are* rhetorical and not transparent in what they communicate. Carole Blair's powerful piece, "Contemporary U.S. Memorial Sites as Exemplar's of Rhetoric's Materiality" (1999), takes memorials as her focus for discussion and examines five different memorials and the rhetorical impact they make on their visitors through their existence and the experience visitors have as they interact. More than a transparent idea that is easily communicated at each site, the nuance of these spaces and the way visitors interact with them has a tremendous impact on the meaning that will be communicated. "Rhetoric," she argues, "has material force beyond the goals, intentions, and motivations of its producers, and it is our responsibility as rhetoricians not to just acknowledge that, but to try to understand it" (22). It goes without saying that memorials are built with particular intentions, to help retain the memory, in a certain way, of a specific event or person; yet those intentions are not the end of what the memorial is capable of communicating. Blair observes, "We must ask not just what a text means but, more generally, what it does, and we must not understand what it does as adhering strictly to what it was supposed to do" (23). Because communication is a negotiation between the memorial (with

the intentions of its sponsors and designers) and its visitors (with their own intentions and desires), intention is only the tip of the iceberg. In analyzing the selected memorials, then, Blair asserts that we should consider the significance of the memorial's existence; the material it is made from and the durability of that material; the memorial's ability to be reproduced or preserved; the ways that the memorial interacts with other nearby texts (other memorials, or other means of communication); and finally, how it acts on the people who visit it (1999). Communication occurs through all of these rhetorical, material facets.

Lawrence Prelli's collection *Rhetorics of Display* (2006) further elaborates on the intentional nature of communication through public display, asserting that "whatever is revealed through display simultaneously conceals alternative possibilities, and therein is display's rhetorical dimension" (2). Whatever we choose to display also suggests that which we chose not to display, and furthermore, "whether constituted through vocal enunciation, textual inscription, visual portrayal, material structure, enacted performance, or some combination, rhetorical study of displays proceeds from the central idea that whatever they make manifest or appear is the culmination of selective processes that constrain the range of possible meanings available to those who encounter them" (2). Displays are the end product of a process of selection, and thus do have some power to guide viewers' perceptions and limit what kinds of meaning might be made.

As we move clockwise into the circle of museum studies, it should be noted that dividing it from discussions of communication and rhetoric is in many ways an artificial boundary. I maintain that boundary here only for the sake of discussing museum studies' own terminology for its work, while simultaneously pointing out those connections and similarities it bears to rhetoric that might find a place in the overlap. It should be noted that museum studies scholar Bruce W. Ferguson actually put the terms "exhibit" and "rhetoric" into the same essay title in 1994 as "Exhibition Rhetorics: Material Speech and Utter Sense," demonstrating the growing reconception of exhibitions as rhetorical, narrative acts and an acknowledgment of the blurred disciplinary lines between rhetoric and museum studies. That essay is indicative of how this present rhetorical review and analysis, done in terms of museum studies discourse, further elucidates the past and present debates on communication, ethics, pedagogical intent, and visitor reactions—in other words, concerns with purpose, rhetorical strategies and their implications, and audience. Because museums have

such a tremendous meaning-making influence over their visitors, engaging their rhetorical implications is essential in order to understand why Native peoples care so much about museums at all, and what kinds of responsibilities museums have to both their visitor constituencies and their represented communities, and to all the overlaps in between. Furthermore, the frame of legible sovereignties points vividly to this exigence and the link between rhetoric and museum studies.

As already noted, museums have tremendous influence as disseminators of knowledge and shapers of public perception. Scholar Steven Hoelscher argues that the power of museums as purveyors of truth should not be underestimated; as American museum research has shown, he notes, "'Americans believe they recover "real" or "true" history at museums and historic sites'" (2011, 210; Rosenzweig and Theilen, as quoted in Hoelscher). Thus museums have far-reaching persuasive and rhetorical power for their visitors. Other discussions of rhetorical work have been taken up by scholars such as Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1999a [1992], 1999b, 2000, 2007), who consistently references the "pedagogy" of museum sites and their educational and communicative capacities. Hooper-Greenhill is overt in her assertion that museums employ "pedagogical style" and "pedagogy"—her words—to teach visitors through exhibits and displays, and that museums therefore do attempt to shape visitor perception (*Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* 2000, *Museums and Education* 2007). At the same time, she recognizes visitors bring their own expectations to the exhibits, and no matter what curators or exhibit designers want visitors to take away, the process of meaning-making is always a mutual process that works with, through, and sometimes against visitor perception and knowledge (2000, 4–5). The "pedagogy" that Hooper-Greenhill acknowledges is therefore a practice of persuasion, and thoroughly rhetorical in nature. However, explicit pedagogical practice is not the only means through which curators, designers, and visitors negotiate meaning. As Bill Hillier and Kali Tzortzi observe, the very layout of an exhibit and how visitors find their way through it creates what they call "space syntax," the particular ways display and arrangement allow for broader or narrower opportunities for interpretation (2011).

Research on museum visitors and their motivations has also been pivotal in understanding how to construct (rhetorically) effective exhibits. Judy Rand's insights into visitor needs, phrased as her "Visitors' Bill of Rights," underscores the imperative to work with visitors, not to patronize them; her list includes basic "orientation," making visitors feel welcome, helping visitors "have a good time," "respect—accept me for who I am and what I know," "communication—help me understand, and let me talk, too," and "choice and control—let me choose; give me some control" (2012; original 2000). John Falk and Lynn Dierking's research (2011 [1992], 2013) has been instructive in sorting out what museum visitors actually do with the exhibits they encounter, and in particular Falk's article "The Museum Visitor Experience" argues that one of the primary reasons visitors go to museums is less to be educated and more to reinforce narratives about their own identities, often into one of five observed categories: the "explorer," who is curious; the "facilitator," who is "socially motivated"; the "professional/hobbyist," who "feel[s] a close tie between the museum content and their . . . passions"; the "experience seeker," who wishes to have "been there and done that"; and the "recharger," who seeks a "contemplative, spiritual and/or restorative experience" (Falk 2012, 324–325). Those visitors who do not find what they seek may furthermore be offended or upset by what they find: as the backlash over a 1991 Smithsonian exhibit titled "The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820–1920" showed, those visitors will reject what they see and challenge it, defeating the communicative goals of the exhibit (Simpson 1996). Overall, as Falk and others observe, to stay relevant, museums need to better understand and anticipate visitors' needs and reactions, and find the rhetorical means to reach them.

At the same time, museum studies has marked a shift in the way that museums serve communities other than visitors. Museums are now recognizing responsibility to the communities whose cultures and lives form the basis of many collections and exhibits. Edited collections such as Sharon Macdonald's *A Companion to Museum Studies* (2011) and Gail Anderson's *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift* (2012) bring together a range of perspectives that point to a growing awareness, since the 1970s and again since the 1990s, to rethink what it is that museums can and should do, often under the frame of the "new museology movement." Museum experts and scholars acknowledge that, more than acting only as collection sites or perpetuating the condescending and distorting narratives of colonialism or presenting master narratives of history—or functioning outright as a "mausoleum," as Andrea Witcomb asserts (2003)—museums need to change their practices and change how they serve their communities, both those represented in the exhibits

and collections and those who visit. For example, through her work with Dutch and Indonesian museums, Christina Kreps demonstrates the shift toward a "new museology" in her critique of the Eurocentric hegemony of museum practices that focus too much on preservation and conservation, ultimately undermining the abilities of communities to curate their own heritage, as well as the abilities of Indigenous communities to reclaim control over their heritage and "speak for themselves" (2003, 155). Other scholars such as Ruth B. Phillips (2006, 2011) and Annie Coombes (2006) continue to document the ways in which Indigenous peoples around the world in North America, the Pacific, New Zealand, and Africa work to have a say in how museums and exhibitions represent them, or develop their own heritage sites altogether.

