

# Speaking Sovereignty and Communicating Change

*Rhetorical Sovereignty and the Inaugural Exhibits at the NMAI*

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The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) has attracted a great deal of attention from museum visitors and scholars alike since its opening in 2004, and with that attention has come a multitude of critiques. From the initial reviewers from major newspapers who criticized the museum for its perceived lack of scholarship and structure, to Native critics who worried that the exhibits lacked enough (or the most appropriate) historical context, from reviewers who praised the example set by the NMAI in its collaborative model, to Native visitors who found a great deal of satisfaction in seeing their stories told, reactions to the NMAI have run the gamut.<sup>1</sup> What is generally recognized among scholars is that the NMAI provides a unique model for museum practice and that never before has the Smithsonian been willing to collaborate on this scale with Native peoples.

As such, the NMAI offers one of the most public platforms for Native peoples to address an audience of non-Native visitors. Using Beverly Singer's term "cultural sovereignty," Amanda J. Cobb asserts the extraordinary Native influence on the site, in that "every aspect of the museum, including its very purpose and function, had to be filtered through Native core cultural values and adapted accordingly. . . . [In] the case of the NMAI, that means integrating the old ways and core cultural values and traditions into the very concept of what a museum is and can be."<sup>2</sup> The recognition of cultural sovereignty is arguably one of the main functions, if not the primary function, of the NMAI.

However, the act of communicating cultural sovereignty in a museum involves more than simply asserting it. The NMAI is situated in the heart of the US capital and the Smithsonian Institution, and, given

this location, it must simultaneously navigate the diverse audiences that visit and the influence of the “museum” as an institutionalized communicative structure. Tribally owned and operated museums and cultural centers are able to fully prioritize their Native audiences in whatever way the local tribal community sees fit; conversely, the NMAI is largely obligated to reflect the Smithsonian’s values and work with the majority non-Native audience. The NMAI is thus a balancing act that works in a weighted framework between asserting the sovereignty of the Native audiences and saying something so foreign that a non-Native audience does not understand.

Rhetoricians generally acknowledge the advantage of identifying with one’s audience to build one’s ethos, but Ernest Stromberg points out that the particular issue for Native peoples using identification as a rhetorical tool is “to bridge communication divisions while maintaining an insistence of difference.”<sup>3</sup> Likewise, even the communicative framework itself can pose a problem. As Simon Ortiz has said of the English language in general, Native users of adapted colonial languages must always consciously work to avoid accidentally speaking what they do not mean through a language that carries colonial baggage.<sup>4</sup> I would argue that the same applies to the communication that takes place within museums. The great advantage to adapting museum structures to Native uses is that those structures are a far-reaching communicative venue with a wide audience; yet the problem with the same is that the museum communicative structure and its audiences already have expectations of Native peoples and what museum exhibits should say.

I argue in this article that if the NMAI wishes to make a communicable assertion of cultural sovereignty that avoids speaking something not intended to its audiences, then the very act of communication—the rhetorical frame itself—must be examined. This is not to argue for pandering to non-Native audiences; as Cobb writes, “To do so would be tantamount to calling the entire project—a project so significant to cultural sovereignty and continuance—a failure.”<sup>5</sup> But in order to learn from, refine, and strengthen this highly rhetorical and sovereign endeavor, the NMAI bears reexamination in those terms. With this in mind, I use Scott Richard Lyons’s sense of “rhetorical sovereignty” to analyze the NMAI’s three inaugural exhibits in order to reveal in sharper detail the range of rhetorical change that Native peoples are setting in motion at the NMAI as well as the potential communicative ambiguities produced

by reshaping museum structures for Native rhetorical purposes (i.e., asserting cultural sovereignty) in the presence of non-Native audiences. Like Cobb's sense of cultural sovereignty, rhetorical sovereignty functions to articulate the act of Native peoples taking control of an institution and redefining it along Native lines. But what rhetorical sovereignty also recognizes—because we are talking about rhetoric—is that sovereignty is also an act of communication, and communication requires addressing communicative goals, selected means of communication, and the anticipated audiences.

In the following, I first provide a brief discussion describing the concept of rhetorical sovereignty as defined by Lyons; second, I offer a short overview of the past rhetorical patterns and the consequent expectations produced by museums regarding Native peoples; finally, I demonstrate the workings and complications of enacting rhetorical sovereignty using the three inaugural exhibits of the NMAI.

CONNECTING COMMUNICATION AND SELF-DETERMINATION:  
SOVEREIGNTY, RHETORIC, AND POWER

For the purpose of establishing a frame for discussion concerning Native communication and museums, I connect here the context-bound nature of sovereignty and its rhetorical dimensions as Lyons defines it. Sovereignty itself is a complex term and a rhetorical one that takes on a different shape depending upon the context in which it is invoked. As Joanne Barker asserts, "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."<sup>6</sup> In European American history, sovereignty has been a concept rooted in feudal rule and the Christian Church that describes the absolute power, divine right, and independence of a nation from its peers and the recognition of that nation as autonomous by its peers. Adapted by contemporary Native peoples, the term has become linked to self-determination, land rights, cultural integrity, self-governance, treaty rights, and cultural revitalization, though it is not limited to these.