While not an exhaustive overview of museum studies scholarship, this review demonstrates the amount of attention being paid to rethinking museum paradigms concerning collection and display, and the consideration of museum visitors' needs (which, admittedly, is both a function of desiring a successful experience / education for visitors and of acquiring adequate financial support through visitor numbers). What is clear now is that museums serve more than one constituency: they work with the communities who are part of the displays *and* the communities who come to see them, and as such the needs of both should be met. Communicative, pedagogical choices—rhetorical choices—are part of this endeavor in the construction of exhibits, as are the worldviews of all parties involved.

Moving to the overlap between Native studies and museum studies, representations of Native peoples in museums are part of this history, and historically such displays created by non-Native scholars and curators frequently depicted white ideas of "Indians" that had little to do with Native self-representation or contemporary life. Scholarship recognizing the colonial roots of museums as a communicative structure and the influence of Western ways of perceiving Indigenous material cultures has already been published (see for example Kreps and West below; also Barringer and Flynn, 1998; Edwards, Gosden, and Phillips, 2006). Devon Mihesuah's collection *Repatriation Reader* (2000) vividly illustrates the multiple demands on museums and collections that house Native American remains and material culture as a result of colonial practices of collecting and display. In the United States, that discussion has been particularly shaped by the passing of the National Museum of the American Indian Act (1989) and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) (1990).

The Smithsonian published *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian* (West 2000), a collection of scholarly essays that traces the European and North American history of representing American Indian peoples in museums and provides critical context for how and why American Indians have been represented as exotic, fossilized, or vanishing cultures. Mary Lawlor's work *Public Native America* (2006) did groundbreaking work on the relationship between several forms of Native public self-representation, including Native museums, powwows, and casinos, and how those performances are designed to resonate with non-Native audiences. Self-definition and self-determination are key in these instances, because—in the face of the narratives created in traditional histories and tourism of Native communities—Native peoples do have some choice about how to define themselves and present themselves to the public. But how does this process reach success? How are these sovereignties made legible?

The construction and opening of the National Museum of the American Indian in 2004 on the National Mall in Washington, DC, sparked major discussion concerning Native and Indigenous representation in museums. Although the NMAI is not the first or only museum with extensive ethnographic collections from North or South America, as one of the most visible sites and as part of the Smithsonian Institution, the museum drew much attention and critique that has rippled outward to other institutions. Two special issues of *American Indian Quarterly* in 2005, on the opening of the NMAI, explored the multiple perspectives—ranging from the celebratory to the highly critical—offered on the museum's design and inaugural exhibits, demonstrating the wide range of scholarly reaction. Amy Lonetree and Amanda Cobb-Greetham published the series of essays again as *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Perspectives* (2008), working through the history of the NMAI, the attempts to use Indigenous methodologies and collaboration in its construction, the scholarly interpretations and reactions to the space, and the questions concerning nationhood and identity that the NMAI raises. Meanwhile, the United Nations formally adopted the "Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples" in 2007 (2008), including provisions for Indigenous self-representation and cultural preservation on those communities' terms.

The Smithsonian has continued to publish work on the present and future of Indigenous museums, including *Vision, Space, Desire* (2006), *The Native Universe and Museums in the Twenty-First Century* (2005), and *Living Homes for Cultural Expression* (Cooper and Sandoval 2006). Conversations

over the difficulties and conflicts in creating Indigenous museum spaces have endured, and Susan Sleeper-Smith's edited collection *Contesting Knowledge: Museums and Indigenous Perspectives* (2009) provides yet another look into the challenges and difficulties of Indigenously grounded meaning-making and representation in a museum space, whether that space is a national museum or a tribal museum. Regardless of these challenges, Sleeper-Smith affirms that "while museums may have emerged as part of the original colonial project, they have been put to new purposes. . . . Indigenous peoples are using museums to emerge from invisibility and to deconstruct the colonization narrative from the viewpoint of the oppressed" (4).

Finally, one of the most recent monographs on the topic of Native museums, Amy Lonetree's *Decolonizing Museums* (2012), offers a historian's perspective of exhibition creation and construction and calls for more critical conversations in examining and telling the "hard truths" of colonization in Indigenous museums. For the sake of decolonizing these spaces, Lonetree argues, "it is time for us as communities to acknowledge the painful aspects of our history along with our stories of survivance, so that we can move toward healing, well-being, and true self-determination" (6). Lonetree's work is groundbreaking in the way she provided genealogies of the museum sites she worked with and critique toward decolonizing museums and telling the harder, more difficult histories of colonization instead of relying on celebration to carry an exhibit. She ultimately argues for ways to make these "places matter" to Indigenous peoples, as she asserts in her conclusion. The concept of legible sovereignties, in contrast, calls attention to the rhetorical, communicative structures on which such practices depend and that make Native and Indigenous self-representations clear, comprehensible, and relevant to multiple audiences in the moment of opening and over time.

The critical conversation surrounding museums and exhibits in Native American and Indigenous studies is ongoing. This is in no small part because they are public displays that create both an opportunity for self-determination and a way to communicate to and educate a wide variety of audiences. At the same time, because contexts, histories, and Native and Indigenous communities vary so much, no blanket solution exists, and tensions continue between attempting to theorize overarching ideas to support Indigenous self-representation and dealing with the nuance of a given situation. Every communicative choice that goes into an exhibit has

a consequence, and trying to prioritize community and visitor needs—on both the macro and micro levels—creates considerable pressure, particularly given the colonial history of museums. Thinking in terms of legible sovereignties helps orient this discussion in a way that highlights its rhetorical elements and the actual strategies for addressing audience concerns without losing sight of Native communities' priorities.

In many ways, scholars in Native and Indigenous rhetorical studies—the overlap to the left on the diagram in figure 1—bring us full circle as they articulate the ramifications of rhetorical study and public display for Indigenous nations, communities, and individuals. Working our way further clockwise on the diagram, the discussion in Native and Indigenous studies concerning the tension between representations made *of* Native peoples and representations made *by* Native peoples has been vigorous, and legible sovereignties offers a further rhetorical consideration of these issues. Historical scholarship tracing colonial manipulation of Native images has already laid the groundwork in many ways; Roy Harvey Pearce's *Savagism and Civilization* (1988) and Robert F. Berkhofer Jr.'s *The White Man's Indian* (1979) both trace in detail how European colonists and American settlers have created their own representations of Native peoples to serve as a contrastive foil to whatever version of civilization stood in question. S. Elizabeth Bird's edited collection *Dressing In Feathers* (1996) provides some important popular culture examples of non-Native representations of Indigenous peoples, and Philip J. Deloria's 1998 monograph *Playing Indian* documents the many ways non-Native Americans have put on their idea of Indianness to suit their particular needs. The arc of such scholarship demonstrates the ongoing ways that non-Native individuals and organizations manipulate images of the "Indian" for their own purposes, with little regard for Native peoples themselves. At the same time, Native peoples have not been and are not absolutely helpless. Deloria's second book, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (2004), rewrites the narrative to reveal the multiple ways Native peoples have challenged their historical erasure by active participation in a society that imagines them vanished. Scott Richard Lyons's (2010) book *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent* argues in part for considering the actions of Indigenous peoples as participation in modernity—sometimes a coerced participation, as with a treaty signature—but active, chosen participation nonetheless. In short, there is a long history of making representations of Native peoples and of Native peoples making representations, and the tensions in that

meaning-making are key to understanding current debates on Native self-representation. This points to legible sovereignties.

As already discussed, Lyons's concept of "rhetorical sovereignty" has become one of several crucial frames for discussing the relationship between rhetorical practice and Indigenous sovereignties. The articulation of rhetorical sovereignty is about self-representation, but a self-representation that reclaims identity and discursive power for Indigenous peoples well beyond Lyons's original conceptualization for the classroom. Malea Powell's contributions to the field in her historiographic work on Native rhetoricians and public figures such as Charles Eastman, Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, and Susan La Flesche Picotte, her criticism of modes of rhetorical analysis that erase Indigenous peoples, and her most recent work on the rhetorics of Indigenous makings—basketry, beadwork, and their related activity—underscore the wide variety of Indigenous rhetorical and meaning-making practices, past and present (2002, 2004, 2008). Ernest Stromberg's edited collection *American Indian Rhetorics of Survivance* (2006) begins theorizing Indigenous rhetorical strategies as deployed in various genres of texts produced by Native Americans, including speeches, the oral tradition, novels, boarding school narratives, and prison writing. In considering the wide range of contributions to the collection, Stromberg identifies a general pattern: to reach a white or non-Native audience, Native rhetoricians have to work across divisions between themselves and a non-Native audience while still "maintaining an insistence of difference" (3). Angela Haas's work with wampum-as-hypertext has called attention to Indigenous rhetorical makings as a pivotal part of "the intellectual history of technology, hypertext, and multimedia studies" that demand recognition (2007). Andrea Riley-Mukavetz's privileging of story as methodology illuminates the ways Native rhetors enact and "Native rhetoricians examine *how* American Indians make and disseminate knowledge within various intellectual sites," including "community-based research" and "embodied and visual rhetorics" (2014). Additionally, Joyce Rain Anderson's long-term collaborations with Boston-area and regional museums demonstrate the ongoing process of shifting away from static representations of Native peoples toward a more rhetorically aware practice of consultation and exhibit construction (2015).

Therefore, recent rhetorical study in Native rhetorics covers not only the more traditional consideration of spoken words or written texts, but also the visual and the material across a vast array of sites. In the shared space with museum studies and display, we understand that

meaning-making happens through a series of choices about what we choose to put forward—what we choose to display and how we display it—and yet while the series of choices narrows the opportunities for interpretation and sharpens intent, actual intention is not the end of the communicative process. For Native and Indigenous studies and related communities in the overlap to the left of our diagram, this means that public rhetorical practice is inextricably tied up with self-determination, and as Stromberg sharply observes, "In the aftermath of white military conquests and subjugation, Indians who would speak or write on behalf of Native rights and cultures were and often still are addressing an audience that assumes its own superiority. It is not a rhetorical situation conducive to mutual dialogue" (2006, 5). The challenge is how to make that public communication, that selected display, work in terms of sovereignty and for the good of Indigenous communities. It is in this way that legible sovereignties finds its roots in the rhetorical turn to the visual and material as well as the foundational work of Native and Native-allied scholars in rhetoric, and continues expanding the conversation while bringing Native and Indigenous perspectives to the fore.

In sum, legible sovereignties as a frame both articulates the connections in these three fields and creates a meeting place within this interdisciplinary constellation[2] for discussing the rhetorical impact of Native American museums. Rhetoric studies tells us that meaning is communicated in more than just written text, and that places, spaces, and displays are deeply rhetorical acts. Every choice a curator or designer makes has rhetorical resonance in how a visitor will experience and interpret an exhibit. Museum studies points to the persuasive and pedagogical nature of exhibits and the necessity of paying attention to visitor needs. Moreover, museum studies has been developing a self-reflexivity in order to consider the Eurocentric tradition of museums and how Indigenous communities should have a say—if not control over—the handling of their own heritages. Native American and Indigenous studies underscore the need to address the problems with past and present museum representations of Indigenous peoples and communities and the ways in which these communities can take representation into their own hands through this communicative medium. Native Americans have a particular stake in discussing rhetorical practice, be it their own or the ways in which they have been and are depicted, because rhetorical practice has a direct effect on visitor perception—often with material and policy consequences.

For this study, legible sovereignties is the framework for rhetorical action to address the questions that develop out of this nexus of ideas as they reflect diverse experiences at a range of museum sites: How do we make the most of museum exhibits to serve both Native and Indigenous communities and their visitors? How do we make sure that Native voices are prioritized, but visitor needs are not ignored? How do we handle the "hard truths" of history and the realities of colonization? These questions are significant in the endeavor to use a loaded communicative framework for new purposes that must serve multiple interests and needs if Native communities wish to shift public discourse and representations of Native peoples.

Notes on Methodology

It could be argued that these questions go beyond museums, and that legible sovereignties is a framework that could be employed outside a museum space. I fully support that assertion. Grasping how this kind of communication functions goes beyond a given museum exhibit. At the same time, it is in part through the above-outlined interdisciplinary work and the public attention museums receive that theorizing this process is possible. Additionally, museum exhibits offer vivid and concrete examples that make applying legible sovereignties to other contexts easier.

With that in mind, my own approach as a rhetorician to answering these questions in the context of these exhibits takes some support from rhetorical genre theory and its methodologies. It should be noted that museum scholar Gwyneira Isaac, for example, has begun applying the term "genre"—or in her work, "genres of expectancy"—and rightly observes that audience expectations of an exhibit or subject matter may guide audience reaction, and that problems with exhibits may emerge when curator and audience expectations do not align (2008). However, rhetoric studies has a more fully articulated understanding and methodology regarding genre that more systematically addresses genre and communication and can be useful in its application here.

Rhetorical genre theory shares the assumption that communication of any kind is often a typified act in response to a perceived set of circumstances, that genres function to do the work of groups or communities and that in turn those genres support, shape, and maintain the boundaries of that community (Devitt 2004; Barwarshi and Reiff 2010). It is communication understood as social action (Miller 1994). Genres ask users

to take on particular roles in relationship to each other in the course of using those genres and participating in the activities they support. Genres are also inherited, and what users do with them in the present is in part constrained by the handed-down expectations entailed with that particular genre (Jamieson 1975; Devitt 2004). At the same time, genres are both sites of creativity and constraint. On that essential point, Amy Devitt argues,

> Without genres, writers would lack significant ways of understanding their experiences and of making meaning through language. With genres, writers are subject to the manipulation of others and to the constraints of prior expectations, assumptions, values, and beliefs. Janus-like, genres inevitably look both ways at once, encompassing convergence and divergence, similarity and difference, standardization and variation, constraint and creativity. Rejecting these dichotomies and sustaining these tensions, genre can become, as language, infinitely and essentially creative. (2004, 162)

As such, in examining communication, a genre researcher looks for generic patterns that users employ, the reasons they do it (the rhetorical goals), the expected (intended) effects, and what actually happens with given utterances in that generic form as they make their way through that genre's community of users. Does the genre change? Does it signal something different for each user, playing a different role (think what a medical intake form means to a doctor versus a patient)? What role does the genre itself play in the community? What meaning-making impact does it have?

Within *Legible Sovereignties*, the opportunities for application point to local and larger rhetorical structures. In terms of more than just expectations, museums as institutions and, one could argue, genres, have been created to support the education of the masses and have routinely reflected the ideological frames of their creators. Colonialism and the display of colonized peoples were a strong part of this, and it is these same communicative structures and methods that curators and designers struggle with today. Museums and their genres support particular versions or ideas of history, culture, and science, shaped in part by their creators and funders, which in turn shape us. Museums as conceptual lenses are inherited, as are the roles played by curators, designers, and visitors. Especially when museums attempt to do something different or change the rules,

the constraints become clear in curators' struggles, visitors' frustration, or funders' dissatisfaction. If participants' expectations are challenged, so too are the roles they know how to play; to challenge expectations is not merely asking participants to get used to something new, but rather to change participants' roles and thus their relationship to the genre and its supporting communities. This can disorient participants to the point of being unable to function and possibly rejecting the change in the genre and thus all it attempts to communicate. At the same time, knowing these constraints provides insight into how to change the structure, and there is room for creativity. The museum itself has the potential to take on new meaning as a purveyor and keeper of knowledge when it is placed in a new setting or situation, and though there is a chance for its inherited meaning-making tendencies to shadow each attempt at remaking it, there also exists the chance for something new. This is the work I see Native American and Indigenous museums doing.