"Rhetorical sovereignty" is part of that effort to articulate what sovereignty can mean within Native contexts, and it is in the realm of language and representation that Lyons invokes a kind of sovereignty that brings

communicative action and interaction with colonial forces into focus.<sup>7</sup> In Lyons's tracing of sovereignty's evolution, he observes how the European American notion of sovereign power was translated into legislative and political rights. Sovereignty, therefore, carried and still carries European American connotations of power, independence, and—perhaps most crucial—recognition by others as powerful and independent in a nation's exercising of its rights to self-determination. By contrast, Native nations defined themselves in terms of a "people," a nation-people—and as such the driving principle for the sovereignty of a nation-people was not private individual rights but the survival and continuity of the community, its culture, and its land together. The example that Lyons cites is that of the Haudenosaunee, which is a united confederation of the Mohawk, Onondaga, Oneida, Seneca, Cayuga, and Tuscarora peoples with the goal of mutual prosperity and peace. Their idea of sovereignty, in Lyons's words, is "the right of a people to exist and enter into agreements with other peoples for the sole purpose of promoting, not suppressing, local cultures and traditions, even while united by a common political project." Sovereignty, characterized this way, is based both on the "power to self-govern and the affirmation of peoplehood."<sup>8</sup>

But the history of US legislative terminology rarely reflects Native conceptions of sovereignty, which illustrates the US government's exercise of rhetorical power. While initially treaties were made that named Native peoples as sovereign nations to be dealt with as equals, by the 1830s, as described above, US policy toward Native nations was altering its rhetoric: the terminology changed from "nation" to "tribe," from "treaties" to "agreements," and Native peoples were characterized as "wards" instead of "sovereigns." Such nominal changes reflect a kind of "rhetorical imperialism" in the US legislation that worked to erode Native nation-peoples' rights and power in the name of a colonial nation-state. As Lyons observes, "He who sets the terms sets the limits" of discourse and law. It is for these reasons, among many, that Native peoples are working to reassert what sovereignty means, and that means in language and representation just as much as in legislation, for it is in the forge of language that such legislation is wrought. Lyons asserts, "Sovereignty is the guiding story in our pursuit of self-determination, the general strategy by which we aim to best recover our losses from the ravages of colonization: our lands, our cultures, our self-respect," and, therefore, specifically, "rhetorical sovereignty is the inherent right of *peoples* to de-

termine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse.”<sup>9</sup>

In this way, through the language and rhetoric of representation, one can begin to see how language and image drive action and policy, and policy has material consequences for Native nations. Rhetorical sovereignty as a term directly addresses that language and rhetoric concerning Native peoples and wishes to place the control over that language and rhetoric—and therefore control over the representation and the image derived from them, and therefore the policy and action derived from those—in Native nations’ hands. It continually asks the questions, What does sovereignty mean here? How can a given Native nation communicate it? To its members? To non-Natives? To claim rhetorical sovereignty is to claim the right to determine communicative need and to decide as a people how Native nations should be constructed in public discourse. The power of rhetorical sovereignty lies in its ability to challenge the very constructions of “Indian” that historically are at the heart of the history of Native representation in the United States, constructions that manifest themselves in law, in education and academia, in popular culture, and in specific material sites such as museums.

#### EXHIBITS AND “INDIANS”: SAVAGISM AND CIVILIZATION IN MUSEUM NARRATIVES

In order to work with rhetorical sovereignty within the context of the museum, we first need to understand the rhetorical context of Native peoples and the historical representations of them within museological communicative structures. Many scholars have documented the ways in which museums are sites with exceptional public influence and how they are also problematic sites for Native peoples. Much of what has been collected and displayed in museums was taken under duress or dubious circumstance, has been decontextualized from Native cultures under the auspices of European American scholarly pursuits, and makes little or no reference to the contemporary lives and cultures of Native peoples. Therefore, the discussion of how these communicative structures (with the collections that help form them) and the narratives and representations produced within them is a pivotal one, especially for Native nations.

As Roy Harvey Pearce in *Savagism and Civilization* and Robert F. Berkhofer Jr. in *The White Man's Indian* have illustrated, the European American version of history in the "New World" has been constructed just as much to define what Europeans and European Americans believed themselves to be just as much as to define what they believed Native American peoples to be.<sup>10</sup> The narrative of "savagism and civilization," as Pearce explains it, was (and is) a narrative of foils that worked to underscore what "civilization" was for each generation of European American thinkers and settlers. "Civilization" as a binary must have its "savage," and so Native American peoples have come to represent what civilization was not, both as a method of self-definition for European Americans and justification for western settlement, Manifest Destiny, and Progress.

Furthermore, collecting Native American-made objects, body parts, and burial artifacts took on a special significance in the construction of the European American savagism-and-civilization narrative. Concurrent with each generation's construction of itself and often in the absence of actual Native peoples, the representations of Native peoples through the display of Native objects took on lives of their own. Explorers used collected objects as "curiosities," proof of successful expeditions, and evidence of heathen peoples; eighteenth- and nineteenth-century academics used them as proof of human evolution in a Linnaean system of race, with Native peoples near the bottom, and as justification for Native peoples' removal; local European American communities created collections of their own as a demonstration of civic pride and a kind of territorial ownership; early twentieth-century academics used them as the foundation for modern American anthropology.<sup>11</sup> As the sites for display, study, and storage of these collections, museums took on the same significance in the construction of the savagism-civilization narrative, if not more so, because museums became and still often are the place for public—that is, predominantly European American—dissemination of knowledge regarding Native peoples. The exhibits created to display these collections provide the frame, context, and substance of many past and contemporary depictions of Native peoples, propagate those images, and assist in their establishment in the narrative of European American history.

With repatriation legislation and especially NAGPRA, the opening of

an increasing number of Native-owned and Native-operated museums and cultural centers, and the substantial revisions made by other museums in recent years to their approaches regarding Native peoples and cultures, there is ongoing discussion of rhetoric and how Native representation can and/or should be made through museums. In many respects, the NMAI is a product of those discussions and the connected efforts to assert sovereignty within the museum structure and therefore within the public dissemination of narrative, of history making. The major challenge facing Native peoples is to do this successfully—that is, as Cobb articulates, asserting cultural sovereignty but in a way that non-Native audiences can comprehend and Native audiences can affirm—with a colonial communicative structure that carries the weight of histories past.