Legible Sovereignties, however, is not a rhetorical genre theory study per se; it is instead a genre-theory-informed rhetorical analysis that has the enactment of effective rhetorical sovereignty as its primary goal, as I have already addressed. A rhetorical genre theory–based study of museum exhibits conducted with the purpose of defining them as genres or interlocking sets of genres would be an entirely different project (and a study of what goes on in Indigenous museums to differentiate them would be something still different). At the same time, this study does to an extent take for granted the readers' previous experiential and nearly intuitive knowledge of what museum exhibits are, and the roles that we play, at least as visitors, when we enter such a space. Rhetorical genre theory provides some useful guideposts for how I approached data collection and how I present my findings in order to be responsive and responsible to the museums' communities, taking into account the original intentions of the exhibits (and not simply imposing my own reading from the outset), and paying attention to what visitors do with those spaces. Genre theory also points to museum exhibits as spaces of both creativity and constraint, for designers, curators, and visitors, and usefully highlights those tensions not as anomalies or failures, but as part of the ongoing process of communication.

Additionally, rhetorical genre theory emphasizes a holistic approach much in line with the discussions of memorials and displays above, and so reinforces Blair's and Prelli's assertions about rhetoric, experience, and display, with the added advantage of emphasizing community use of the

genres. This overall approach requires not just reading the alphabetic text of the brochures or exhibit labels, but also examining everything that makes the genre what it is. In the case of museum exhibits, this means considering layout, color, lighting, displays, selection of objects, labeling, sound, narration, guided or unguided tours, the mission statement of the institution and guiding statement for the exhibit (to establish intentions), and interviews with staff for their understanding of the intentions of the space, the process of making the space, and what they observe people actually doing with the exhibits. Ideally, a visitor study would be part of this, but given cost and time constraints, few museums ever do this, and rely more on observation of visitors, direct feedback through visitor books and other correspondence, and feedback from sponsors. In short, rhetorical genre theory has provided me suggestions for the "how" of this project, if not the goal itself.

My own research was conducted at the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan's Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture & Lifeways (Ziibiwing), the Haskell Indian Nations University's Cultural Center and Museum (HCCM), and the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC (NMAI), over the course of two time periods: first, 2006–2007, a few years after each institution initially opened and after the proverbial dust had settled; and second, during the summer of 2014, as each institution met or approached its ten-year anniversary. Further follow-up visits have been conducted as necessary. The first round of research I conducted was part of my efforts to understand what the theory of rhetorical sovereignty would look like in practice, especially as Indigenous communities sought to create public spaces for cross-cultural education and self-representation. The second round of research was conducted specifically with this book in mind, in order to understand how each museum site had maintained, shifted, or altogether changed its approach to support its efforts toward rhetorical sovereignty over time.

I visited each site multiple times during each phase of research to document the details of each museum's permanent or inaugural exhibits in photographs and to interview curators and designers to better understand what they intended or desired the communicative effect of the exhibits to be, in their words. I also asked for anecdotal and documented evidence for visitor responses to the exhibits, or what studies on visitors might be available. This kind of analysis also involves me, the researcher, in roles as both visitor and scholar. For each site, I went through each space first as a visitor

to experience it as a new visitor would, and then went through multiple times more to photograph the exhibit for my records and analysis. As a result, I have two bodies of data—photographs, interviews, and my own experiences there as visitor and as researcher—that provide the comparison and the longitudinal insights into rhetorical sovereignty in museums as an ongoing communicative process between Indigenous communities, museums, and visitors.

A final note on methodology: I take to heart Linda Tuhiwai Smith's call for decolonizing research methodologies, and her pointed questions about and demand for self-reflexivity in the process of research are just as pertinent now as when she first published *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* in 1999. To my mind, this is not a genre study or distanced rhetoric study per se, because it needs to be a study in rhetorical sovereignty, in self-determination. Tuhiwai Smith locates self-determination as the center goal of an Indigenous research agenda (2012 [1999], 120–121), and I hope it is clear that the guiding force for this book is the desire to support the power of Indigenous self-determination and expression through museums. All of the processes she names—healing, decolonization, transformation, and mobilization—happen at Ziibiwing, at the HCCM, and at the NMAI, but in different ways, and with varying successes. As I outline below, this book is an effort to strengthen the effect of these processes, for the good of all communities involved.

Chapter Overviews

I have endeavored in this introductory chapter to lay out the moment of necessity to speak, as the disciplines of rhetoric studies, museum studies, and Native American and Indigenous studies are having increasingly overlapping conversations about the best ways to communicate Indigenous self-representation and self-determination in a museum space. The conceptual framework of legible sovereignties is a product of this conversation and my own research with the three distinct museums/cultural centers named above. Creating and maintaining legible sovereignties is fine to talk about in theory, but the best observations and analysis can be had in how these processes play out on the ground in the life of an institution. In the following chapters, I use the framework of legible sovereignties to analyze the permanent or inaugural exhibits at Ziibiwing, the HCCM, and the NMAI to demonstrate the variety and complexity of attempts and methods for

making sovereignties legible in three distinct situations. Their individual chapters also examine the present state of these exhibits and the way their institutions have shifted in their thinking about Indigenous self-representation through museum display, and the ways they are currently making changes to better reach their audiences.

Chapter 1 begins this analysis of legible sovereignties in actual museum sites, and it focuses on the tribally owned and operated Ziibiwing Center and the ways it has attempted to enact legible sovereignty. This chapter works through Ziibiwing's formation, mission, and permanent exhibit; analyzes the permanent exhibit and the original intentions behind it; and then turns to an examination of the present state of the permanent exhibit and the plans the staff and community have for it. As the only tribally owned and operated institution in the analysis, the Ziibiwing Center provides particular insight into how legible sovereignty can be enacted, moving from a reaction to NAGPRA to an active community centerpiece that serves the immediate Saginaw Chippewa community, a range of Native and Indigenous communities that seek it out as an example, and broader educational initiatives in the surrounding area. While its primary goal and audience is always the local Saginaw Chippewa and surrounding Anishinabek communities, the Ziibiwing Center continues to build bridges to and relationships with the surrounding city of Mount Pleasant and beyond. By beginning with a tribal cultural center, I also frame the subsequent discussion in terms of these local, tribally centered efforts toward legible sovereignties.

Chapter 2 continues the on-site rhetorical analysis of legible sovereignties at the Haskell Cultural Center and Museum, an intertribal museum that represents both the multiple Native communities included in the student body at Haskell Indian Nations University (HINU) and the institution's own beginnings and history. This chapter examines the museum's history, mission, and inaugural exhibit; analyzes the original intentions behind that first exhibit, which still stands ten years later; and then moves to an analysis of the present condition of the exhibit, the site, and future plans. What is singular about the HINU Cultural Center and Museum is the university's history as a boarding school, its situation between tribal communities and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, its diverse audiences—the university body represents more than 150 tribal nations and communities—and its mission to be both a site to confront the past and a keeper of Haskell's history. Legible sovereignty here has to do with meeting the multigenerational needs

of Haskell students (past and present), making do with limited resources even as federal funding is cut, and maintaining the site as a place of healing that is also relevant in more ways than the boarding school narrative.

Chapter 3 addresses the final site, one of the best-known Native-allied museums in the United States: the National Museum of the American Indian. This chapter provides a descriptive overview of the museum's history, mission, and three inaugural exhibits; moves to an analysis of intentions of the original exhibits and the critiques that arose; and finally shifts to an analysis of the present state of the NMAI and its future plans. Particular to this site, legible sovereignty has had to deal with ownership by the Smithsonian Institute and to encompass an audience of millions that comes in from around the world, including tourists and policy-makers from Capitol Hill who seek an education about Indigenous peoples of the Americas. It has also had to answer the initial and still-ongoing critiques that it does not address the difficult truths of colonialism in the Americas in a blunt enough fashion or make itself relevant enough to the average museumgoer. The chapter ends with a focus on *Nation to Nation: Treaties Between the United States and American Indian Nations*, the first new installation (September 2014) to take the place of one of the inaugural exhibits, and one that reflects the altered approaches the NMAI is now taking with its exhibits.

The conclusion presents the summative findings of the analyses of legible sovereignty at the museum sites, drawing together their commonalities as well as providing a last discussion of how legible sovereignty comes to mean something particular to each institution's history, mission, and audiences. Again, not a checklist for a successful exhibit but rather a reflection on strategy, the conclusion reviews the key ideas that each institution provides in thinking through its own attempts at an accessible statement of rhetorical sovereignty. This final chapter also discusses the future of Native museums, and how thinking through the process of making an exhibit's or institution's communicative act of sovereignty accessible is now a pivotal consideration for present and future exhibitions. Simply put, all three sites acknowledge that stating "we are still here" is not enough, calls for decolonizing practice are not enough, and that what Native and Indigenous statements of rhetorical sovereignty ultimately must do is find expression in a way that both supports Native and Indigenous communities according to their needs and makes itself relevant and understandable to visitors. These stories of Indigenous resilience and self-determination

are too powerful to go unheard, but their power alone will not get them an audience; in telling some these institutions' stories, I hope to provide insights into how they and other institutions can keep gaining the audiences they deserve and telling the stories that audiences need to hear.

Conclusion

Openings for Legible Sovereignties

There is for me always a sense of both contentment and regret when I leave one of these museums or cultural centers: contentment in having borne witness to frequently beautiful acts of self-representation, however terrible the truths they speak; regret in knowing that I have to leave and knowing that it will change behind me. When I go back next it will not be the same. Yet as a matter of course, it shouldn't be. In this way, it is strange to write a conclusion here, particularly because, as I write, each of the sites discussed here is already moving along, doing more, and continuing to refine their practices in articulating legible sovereignties.

It might be better to think of this as a resting place to consider, in sum, what a rhetorical analysis of the past ten years can show us (the scholars, the community members, the visitors) about how enacting legible sovereignties shifts over time and space in response to community and audience needs. This rhetorical analysis has attempted to reveal the nuances between speaker-display and its audiences through stated intentions and actual effects, the institutions' reactions to audience feedback, and their continued work. The advantage of a rhetorical analysis like this is that it can provide not just theoretical justification for Native and Indigenous self-representation, but also on-the-ground analysis of how it happens and how it must strategically shape and reshape itself. To illustrate this further, in the following I provide a brief comparative look at what the Ziibiwing Center, the HCCM, and the NMAI have accomplished and where they have struggled, and an update on what each of them is now doing at the time of this writing.

In the introduction, I outlined the key ideas for a framework that supports the legible representation of rhetorical sovereignty, with the proviso that what "rhetorical sovereignty" will look like and what needs to be done for the sake of legibility will change according to the time and the museum or cultural center site. What works for one place will not function well for another; what a set of audiences need at one site will be different for the next site. However, there is some unity in the process of shaping rhetorically sovereign communication. To recap, in thinking through legible sovereignties as a framework for rhetorical action, we can

1. take Indigenous self-determination in communication first and foremost as the primary goal;
2. understand and examine the communicative intent of a given act or display in support of the represented Indigenous communities;
3. observe how the communicative act functions in reality—that is, assume it does generate multiple meanings for different audiences and take those multiple meanings into consideration of its total effect;
4. analyze the tensions between the communicative intent and the multiple meanings generated; and
5. provide constructive rhetorical critique toward eliminating disconnects and strengthening communicative alliances between communicative goals (and the community they represent) and audiences.

The Goal Is Indigenous Self-Determination, The Intention Is to Speak

At each of the sites covered here and in each of their major exhibits, each institution is attempting to make a rhetorically sovereign statement about the community it serves or represents. What is quickly clear, however, is that the context—the site itself, the time in which it speaks, the reasons for speaking in that time and place—all influence how rhetorical sovereignty becomes embodied in the exhibits. For example, at the Ziibiwing Center, long-standing community desire and immediate post-NAGPRA need were primary driving forces in the creation of the Ziibiwing Center. As a result, the articulation of rhetorical sovereignty came directly from the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, and the goals of the Ziibiwing Center and *Diba Jimooyung* are to maintain local Anishinabe knowledge and history and

educate the home community about them. Outside audiences are welcome to join, and it is the hope that, through this education, tribal members, other Anishinabek people, and area communities will come to recognize the value and importance of Saginaw Chippewa history, culture, and place. Particularly because the Isabella Reservation has been a site of contested histories and ownership, the Ziibiwing Center's existence and goals seek to firmly establish Saginaw Chippewa voices within the discussion and on that land.

Meanwhile, at the HCCM, a historical institution representing 150 tribal nations found itself in need of a way to trace and preserve its history. The HCCM now houses and protects the Haskell archives, and the *Honoring Our Children* exhibit captured that desire for retrospection from Haskell's origins as a boarding school to its support of Native cultures and students today. More than only a repository or site for display of history, though, the HCCM stands as a space intended to encourage students to confront the boarding school histories that still resonate for many Native families and communities. The articulation of rhetorical sovereignty therefore comes in part from the desire to remember and document this history, but then also show how Haskell students over time have turned the purpose of school to serve them and their communities. Additionally, the HCCM was intended to stand as a bridge between the past and the present and between the Haskell community and the Lawrence and Kansas City–area audiences.

On the national and international stage, the NMAI attempts to represent the voices of two continents and an entire hemisphere of Indigenous peoples and nations. Its ambitious attempts at reforming museological practices on such a scale have resulted in both praise and criticism from multiple camps, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, pointing to the necessity of reevaluating goals, techniques, and audience needs in order to best represent the Indigenous communities it works with. The three inaugural exhibits, *Our Peoples*, *Our Universes*, and *Our Lives*, were far from failures, but they revealed the complex ways that self-representation finds expression and the need for self-reflexivity when that expression does not resonate with—or is not even legible to—its audiences. *Nation to Nation* represents the first large-scale attempt to rearticulate legible sovereignties with the understanding gleaned from reactions to the inaugural exhibits, and its successes reflect both the rhetorical progress being made in articulating legible sovereignties and the need to keep reassessing what constituent communities and audiences need.

A brief cross-comparison of these three institutions with regard to legible sovereignties helps illustrate how much the context, site, and differing needs of communities influence the different forms a legibly sovereign statement will take. With regard to taking Indigenous self-determination in communication as the primary goal, it can be safely said that each of these institutions does this. At the same time, context requires that it happen in different ways. At the Ziibiwing Center, a community-oriented approach grown from the community's long-expressed desire to articulate its own history among many Saginaw Chippewa has shaped the path of *Diba Jimooyung*. The center's location, alongside the town of Mount Pleasant and within the long history of conflict and discrimination there, highlights the need for a functioning site of public outreach and makes the Ziibiwing Center's message and mission relevant for the present and the future for the sake of staking Saginaw Chippewa claims to existence, to culture, and at times even to sovereignty under the law.

At the HCCM, self-determination takes the shape of narrating Haskell's evolution from boarding school to a unique pan-tribal, Native-supporting institution of higher education. The need to speak here is closely tied to preserving that history and articulating it for students, faculty, and surrounding communities so that it can be remembered and not forgotten. But more than simply preserving history, the process of mounting and maintaining *Honoring Our Children* has provided the means for students and faculty to come to grips with that history; in speaking it, the exhibit has the potential to provide a site for healing and motivation. For the wider surrounding community, the exhibit stands as a reminder of a history that is all-too-often sidelined in favor of more palatable narratives about the region.

At the NMAI, the need to self-represent is situated on the National Mall in the United States' capital city, among the long-standing historical narratives that freeze or erase Native peoples in time, at the epicenter of legislative power. It is also a tourist city that attracts millions of visitors a year, and thus is both a national and global platform for Native and Indigenous voices. The NMAI's initial goals were therefore to purposefully overturn traditional museological practices in that space in order to support Native voices in as many ways as possible. In this way, self-determination was meant to be the driving force in the inaugural exhibits, even as the NMAI fought its inherited legacy from other major museological institutions and the concomitant expectations of visitors.