This is where the work of rhetorical sovereignty can perhaps begin to show the potential and the pitfalls of the communicative process. Within the act of communication at a museum site, the questions of how, why, and to what effect transitions can be made from the European museum structure are not easily ignored, as they always shadow what Native-associated or Native-based museums and cultural centers do. Because definitions of sovereignty are contextually based, the answers to such questions will depend on the situation and the position of the observer. Yet what can be said with some certainty is that Native peoples strategically deploy varying representations to accomplish their purposes for a heterogeneous audience, and, furthermore, actions that appear contradictory may also have functions that make sense within a larger framework. Therefore, I approach this site as a place of always-negotiated and varied meaning that nonetheless seeks to be a reaffirming gathering point for Native identity, representation, and sovereignty for multiple audiences. While I cannot possibly outline every plausible meaning for every representation, what I attempt to do in the following is describe what these communicative structures do to create the respective representations of Native communities at the NMAI. Rhetorical sovereignty asserts that even as a communicative system sets some constraint on its users, there is possibility for change in how the individuals involved may wield, alter, retranslate, or discard it. In the following analysis of the NMAI's three inaugural exhibits, the possibilities for and ambiguities in the enactment of rhetorical sovereignty become clearer.

ANALYZING CONTEXT: HISTORY,  
MISSION, AND AUDIENCE AT THE NMAI

Understanding the rhetorical dimensions of the NMAI requires a recognition of the site's communicative frame: its history, its purported mission (communicative goals), and its target audiences. The NMAI was established by Congress as a branch of the Smithsonian Institution under the National Museum of the American Indian Act in 1989 and has as its foundation the George Gustav Heye collection of some 800,000 artifacts from across North and South America.<sup>12</sup> As a museum site that desires to set itself apart from the more traditional museum structures within the Smithsonian system, such as the National Museum of Natural History, the NMAI defines itself as

the first national museum dedicated to the preservation, study and exhibition of the life, languages, literature, history, and arts of Native Americans . . . [working] in collaboration with the Native peoples of the Western Hemisphere to protect and foster their cultures by reaffirming traditions and beliefs, encouraging contemporary artistic expression, and empowering the Indian voice.<sup>13</sup>

Rather than a repository of scientific knowledge, the NMAI rhetorically emphasizes its difference, however subtly, from past museum traditions—even within the Smithsonian system—and underscores Native collaboration and living cultures as the hallmarks of its purpose.

This mission finds physical manifestation in the National Mall site itself.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to the neoclassical marble and granite structures surrounding it, the NMAI building is a carefully landscaped curvilinear Kasota sandstone structure and attempts both to evoke the organic lines of a natural landscape and to acknowledge the symbolic significance of various Native peoples' cosmologies. Inside, the large sky-lit atrium is a place for displays and performances, and the rest of the four-story building houses the inaugural exhibits, space for rotating exhibits, two theaters with video presentations, a resource center, two gift shops, and a café featuring foods inspired by regional Native cuisines. The architecture and exhibits were created with extensive Native collaboration, and much of what is for sale in the gift shops is Native-made. In its structure alone the NMAI is singular among the Smithsonian museums in respect



to the degree of Native involvement with the creation and maintenance of its facilities and exhibitions.

However, the target audience is primarily non-Native. Given that the NMAI is part of the extensive Smithsonian complex, it comes as no surprise that the NMAI anticipates a large tourist audience that expects a conventional amount of guidance. According to the NMAI curators interviewed, Dr. Ann McMullen and Emil Her Many Horses, the NMAI's primary visitors are tourists, family groups, and school groups, and likely these tourists are seeing the NMAI as part of a tour of Washington, DC.<sup>15</sup> Curator Paul Chaat Smith recalls that in the process of designing the *Our Peoples* exhibit, he was repeatedly admonished that the Smithsonian Institution's sense of its visitors was of an audience with a seventh-grade education and that exhibits (and presumably associated productions) should be aimed at that demographic.<sup>16</sup> Yet Native visitors also come to the NMAI as well, and the importance of the museum to Native communities was made manifest in the thousands who attended its opening.<sup>17</sup> Though the NMAI may wish to decenter non-Natives as the primary audience and does prioritize Native presence, the unavoidable fact is that the great majority of visitors are non-Native tourists, and much of its success as an institution hinges on that majority.

Yet the NMAI works to differentiate itself as a new kind of institution, as is visible in how it casts itself in its mission and its structure. In spite of, or perhaps because of, its history, it is a site with tremendous potential for Native nations to communicate a Native-driven vision of Indian Country to non-Native visitors and to affirm that vision with Native visitors. The major way this is done is through the backbone of any museum: its exhibits.

#### EXAMINING THE NMAI INAUGURAL EXHIBITS:

#### *OUR PEOPLES, OUR UNIVERSES, AND OUR LIVES*

Though museums and cultural centers have historically been sites for collections, storage, and academic research, they are best known to the average visitor for their displays and so are the communicative point with the most power.<sup>18</sup> Particularly important are those displays that are a central part of the museum or cultural center structure, for they become in many ways the defining elements of that site. While the above establishes a sense of the NMAI's overall identity, I have chosen here

to focus only on the three central inaugural exhibit installations at the NMAI because exhibits are one of the pivotal points if not *the* pivotal point of direct communication with visitors. In the following I first note the prime influence of exhibits as communicative structures; I then describe each exhibit and then analyze it for how it works to represent the Native peoples involved and how it addresses its potential audiences at the NMAI, contrasting the three exhibits as I go. Through this analysis I demonstrate some of the potential and the problems each exhibit presents and what the three together offer in the process of asserting rhetorical sovereignty.

In *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* Eilean Hooper-Greenhill argues that experience of the exhibit is still the primary form of “pedagogy” that museums employ. She writes, “It is the experience of the displays that for most visitors defines the museum, and it is through displays that museums produce and communicate knowledge.” However, as museum curators and design teams have discovered, meaning making is something that can be influenced but not completely determined. Visitors bring their own experiences to the museum or cultural center and therefore have interpretive lenses of their own through which to understand what they encounter.<sup>19</sup> Gwyneira Isaac, in her own multiple journeys through the NMAI, has noted that same phenomenon: within the NMAI there are multiple opportunities (as constructed by the curators) for visitors to interact with Native history, but visitors bring their own expectations with them and “do not merely translate exhibits using different perspectives on history, but adhere to different knowledge systems.”<sup>20</sup> Connecting and communicating with a non-Native audience—or Native audiences—with prepackaged expectations is no small rhetorical feat.