In connection with taking Indigenous self-representation as the primary goal, the second point—concerning how we examine the communicative intent of a display in support of Indigenous communities—directs our attention to how self-determination happens through these communicative acts. At the Ziibiwing Center, *Diba Jimooyung* is a focused, community-based telling of Anishinabek migration and settlement in the area, as well as the events from the last century. By taking control of the historical narrative and using the exhibit as a place to exhibit land and legal sovereignty, the exhibit functions as a way to make a very specific rhetorically sovereign statement aimed at educating visitors from a Saginaw Chippewa perspective. Similarly, the *Honoring Our Children* exhibit at the HCCM draws from its own archives and collections to tell its own story on a site that once was meant to erase Native voices, at least Native voices that challenge the narrative of assimilation. The HCCM also becomes a space for students to interpret for other students, and opens the possibility for celebration of survivance in the face of the assimilation narrative. The NMAI, in part because of its more visible platform and national/international orientation, meant to stage a challenge to the national historical narrative about the Indigenous peoples of the Western hemisphere in order to support Native communities' voices and collaborative narration of history. By calling into question what visitors desired of museums and then opening the space for collaboration with multiple Indigenous communities, it desired to illustrate self-determination within the museum on a wide scale.

From the first two points, from the frame above, we can see that there may be broad shared conceptual goals—of self-determination and the support of Native voices—but how that takes shape will be heavily determined by local contexts, local histories, and the specific goals that sites produce. Rhetorical legibility must be considered within those particular elements, and self-determination will shape-shift accordingly.

Reactions and Tensions

While intentions may be good, and the goal of self-determination an admirable one, the previous chapters have illustrated that stated rhetorical intentions and actual rhetorical effects do not always align—sometimes in unanticipated ways. At the same time, these effects are often learning opportunities that can help an institution understand more about its visitors

and their needs in order to make exhibits, displays, or the museum/cultural center as a whole more legible.

At the Ziibiwing Center, *Diba Jimooyung* functions well for tribal members to support their education, and museum programming is consistent with that educational goal. The awards and recognition at the state and national level reinforce the sense that Ziibiwing is doing well, and tourists from out of town leave positive remarks and reviews for other travelers. At the same time, the discrimination study and the ongoing work at Central Michigan University illustrate that local communities in the area, and particularly Mount Pleasant, still do not always have the educational resources they need to fully understand their Saginaw Chippewa neighbors' history, culture, and ongoing presence. At the HCCM, the initial impact of the exhibit was positive in part because of its novelty: as the first of its kind, it was doing groundbreaking work for the university community as well as the local and regional audiences, and was celebrated accordingly. Over time, however, the *Honoring Our Children* exhibit appears to have led visitors to consider the problems and sadness of Haskell's initial decades quite effectively but, from director accounts, has not consistently led to healing or resolution for the students who see it. Furthermore, the exhibit seems to have lost its immediate currency, and its story has fallen into physical and rhetorical neglect. Meanwhile, as was amply documented, the NMAI's initial efforts with the inaugural exhibits were met simultaneously with celebration and strong critique for multiple reasons, as detailed in chapter 3. The large national and international stage was both an asset and a challenge in that there were so many more audiences to take into account: participating Native and Indigenous communities, observing Native communities who were not included in the exhibit, activist groups, scholars, non-Native reviewers, and non-Native visitors.

It would be an accurate observation that a given museum cannot be all things to all people all of the time, yet I would argue that a museum can always be doing more to make its exhibits more accessible—more legible—over time, to respond to audience needs in a given moment in time. Identifying and analyzing the rhetorical tensions at a given site can help reveal strategic ways to respond and adjust the statement of self-representation for a museum's audiences. At the Ziibiwing Center, the disconnect between the Saginaw Chippewa community and Mount Pleasant was abundantly illustrated by the discrimination study

and by the legal case contesting the Isabella Reservation's borders. The narratives of colonial rights and dominance are still present, and while Ziibiwing's existence provides a tangible counter-narrative, drawing local non-Native visitors to consider that narrative remains a challenge. Similarly, incidents on CMU's campus over the last ten years indicate an ongoing need for cross-cultural education, which the Ziibiwing Center is uniquely positioned to support.

At the HCCM, the tensions emerge from student struggles to process the grief and horror of Haskell's founding, challenges to maintaining the HCCM's relevance in the present, and practical difficulties in funding for the maintenance of the exhibit and supporting programs. Without promotion, maintenance, and funding to add new exhibits, the HCCM and *Honoring Our Children* have both suffered in the past years, and therefore for a time were unable to sustain a profile as consistently usable and relevant as a gathering site and attraction on campus.

For the NMAI, trying to simultaneously challenge traditional museological practices (and the attendant expectations cultivated in audiences) while foregrounding Native and Indigenous voices created an unevenness to the inaugural exhibits that ultimately caused confusion, celebration, and outrage, or a combination. It was an ambitious project, but one that in many ways was covering new ground without a precedent to follow on that scale. As a result, the discord in the range of responses can be understood as a result of an experiment that was in part successful (in that it did lay a foundation for new work to be done) but also in part ineffective.

In sum, audience reactions over time and the resulting tensions between exhibits and audiences provide new insight into the process of meaning-making and the relative legibility of a given exhibit. What all these institutions demonstrate in their attempts to mount and maintain legible exhibits is the difficulty in being able to estimate what will speak to multiple audiences and how it will resonate with them. At times only some audiences' needs are met, or an exhibit may meet with initial success only to find its relevance fade as audience needs change over time. Additionally, the uniqueness of each site and the very different tensions generated in each context point to the ways in which rhetorical legibility, and therefore rhetorical self-determination, is a highly localized act. What works at one site will not transfer well to another, and problems that arise in one place will not necessarily be an issue elsewhere. Much depends on

the context, history, and needs of the constituent community (or communities) and the visitors.

Constructive Critique toward Legibility and Alliances

The tensions arising from audience/visitor feedback can be understood as a potential positive when they are used to generative effect, as each of these institutions demonstrates. Over the course of their first decade, they have all had to adjust, or at least plan for adjustments, to make Native and Indigenous self-determination legible and relevant to target audiences. Rather than conceptualizing a museum and its exhibits as an entity on a linear trajectory, with hurdles to overcome and obstacles to surmount toward a single goal, it is more productive to think of them as living institutions that are constantly learning and responding to new situations and new constellations of factors.

The Ziibiwing Center, for example, could not have anticipated the role it would play in settling the legal dispute over the reservation's borders, but found itself and its archives becoming crucial in protecting Saginaw Chippewa land sovereignty. The *Diba Jimooyung* exhibit, while generally successful, still seeks local visitors who could benefit from the narrative it provides, and so its surrounding programming has needed some adjustment to serve both the Saginaw Chippewa and regional Anishinabek communities as well as draw in more local audiences from Mount Pleasant and the university by reaching out. At the HCCM, the *Woodland* exhibit was a first major step in doing something new with the exhibit space that did not downplay the importance of the history encapsulated in *Honoring Our Children*. While it was not large or permanent, the *Woodland* exhibit did mark a new occasion—that of a Haskell alumna taking on the university's highest leadership position—and drew attention to the successes of the present and the long-term positive legacy of Haskell. At the NMAI, the *Nation to Nation* exhibit and the techniques used to construct it reflected the museum staff's attention to the feedback and critique generated from the inaugural exhibits. By providing more physical and rhetorical guidance to visitors, by addressing the context of history in many of its hard truths, and by making the story told relevant to non-Native visitors through making their history a part of the narrative, *Nation to Nation* stands as an example of how responding to audience critique can lead to greater rhetorical legibility and therefore better self-representation.

What can generally be said across these three sites is that, as frustrating as critique can be, it takes a first attempt at creation to be able to enter the conversation and promote Native voices at all. The job of the museum is then to respond to audience reaction at the moment of opening, but then also, over time, to support the rhetorical legibility of its exhibits and goals. The Ziibiwing Center has not lost its importance for the Saginaw Chippewa community, but because of its successes for its first priority community, it can now turn its attention to other forms of outreach for other communities. The HCCM and *Honoring Our Children* represented milestones in Haskell's self-telling of its history, and while that history is still important, the students need a fuller understanding of that history, as it endeavors to do now. The NMAI's ambitious first attempts toward large-scale museological and historical change could be dismissed as a partial failure, and yet the very presence of those attempts did still create visibility and they have created the space to do even better work.

Through the frame of legible sovereignties, these institutions' decade of work reveals the various factors involved in the successful communication of Native and Indigenous self-representation to multiple audiences at the same time. Communicative tensions will always exist; even if an exhibit could meet all audiences' needs on the first go and open in a state of rhetorical perfection, audience needs would change over time and the exhibit or museum would have to adapt. Meaning-making will vary down to the level of the individual visitor, and the curator and exhibit designer cannot control how visitors will interpret what they see. For Native and Indigenous communities using museums and cultural centers as stages from which to speak, this means that the act of articulating sovereign self-representations will involve a recognition of living in this state of rhetorical flux. It means the evaluation and reevaluation not just of how they wish to represent themselves, but also of how to make this work for the audiences whose eyes, ears, and engagement they seek. For the Ziibiwing Center, it means finding ways across the deeply ingrained racism and ignorance that so often blocks communication or even recognition of Saginaw Chippewa people as Native people with rights. For the HCCM, it means discovering again what students need now, and making the site a priority for the enhancement of student life on campus, then for the larger regional community. For the NMAI, it means making local, continental, and hemispheric Indigenous narratives clear, accessible, and significant to a large set of audiences. For all these sites, moving in a spirit of both rhetorical

sovereignty and outreach toward audiences over time appears to make the difference in creating legibly sovereign self-representations.

New Work and Legible Futures

The work is never done. This study has attempted to capture in a ten-year span what the Ziibiwing Center, the HCCM, and the NMAI have accomplished toward legible sovereignties, in their own ways, for their own contexts. Yet even as I write they make plans for new ways to speak, and further changes, challenges, and endeavors are in the works.

The Ziibiwing Center plans to continue with the programming that has made the most impact and find ways to enhance that influence in the region and beyond. For *Diba Jimooyung*, as already noted in chapter 1, the maintenance work and updates will continue. Two of the three cradleboards for the Blood Memory section are finished and will soon be installed, and other small repairs and enhancements are in the works to keep the exhibit on the cutting edge of display and to support its ongoing relevance as a history-keeper for the community.

With the Saginaw Chippewa acquisition of the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School (MPIIBS) grounds, work will continue on that site to document the school's history and the ongoing ramifications for the Saginaw Chippewa, regional Native, and Mount Pleasant communities. As a place that represents tough and at times tragic stories that involve all of these communities, it will be a continued site for education and dialogue. The *Debwewin/Truth* changing exhibit was the beginning step in bringing the MPIIBS materials into the public eye, though clearly more will be done. Since 2009 there has been an annual day of remembrance to honor those stories, and at the most recent gatherings, the anniversary of the closing of the school has been marked by a public ceremony and tours of the site. The day is sponsored in part by the Saginaw Chippewa community and the Ziibiwing Center, but has included sponsors from CMU and Mount Pleasant (Sowmick 2015; "Honoring, Healing, and Remembering" 2015). Further plans are in development, but it appears that the MPIIBS already serves as a kind of common ground on which several communities may meet to recognize the difficult history there and its present consequences.

The changing exhibit space at the Ziibiwing Center has since housed the *Great Lakes Native American Collection* exhibit, which showcased objects from the Cranbrook Institute of Science's anthropological collections. By allying with a Michigan museum of natural history, such an exhibit builds a partnership with another museum that has participated in colonial collecting practices and, more importantly, brings the objects into a Native context for interpretation and display. Within the Ziibiwing Center and adjacent to *Diba Jimooyung*, the objects have a better chance of being framed as part of living memory and culture rather than anthropological curiosities. At the same time, by borrowing the accepted rhetorical authority of the Cranbrook Institute, the Ziibiwing Center can strategically raise its profile in non-Native communities that may perceive it as a place only for Native visitors or as a space that does not have the same educational value as a non-Native museum. Additionally, this space has recently hosted the *Walking With Our Sisters* traveling bundle and memorial, which honors missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada and the United States and stands as a strategic call to action ("Ziibiwing Centre" [*sic*] 2016; "Walking With Our Sisters" 2016). This traveling memorial and its loving display has garnered much praise and attention as a community-based project that raises public awareness of the current crisis in the rate of abuse and death of Indigenous women through the display of nearly two thousand pairs of donated moccasin vamps. As the only US institution to host *Walking With Our Sisters* to date, Ziibiwing strengthens its ties to, and continues its work as part of, a larger Indigenous network across northern North America. Through the *WWOS* bundle's visit, Ziibiwing found yet another new way to carry out its goals for community healing, local education, and self-representation. In total, the changing exhibit space and the acquisition of the MPIIBS grounds create a potential for a constellation of programs and exhibits that appeal to multiple audiences in a variety of ways that all support the Ziibiwing Center's mission and educational goals as well as cross-community alliance-building. Each new offering is a new invitation to these communities to come and learn together.

At Haskell, the HCCM and its funding struggles have become part of a larger conversation about the future of the university itself and its relationship to the federal government. Haskell students, families, and faculty were shocked when the administration announced the need to cancel the 2015 football season and several other athletic programs because of funding problems (Tait 2015). In October of 2015, the subject of severing ties with the federal government altogether was broached, and the *Kansas City Star* reported that the option was actively being investigated by the

university administration. Because Haskell is a ward of the federal government and subject to its jurisdiction, as with other federal agencies, the university is also subject to the same funding cuts and red tape for fund-raising (Hendricks and Williams 2015; Rahder 2014). For example, while Haskell's neighbor, the University of Kansas, saw a 15 percent increase in its funding over the past four academic years because of its fund-raising campaigns and endowments, Haskell saw a mere half of 1 percent increase because of federal restrictions on its ability to raise extra funds. The Haskell Foundation, once defunct, was revived in 2014 and has been working to regain public trust to ease some of the university's financial pain (Shepherd 2014b). The foundation now has its website up and running, and its mission is explicitly to "assist with unmet needs of the university that are beyond appropriate funds provided by the Bureau of Indian Education" ("Haskell Foundation" 2015). Whether or not severing ties with the federal government will be pursued is another matter, though the BIE has to this point been supportive of at least discussing it. Such a move would also need to find support with the Kansas congressional delegation, which may provide further obstacles (Hendricks and Williams 2015).

For the HCCM, Warrington's steady presence has meant a slow revitalization of the space and its activities, even in an atmosphere of institutional uncertainty. Through her efforts on campus, art classes have been offered again at the HCCM (Hasselman 2015), and the HCCM has been developing better promotion through a consistent social media presence that highlights materials from the archives (see the "Haskell Cultural Center and Museum" Facebook page). Even better, Warrington has continued developing new exhibit materials, and in the summer of 2016 mounted a new exhibit celebrating the anniversary of one of Haskell's most important landmarks, the Haskell Arch and Stadium. By all appearances, Warrington's vision to extend the consideration of Haskell's history beyond—but without forgetting—*Honoring Our Children* is well under way. For now, its supporters continue to find ways to keep it functioning on campus, and hints for its future can perhaps be read in the latest (as of December 2015) version of its mission statement:

> The Mission of the Haskell Cultural Center and Museum is to provide Tribal students and communities with programs and exhibitions that enhance the understanding and appreciation of the unique history of Haskell Indian Nations University. The Cultural Center serves as the leading institution of holistic education and intellectual prominence of Indigenous culture and fine arts, . . . providing the resources for academic research to faculty and tribal communities. ("About Us" December 2015)

Even more than the previous version of the mission statement discussed in chapter 2, and consistent with Warrington's work, this articulation of the HCCM's vision projects Haskell as a place with a "unique history" that deserves preservation but is not the end of the HCCM's purpose. This particular version also sounds less like the standard museum statement of its preceding form, and foregrounds the HCCM as an "institution of holistic education" that is the home and educational site for recognizing the "intellectual prominence of Indigenous culture and fine arts." Deleted from this version are references to classes or internships, though the "resources for academic research" remain. The stated target audiences are students and faculty, though the Vision Statement maintains the additional orientation to the general public.