This is not to argue that guiding visitor perception in regard to interpreting displays is a futile effort; if anything, such an effort underscores the importance of how the histories and narratives told by exhibitions are constructed and thus in the end are highly rhetorical and a key site for rhetorical sovereignty. Though she does not use the word “rhetorical,” Hooper-Greenhill relies on an understanding of what she calls “pedagogic style” to discuss the ways in which

something is said, or teaching method; in museums this refers to the style of communication in displays, which includes the way the

objects are used or placed, the way the text is written, the provision within the exhibition for various forms of sensory engagement (including visual, tactile, auditory senses), the use of light and colour, the use of space, and so on.<sup>21</sup>

All of these features contribute to the process of meaning making, creating cues for visitors to follow in the interpretive process. Referring to those cues as a “hidden curriculum” in museum pedagogy, Hooper-Greenhill recognizes that the values and attitudes embedded in such a “curriculum” also carry political consequence, specifically citing museums with ethnographic collections as particularly contentious places with regard to the construction of historical narratives.<sup>22</sup> These kinds of exhibit features take center stage here.

The three centerpiece exhibit galleries at the NMAI are the sites in which the most overt discussions of what the NMAI is about take place. Located on the third (*Our Lives: Contemporary Life and Identities*, Cynthia L. Chavez and Ann McMullen [community sections], Jolene Rickard and Gabrielle Tayac [central sections], primary curators) and fourth floors (*Our Universes: Traditional Knowledge Shapes Our World*, Emil Her Many Horses, primary curator, and *Our Peoples: Giving Voice to Our Histories*, Ann McMullen, Paul Chaat Smith, and Jolene Rickard, primary curators), each exhibit gallery is designed with its own thematic structure and internal organization, but what each has in common is a group of eight Native communities (for twenty-four total communities) contributing their stories and viewpoints, a thematic umbrella provided by the NMAI curators, as well as recognizable genre features such as labels, images, and objects.<sup>23</sup> What follows are brief descriptions of each exhibit and analyses of how selected features help to underscore the NMAI’s potential statement of rhetorical sovereignty.

#### *Our Peoples: Giving Voice to Our Histories*

In many ways, *Our Peoples* provides the historical framework for the rest of the museum, as it works to establish an overall contact narrative from a Native point of view that culminates in the histories and stories of survival from eight Native communities, the Seminole Tribe of Florida (United States), Tapirapé (Mato Grosso, Brazil), Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma (United States), Tohono O’odham Nation (Arizona, United States), Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation (North Carolina, United

States), Nahua (Guerrero, Mexico), Ka'apor (Maranhão, Brazil), and Wixaritari (also known as Huichol, Durango, Mexico).<sup>24</sup> The spatial arrangement is designed to be a “gently destabilizing” experience, full of curving walls and alcoves that a visitor must explore (as opposed to a highly sequenced arrangement).<sup>25</sup> The backbone narrative, called *Evidence* by its curators, curves in sections through the center of the gallery space from entrance to exit, and surrounding it are eight semicircle, room-sized alcoves devoted to each Native community. An additional alcove, called *Making History*, sits to one side.

The rhetorical-communicative goals of this exhibit appear to be threefold: first, it provides a counternarrative to American history, one that begins with the Indigenous Americas and tells the story of contact from those points of view; second, it affirms the individual histories of the Native communities included; third, it asks for active participation from visitors in the process of history making.<sup>26</sup> The first point might be found, for example, in the purposeful arrangement of objects that avoids strict chronology and instead centers on illustrating the forces that shaped and changed Indigenous civilizations, a technique that the curators call “repetition with difference.”<sup>27</sup> This already makes a rhetorical point: the goal is not to find authority for this narrative through careful chronological dating and labeling of objects; instead, the objects are included to illustrate the story. For instance, the section of gold ornaments and ears of corn, called *Gold*, establishes the highly coveted wealth of the Americas in terms of both precious metal and grain and lays the foundation for considering the Americas not as empty space to be settled and populated but as already populated and already rich. The conceptual label that accompanies the display explains and reinforces this idea, stating: “The millions who lived in the Americas produced extraordinary wealth. Corn and gold were the paramount symbols of power and wealth. They anchored the largest civilizations.” Subsequent sections that center on swords, maps of contact and disease, guns, Bibles, and treaty documents likewise center each collection of objects in terms of what they meant and mean to the Indigenous peoples of the Americas while simultaneously building the historical narrative of the Americas from a Native point of view. The narrative finds its conclusion, tellingly, in a display of contemporary Native art that represents the survival, resistance, and continued life of Native communities; entitled *Eye of the Storm* by artist Edward Poitras, it is intended to be a

“place of stillness” in the storm Native peoples have endured. As Smith writes in the label, “Storms come and go, but life continues. There is regeneration and renewal, rebirth and rebuilding—always and forever. Native history is not over. It continues, as yet unwritten,” and still yields “evidence of Native survivance.”<sup>28</sup>

The second point—affirming Native communities’ senses of their own histories—finds grounding in the community alcoves surrounding the gallery. In each alcove, each participating community voices its own history in a narrative they cowrote with the NMAI curators and with objects they chose from the NMAI collections. Each community space is prominently titled with the community’s preferred name and a subtitle for the display and includes a panel where the community, its geographic location, and its contributing “community curators” are introduced via text and photographs. Within these displays, each community tells its history as its contributing community curators have agreed to tell it, sometimes including creation stories, major historical events, and perspectives on contemporary life. For example, the Seminole Tribe of Florida labeled their exhibit space *Seminole: We Will Never Surrender—We Will Survive*. Their space includes labels (“Creation and Human Emergence,” “Seminole Women Suffer During Removal,” “Surveyors Destroy Billy Bowlegs’ Garden,” “Woman Remembers Lost Song,” and “Seminoles Establish Tribal Government”) and images that have been chosen to represent particular aspects of Seminole history that the Seminole wish to be highlighted for the public. Perhaps more important, each story underscores the subtitle of survival, documenting injustices—land loss, removal—and ultimately declaring their survival—a lost song remembered, tribal government fighting the US government’s termination policy.