Overall, the HCCM's future is not yet secure, though its value is unquestioned. These gradual changes—the *Woodland* exhibit, the updates to the website, and Warrington's hire—indicate that the HCCM is still a rhetorically viable and important site on campus. The Haskell Foundation has the power to take earmarked contributions for the HCCM, as indicated on the HCCM's updated website, and so with successful fund-raising more opportunities may come. For now, the HCCM keeps its head above water and does the best it can to recover.

The NMAI continues its work on the national and international stage as it replaces the second of its inaugural exhibits. The newest large-scale exhibit, *The Great Inka Road: Engineering and Empire*, takes the place of *Our Lives* and examines the Inka Road as "one of the monumental engineering achievements in history" that connects peoples and cultures over space and time. The online exhibit description frames the exhibit as one that "explores the foundations of the Inka Road in earlier Andean cultures, technologies that made building the road possible, the cosmology and political organization of the Inka world, and the legacy of the Inka Empire during the colonial period and in the present day" ("Exhibitions: The Great Inka Road" 2015). One can see the inheritance of previous NMAI exhibitions in this exhibit, as well as what has been learned from them. On the one hand, *The Great Inka Road* is careful to narrate the cultures that gave

rise to the Inka Empire, the spiritual and cultural significance of the road, the empire's successes, but also the narrative of European invasion, the impact of it, and how Indigenous communities along the road maintain it today; in this respect, techniques and themes developed in the *Our Peoples*, *Our Universes*, and *Our Lives* exhibits remain present ("Exhibition Website" 2015). On the other hand, the stronger orientation to visitor needs, which includes significant background information, explicit discussion of invasion, the inclusion of 140 objects, the interactive multimedia stations, and the blending of academic and Indigenous voices (often in the same person, as with the curators Ramiro Matos [Quechua] and José Barreiro [Taíno]) ("Fact Sheet" 2015), reflects the adjustments that *Nation to Nation* made in the NMAI's approach.

This new exhibit makes contributions in its own right, as well. While *Cerámica de los Ancestros* was the first bilingual exhibit that the NMAI had mounted, *The Great Inka Road* is the first semipermanent exhibit that is in both English and Spanish. The exhibit also includes some vocabulary in Quechua, which orients visitors to precontact languages. As McMullen observed of the previous ceramics exhibit, part of what the NMAI is trying to accomplish is a larger sense of what "Indigenous" means, and *The Great Inka Road* illustrates the largest effort yet to stretch visitors' understanding past the typical North American Plains peoples they likely imagine when they think of "Indian." In a different respect, the exhibit also challenges the notion of the "primitive" Indigenous in how it describes the Inka Road explicitly as a feat of engineering and an accomplishment that rivals anything accomplished in Europe or elsewhere. By covering the science and engineering aspects of the road and its maintenance even today, the exhibit seeks to establish the Inka Empire and the peoples who were a part of it as users and creators of technology that we have yet to replicate today.

Media coverage (other than the Smithsonian's regular promotional articles) of *The Great Inka Road* so far has been largely positive, though the coverage has served primarily as further promotion, and few reviews of the exhibit itself have been published in major outlets. Most pieces simply describe the contents of the exhibit in the same way they might any other exhibit at another museum, sometimes in past tense ("Smithsonian Exploring" 2015) but often in terms of a "great engineering feat" (Dingfelder 2015; "Inka Road Still a Monumental Achievement" 2015). Some science and engineering blogs have covered the opening of the exhibit, again emphasizing the appeal to visitors not just in terms of culture and

history (M. Anderson 2015; "Inka Road Still a Monumental Achievement" 2015; Pittman 2015). North American Native news sources have not given the exhibit much coverage, with the exception of a positive promotional article in *Indian Country Today* ("20 Stunning Views" 2015).

Given a complete lack of critique or backlash such as what happened after the inaugural exhibits were unveiled, one could assume that, because the exhibit so far meets audience expectations, there is nothing to make a visitor feel uncomfortable. The relative distance from the subject material—this is about a different continent, after all—may also lower the perceived threat to visitors' preconceptions of Indigenous peoples. Yet that distance may also create rhetorical opportunities in that, when the threat level is low, visitors are better able to engage with the materials. The education that visitors can receive about Indigenous technological accomplishments and the variety of Indigenous peoples across two continents may require creating more accessible contents even as it reinforces these histories from Indigenous perspectives. Overall, *The Great Inka Road* showcases techniques that may become part of standard rhetorical procedure that the NMAI follows as it mounts new exhibitions.

For the Future

In sum, legible sovereignties as an analytical frame enhances rhetorical analyses of how exhibits function in Indigenous museums. It reveals how the communication from a museum to the public is constantly evolving and still frequently entangled with colonialism. Each articulation of purpose or mounting of an exhibit reads differently depending on context; it is affected by resources, and it has to be continuously revised in order to meet audience needs and maintain relevance. This may seem obvious, but it is not quite so transparent in practice; of course we look to see what other institutions do, but legible rhetorical sovereignty will generally be rooted in place and intention, requiring close attention not just during the process of writing a mission statement or designing an exhibit, but through the process and afterwards. Procedure cannot be taken for granted, and self-reflexive rhetorical analysis with attention to audiences and the desires of the Indigenous communities involved will yield the most effective self-representations. Simply speaking or displaying does not mean the rhetor will be understood. Legibility requires an understanding of the communicative need of the moment, the context, the place; it will need to represent

the involved Native community the way it wishes to be understood; it will have to work with the constraints of the audiences that community wishes to target.

Yet these constraints also offer opportunities. This rhetorical analysis from the past ten years reveals the representational workings within these institutions' exhibits and how they support Indigenous rhetorical sovereignty while also revealing the distinct differences in how each site makes its stories accessible to multiple audiences. The next decade will be telling for the Ziibiwing Center, the HCCM, and the NMAI, as each continues to maintain its relevance and make itself legible to as many of its audiences as possible. Their work also lays the foundation for further questions about where legible sovereignties go from here: for example, what happens when these exhibits travel, if they can? How does a museum outside of the Americas handle a collection indigenous to the Americas in a responsible way for the constituent communities and the local non-Native audiences? In what ways can technology—websites for exhibits, online teaching resources, digital archival collections—enhance access to and legibility of Native self-representation? And what are the limits of museums? If the institution itself builds in expectations for visitors, how far can a museum thwart those expectations, and what other means of self-representation might be more effective or support a given exhibit?

The promising thing about all three of the sites covered in this study is that they are young, and in many respects each represents a new beginning and a new attempt at legible sovereignties that continues to reshape how we think about Native and Indigenous self-representation to multiple audiences. While it would be nice to have a one-size-fits-all solution, or a statement of sovereignty so clear and thorough that it solves the problem of Indigenous self-representation permanently, the rhetorical reality is that each community, each audience, across time, will need something different in order to understand. To be truthful, any form of self-representation, not just museum exhibits, involves a consideration of rhetorical legibility and the ways in which rhetorical sovereignty can be enhanced. The efforts made at each of these sites illustrates one kind of approach (the exhibit), but they are part of a larger rhetorical network of communications across Indian Country and beyond. They demonstrate what kind of work has already been done, and they give us hints for what works and what does not. As they and other museums learn, so can other Native and Indigenous communities and other museums learn from their example—in their

successes, their miscalculations, their reorientations, and their follow-up efforts. They teach us about the rhetorical and educational power of exhibits and the museums and cultural centers that house them. They teach us about the rhetorical processes of communication across communities and audiences in often-tension-filled situations and hard histories. And they teach us about Native and Indigenous peoples' power to self-represent. As a process of negotiation in this complex constellation, the work of making Native and Indigenous self-representation legible is never finished, and so in the coming decades we will continue to see how they evolve to meet the new exigencies that will inevitably arise. If the impact they have made so far is any indication, then the future will be a challenge, but that future is full of potential for articulating legible sovereignties.