Third, the *Making Histories* alcove—a section of the exhibit that does not fit either as a community display or as part of the historical narrative—calls attention to the process of making history itself. Within it, a visitor encounters a curved wall full of George Catlin portraits of Native leaders—a literal assembly of colonial-made images of Native peoples—facing a wall with a single portrait on it: that of George Gustav Heye, the collector whose massive collection of Native objects forms the foundation of the NMAI. Next to Heye’s portrait a section of the wall bears the title of the section and an explanatory narrative describing who Heye and Catlin were as collectors as well as suggesting that history itself “is

always about who is telling the stories, who the storyteller is speaking to, and how both understand their present circumstances.” Simultaneously, a video monitor embedded among the Catlin portraits plays a video depicting Floyd Favel, a Plains Cree playwright, directly confronting the past depictions of Native peoples, especially in museums, and offering the “evidence to support our belief that our survival, the original people of this hemisphere, is one of the most extraordinary stories in human history. . . . Explore this gallery. Encounter it. Reflect on it. Argue with it.”<sup>29</sup> Here the very authority of the NMAI (and the Smithsonian with it) is called into question; here visitors are told to explore freely, think freely about what they encounter, and argue with it. This is about storytelling and narrative making as active equals, curator and visitor, Native and non-Native, and *Making History* is a direct challenge to the European American notion of museums as institutions that preserve and disseminate Truth.

If, to reiterate, Lyons’s sense of rhetorical sovereignty is “the inherent right of *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,” then the *Our Peoples* exhibit seeks to undermine the structure of the traditional museum exhibit by attempting to reorient the idea of the exhibit according to the histories the Indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere might wish to tell, especially those peoples whose communities participate most directly in the exhibit itself. Rather than producing an exhibit gallery full of artifacts labeled in archaeological or anthropological language by material, time period, and cultural category, the *Our Peoples* gallery seeks to make a space in which “the anthropological gaze—previously one that showed Indians on display, trapped in an ideological prison—would be returned by Indian people.”<sup>30</sup> The historical narrative of contact has been flipped to represent an Indigenous perspective, the stories told in the community alcoves are the stories chosen by the communities to be told, and the notion of a prime historical narrative is confronted and essentially tossed out. In this space Native peoples have unprecedented power to “determine their own communicative needs and desires.” Even though it is still Smithsonian space—and therefore still subject to Smithsonian rules, management, and influence and all the compromises involved—the *Our Peoples* exhibit space is like no other on the National Mall and sets a unique precedent for history making and speaking sovereignty.

However, given that this exhibit, as a communicative structure, strives to overturn what “traditional” museum exhibits (including the Smithsonian) have done in the past—arranging Native objects by regional grouping or evolutionary groupings, or narrating with dioramas, without or with little consultation from the Native communities who are the subject—it may also thwart the expectations of its “readers” in ways that may make this statement of sovereignty difficult to discern. Smith acknowledges that the curatorial team understood that in general the exhibit they were constructing would likely produce “cognitive dissonance” in how it would tell stories and histories that visitors had never encountered before.<sup>31</sup> This cognitive dissonance can potentially function in a positive way to help reorient visitor understanding yet may end up ambiguous in its results. Can visitors to the museum recognize the need for rhetorical sovereignty in the first place, this right of Native peoples to speak their own histories, and then can visitors work with what they hear? For example, the use of “survivance” as a key word that appears in label text is significant, in that the use of Gerald Vizenor’s neologism for “survival” and “resistance” asserts a desire in this context to both resist the way Native histories have been told and foreground the histories that Native peoples do construct. While the assertion of presence—of history enduring and “not yet written”—is made and is an implicit statement of “survivance,” the concept is not overtly explained within the exhibit and therefore could cause a blind spot in understanding among those who do not already literally or conceptually recognize it. Furthermore, I would argue that the exhibit’s structure in itself, as a free-flowing narrative that is purposefully unanchored in conventional anthropological authority, has the potential to create negative cognitive dissonance in terms of how visitors expect to approach an exhibit in the first place. Either of these results has the potential for epiphany or backlash (or a combination of the two): on the one hand, visitors may be able to acknowledge these declarations of rhetorical sovereignty and work with the challenging narrative, or, on the other, they may reject it and its rhetorically sovereign connotations out of hand because it does not fit what they expected. Dr. McMullen, the senior curator for the NMAI, acknowledges that most visitors are imagined as impatient tourists who arrive at the Smithsonian fully expecting to be told what to believe.<sup>32</sup> The intentions of the *Our Peoples* exhibit are fairly clear, but whether or not non-Native visitors are willing to participate in the ac-

knowledge of rhetorical sovereignty and in the history-making process is not, especially if they greet the purposeful undermining of their expectations of “Indians” and museums as unwelcome and prefer to fall back on more traditional—and often passive—ways to approach a museum exhibit. This may always be a result of change, to an extent, but the potential for this reaction has to be acknowledged and anticipated.

*Our Universes: Traditional Knowledge Shapes Our World*

Located across the hallway from *Our Peoples*, the *Our Universes* exhibit presents another eight Native communities, in this case with the goal of explaining how each community spiritually and epistemologically frames the world. Those communities who participated in the exhibit are the Pueblo of Santa Clara (Española, New Mexico, United States), Anishinaabe (Hollow Water and Sagkeeng Bands, Manitoba, Canada), Lakota (Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota, United States), Quechua (Comunidad de Phaqchanta, Cuzco, Peru), Hupa (Hoopa Valley, California, United States), Q’eq’chi’ Maya (Cobán, Guatemala), Mapuche (Temuco, Chile), and Yup’ik (Yukon–Kuskokwim Delta, Alaska, United States). The exhibit also covers three pan-Indigenous events, the Denver March Powwow, the North American Indigenous Games, and the Day of the Dead. The exhibit space is organized as the “passage of a solar year,” with star constellations marked overhead in the ceiling, and the end of the exhibit comes with the phases of the moon. The exhibit alcoves for each community are arranged in a roughly circular pattern, though each community’s space is shaped by the site or ceremony the community wished to portray. Photographs of people participating in ceremonial life are frequently included, as are symbolic images, artwork, artifacts, and occasionally video clips chosen by the community curators.

The rhetorical-communicative goals of *Our Universes* are multiple: first, it seeks to affirm the philosophies and ceremonies practiced as a part of the Indigenous present rather than the anthropological or historical past; second, it works to affirm Native philosophy and spiritual practices on both the individual community level and the pan-Indigenous level; and finally, it provides a forum for these communities to teach about, *as they see fit*, their philosophical and spiritual lives. In the following, both the introductory label and the exhibit itself are discussed in terms of these goals and the assertion of rhetorical sovereignty.



The framing label of the exhibit, written by the exhibit's primary curator, Emil Her Many Horses, is the first the visitor sees:

In this gallery, you'll discover how Native people understand their place in the universe and order their daily lives. Our philosophies of life come from our ancestors. They taught us to live in harmony with the animals, plants, spirit world, and the people around us. In *Our Universes*, you'll encounter Native people from the Western Hemisphere who continue to express this wisdom in ceremonies, celebrations, languages, arts, religions, and daily life. It is our duty to pass these teachings on to succeeding generations. For that is the way to keep our traditions alive.

The communities that were selected to participate had a communal ceremony and established structure from which their traditional community philosophy could be drawn, and the use of the present tense in the label's language immediately reinforces that what visitors will see is present, living Native philosophy and practice. Thus, the first goal—that of continuity of practice into the present as opposed to the portrayal of “vanished” cultures—is established from the beginning. This goal finds further expression in the way that each community's exhibit space is structured: every space is introduced with ideas and symbols that the community curators have chosen to represent them, and those same community curators explain in their own words what those symbols mean. At the end of each community section, a long panel introduces the participating community curators as living, contemporary people via photo portraits and descriptions of their roles in their respective communities and includes a map to show the present-day geographic location of each Native community. More vividly, the assertion of these practices as part of contemporary life comes from the community advocates themselves, as each community shaped the content and design of its space and explains them—again in present tense—itsself. For example, the Pueblo of Santa Clara had its space designed roughly in the spherical shape of the Tewa worldview, with the four cardinal directions also representing the four colors of corn and the four stages of life. The Hupa space invokes the shape and feeling of the Hupa's traditional cedar-plank houses, where much of the community's ceremonial life takes place. Photographs of ceremonial participants and contemporary ceremonial places and structures further assert the continuity and current presence of these practices.

The second goal concerning individual community and pan-Indigenous practice also finds subtle expression in the language of the introductory label; at times, *Her Many Horses* employs the first-person-plural pronoun “we,” invoking a sense of pan-Indigenous experience in the expression of philosophy and practice. At other points, he uses the plural—as in speaking of multiple “lives,” “languages,” and “religions”—to assert the variety of experience this exhibit encompasses. Likewise, the inclusion of a section on the Denver March Powwow, the North American Indigenous Games, and the Day of the Dead covers three distinct ways that Native peoples from many communities come together to participate in ceremonial and celebratory events, even as a visitor to the exhibit also sees the distinctiveness of each community alcove and the practices it describes. While not trumpeted, such an arrangement breaks down the European American notion of the “Indian” and helps to reinforce that while there is a sense of alliance across individual Native communities, every Native community is uniquely itself, not “Indian.”

The third goal is perhaps the most ambiguous in expression, signaling the difficulty in balancing between audiences. On the one hand, the exhibit appears to help fulfill the “duty” of participating Native communities “to pass these teachings on to succeeding generations” for the sake of “keep[ing] our traditions alive”; on the other hand, the introductory label also frames the exhibit as a “discovery” and an “encounter,” ostensibly for those non-Natives who are not familiar with Native spiritual or ceremonial practices. Therefore, it would appear that the exhibit asks for two different kinds of participation, depending on who is doing the looking. For Native visitors who are perhaps the obvious referent in “succeeding generations,” the exhibit is a space to reaffirm the continuity of these communities and their philosophical and spiritual practices. Even if those Native visitors do not belong to one of the visiting communities, witnessing the survival and flourishing of other communities is a vision of hope and a call to fulfill that same duty in their respective home communities. However, for the larger non-Native audience, a different kind of participation is requested. For example, the exhibit ends with an alcove with carpeted benches where visitors can sit and watch a video, an animated presentation of one of the Pacific Northwest Raven stories, emphasizing the teaching of stories and cultural philosophies to new generations. Native visitors may recognize storytelling traditions they already know; non-Native visitors are invited to learn about them.

As suggested in the label, *Our Universes* is likely an “encounter” with the unfamiliar for many visitors, and so the exhibit is an exercise in both teaching *about* these practices and teaching *to* succeeding generations of Native communities.

The exercising of rhetorical sovereignty happens in part in *Our Universes*, as it does in the *Our Peoples* exhibit, through taking the explanation and display of Native cultural and ceremonial philosophies out of the traditional museological framework and providing space for the included Native communities to explain their philosophies as they best saw fit. The curators and designers involved still provide an organizational backbone (the solar and lunar calendars, introductory and closing panels, and the choice of ceremonies still practiced by living cultures), but the content (the “communicative needs and desires,” “languages,” “styles”) of the individual community spaces was largely chosen and negotiated by the community curators. Also, some active participation on the part of visitors is required, as it is in *Our Peoples*. Within each community space, a visitor must reorient and do a little bit of exploring every time, for no two spaces are alike in how the community curators chose to portray their ceremonies or philosophies (and entering a symbolic Tewa space is much different from entering a Hupa cedar-plank house space). Experientially, each space is unique and demands the active attention of the visitor to interpret what each Native community has presented. Active attention is required.

However, rather than discussing history, resistance, or adaptation, the major emphasis within the *Our Universes* gallery, unlike the *Our Peoples* exhibit, is on continuing tradition, with much less orientation toward history, even that history that suppressed or attempted to eradicate the practices and philosophies depicted. Though these philosophies and practices are arguably an embodiment of survivance, adaptation, and/or cultural revival, they are not depicted in this way. Instead, even if the individual community sections demand exploration on the part of the visitor, the general organization of *Our Universes* is far more structured than that of *Our Peoples*, and nowhere are visitors asked to “argue” with what they see and hear, as in the *Making History* section of *Our Peoples*. If anything, the rhetorical framing of *Our Universes* is in terms of respect. Hearing and reading about “teachings” passed down from “ancestors” to “succeeding generations” suggests a different kind of participation to visitors, one in which they are encouraged to explore in order to

understand (and be taught) and to listen in order to understand (and be taught) but not necessarily to challenge what they find there. There is a fine narrative line, then, that both potentially positions the non-Native visitor as an invited guest who may learn and also as an outsider observing the practices of Native communities, the second of which in a sense invokes the older museum frame of passive observing again. Yet while there is the distinct shadow of exhibit-practices-past that allows for non-Native visitors to overlook that rhetorical statement of sovereignty and peruse *Our Universes* again as a gallery of curiosities, it is likely that these Native communities understand their actions as a kind of rhetorical sovereignty, an invitation for museumgoers to learn and affirm these communities' contemporary presence together.

*Our Lives: Contemporary Life and Identities*

Placed a floor below the *Our Peoples* and *Our Universes* exhibit galleries, the *Our Lives* exhibit gallery draws together the historical narrative and the acknowledgment of traditional cultural philosophies in its exploration of present-day Native lives and identities. The organizational theme for this exhibit gallery is explicitly survivance and identity, both in terms of pan-Indigenous questions surrounding Native survival, resistance, and identification and in terms of eight contributing Native communities. The Native communities involved in this exhibit gallery are the Campo Band of Kumeyaay Indians (California, United States), Urban Indian Community of Chicago (Illinois, United States), Yakama Nation (Washington State, United States), Igloodik (Nunavut, Canada), Kahnawake (Quebec, Canada), Saint-Laurent Métis (Manitoba, Canada), Kalinago (Carib Territory, Dominica), and Pamunkey Tribe (Virginia, United States).

The primary goal of *Our Lives* is to underscore the notion of survivance, to demonstrate that change in the lives of Native peoples and communities has not led to erasure but instead to a complicated and varied sense of what "Native" means in a contemporary world. Gerald Vizenor's original conceptualization of the term described it as "an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry."<sup>33</sup> That it is employed here as a major thematic structure suggests a framework for resisting the estab-

lished and often stereotypical discourses of Native identity, of moving past how “history” has written Native peoples and instead actively acknowledging Native peoples’ renunciation of the dominating narrative assertion of presence in a multitude of ways. An introductory panel states:

We are not just survivors; we are the architects of our *survivance*. We carry our ancient philosophies into an ever-changing modern world. We work hard to remain Native in circumstances that sometimes challenge or threaten our survival. *Our Lives* is about our stories of *survivance*, but it belongs to anyone who has fought extermination, discrimination, or stereotypes.

Under the overarching concept of survivance, then, two secondary goals are addressed: asserting the wide variety of identities encompassed in “Native” or “Indian” and bringing awareness to the important issues and topics in contemporary Native lives. Both goals receive attention via the thematically organized series of panels that address concerns that apply across Indigenous communities (such as language, place, self-determination, social and political awareness, economic choices, and traditional and contemporary arts) and within community alcoves.

The first of these two goals, the assertion of contemporary Native identities, may be read in both the thematic backbone panels and the community alcoves. For example, the introductory panel that visitors find upon entering is called *Faces of Native America* and presents more than sixty photo portraits of people who identify as “Native.” Meant as a challenge to the stereotypical images that historical portraits—such as the Catlin collection in *Our Peoples*—now evoke, this section asks visitors to consider what it means to be “Fully Native” by questioning whether blood quantum is the primary identifying trait of Native people. Curved like the panels in *Our Peoples*, the *Faces of Native America* panel continues around into a section called *Body and Soul*, which continues the discussion concerning questions of who is “Native” and who is not while providing some historical context for US government policy regarding blood quantum, Native bodies as artifacts and quantifiable objects, and BIA government of identity. In this way, the concept of “definition” is connected as part of survivance in how these panels question any tidy or stereotypical notion of “Indian” identity. The eight community sections of the exhibit also challenge dominant notions of

“identity” by providing contemporary Native peoples explaining how they define themselves as “Native,” including communities that visitors might not immediately recognize: a mixed-nation urban Native community (Chicago), a mixed European and Native community (Saint-Laurent Métis), and a Native community not currently officially recognized by the US government (Pamunkey).

The second of these goals, speaking to topics and themes in contemporary Native lives, can also be found in the pan-Indigenous panels as well as the community alcoves. For instance, the section on social political awareness presents a collage of objects from the 1960s and 1970s, from hand-made dolls to album covers with Native musicians, from Red Power merchandise to books by Native scholars. The surrounding wall is a collage of photographs of Native protesters. The label next to it reads (in part): “Survivance means doing what you can to keep your culture alive. Survivance is found in everything made by Native hands, from beadwork to political action. . . . The things that we make, also make us.” Here, survivance explores the growth and range of political and social resistance to dominant narratives and their resulting discriminatory policies as well as an expanding awareness and reassertion of Native culture and self-determination. Concurrently, each community alcove provides a self-definition that describes what is most important to it (language, culture, land and environment, government, sovereignty, etc.), how change has happened, and how those things the community values are enacted and supported today.<sup>34</sup> The Kahnawake community alcove (Kahnawake: Kahnawa’kehró:non), for example, provides an overview of the community that among many topics includes the community’s pride in its history in ironwork (“Ironwork Is in Our Blood”), finding ways to include and prioritize Kahnawake language and culture in their children’s schooling (“Taking Back Our Children”), and a historical timeline that asserts Kahnawake contemporary sovereign presence (“Keeping Up with Change”).

The assertion of rhetorical sovereignty in *Our Lives* can be read in the explicit focus on survivance across Native communities. The choice to use survivance as a uniting theme invokes “the inherent right of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires” toward the recovery of “our losses from the ravages of colonization: our lands, our cultures, our self-respect,” in that the goal of the exhibit appears to be

to assert and affirm the contemporary presence and process of self-definition of contemporary Native communities. Though by no means an easy task, the participating curators and Native communities do assert rhetorical sovereignty in their choices to define themselves here and in the face of those historical narratives that understand Native communities as dead, now “impure” (culturally or racially tainted), or fully assimilated. By naming the Native communities the “architects of [their] survivance,” the afore-mentioned label also asserts Native communities’ agency in what the visitor will see rather than passivity.

How those encounters within the exhibit occur, however, is largely up to the visitor, for aside from the opening text panel on survivance embedded in the photo portraits of the *Faces of Native America* display, the organization of the exhibit is open to exploration. A visitor is given no map of the display and so must explore the individual community or thematic displays in order to create a coherent sense of what survivance means here. Once again, active participation on the part of the visitor is demanded, and the request for dialogue, though not overt as in *Our Peoples*, is still suggested in that open space. Yet that same openness and reliance on the visitor to make meaning can also create difficulties, for unlike *Our Peoples*, which began with a familiar historical narrative, or *Our Universes*, which provides an explicit explanation and organization of what visitors will see, *Our Lives* describes a rhetorical discourse of survivance, self-determination, and sovereignty that visitors outside of Indian Country will likely find unfamiliar and Native community realities that challenge what visitors may believe. This kind of education is a good thing, no question; but since it is combined with the openness of the exhibit itself and the refusal to create a new prime narrative, non-Native visitors might actually balk at it specifically because they do not know how to make sense of what they see. Though the thematic framework for survivance is there, and the community spaces are to an extent self-contained and self-explanatory with a repeating pattern in their introductory materials, the degree to which a visitor may come to understand survivance as the intended tie to bind them all—or accept it, once recognized—remains a question. But like the *Our Peoples* exhibit, the layout encourages dialogue between exhibit and visitor, and so one may understand the goal as, if not outright persuasion, at least provoking discussion—and that is also rhetorical sovereignty.

CONCLUSION: NEGOTIATION AND RHETORICAL  
SOVEREIGNTY AT THE NMAI

To reduce a discussion of rhetorical sovereignty—or any other kind of sovereignty—to a matter of success or failure misses the ever-present negotiation of meaning of these exhibits and this museum as they are constructed by staff and encountered by visitors. The question is more one of degree, of context, of success relative to each exhibit's goals, how the exhibits function together, and how the NMAI is situated within the larger Smithsonian complex. Recognizing this process of negotiation and how Native participants have decided and articulated their goals within this communicative web of relations demonstrates the great deal that has been accomplished and the ambiguities that still remain.

As they are described above, we can see three distinct approaches to presenting Native nations' perspectives on history, philosophy, and contemporary life, although what they all have in common is the pervasive and persistent push to present Native perspectives first instead of the exclusive European American scientific or anthropological perspectives as they have been previously embodied in the museum exhibit genre. This reversed prioritization is an act of rhetorical sovereignty. Within these three central exhibits, the NMAI strives to define itself as unique among other Smithsonian museums that do privilege scientific and/or anthropological discourses but in a way that would change the exhibit genres as they stood in the Smithsonian Institution in order to promote discussion and acknowledge the many different perspectives that may be called "Native." Before the NMAI there was little non-Native public discussion of Native peoples as contemporary nations at all. Therefore, *Our Peoples*, *Our Universes*, and *Our Lives* are a kind of Smithsonian revolution in that there were Native members of the curatorial teams and that Native communities exerted considerable direct influence over what they contributed to the NMAI. The contents of the exhibits often present versions of history or perspective on Native issues that visitors find different from what they know, and specifically in *Our Peoples* they are exhorted to challenge the very notion of "history" itself. The spatial organizations are mostly fluid, allowing for visitor exploration, and so it could be argued that, more than any other Smithsonian museum, narrative building is fair game for both curator and visitor alike. This is a tremendous step away from what the Smithsonian has done in the past,



functioning today more for Native peoples rather than doing history to them. Thus, the uniting of the museum structure with self-spoken narrative by Native communities creates a strong opportunity for asserting rhetorical sovereignty.

On the other hand, depending on how it is deployed, that same combination simultaneously creates the opportunity for gaps in non-Native visitors' understanding of that spoken sovereignty. For instance, the mandate to discuss and interact with exhibits that visitors may expect to passively peruse as concrete "Truth" is not a part of the larger Smithsonian approach—at least not in its history with presenting Native peoples. Consequently, these exhibits may also cause frustration in visitors whose generic "museum" expectations have been thwarted and who have not yet found a way to comprehend what they do see. In fact, if one reads those new exhibits in relationship to the larger structure of the NMAI, they are still surrounded by the conventional trappings of a museum and flanked by conventional object-driven displays that fall back on previous exhibit models. As a result, visitors must make the awkward negotiation between the exhibits they are most comfortable with (likely the cases full of tomahawks and beadwork) and the inaugural exhibits that upend that comfort. Those Native voices from the inaugural exhibits end up competing with more conventional versions of museum exhibits and audience expectations. Such positioning may inadvertently distance and objectify those voices and the three inaugural exhibits by association or place the traditional exhibits and the inaugural exhibits in competition with one another for narrative status.

Compounding that potential ambiguity is the fact that non-Native visitors will also likely not encounter the "Indian" they expected to see in the inaugural exhibits. This is in many respects precisely the point of these exhibits and cause for celebration, but, rhetorically speaking, combining major changes in both the communicative framework and what it speaks can create a less-than-optimal distance between the speaker and the listener. A purposeful cognitive dissonance may be produced, but how well that dissonance is put to constructive use within the inaugural exhibits is another question, leaving room for discussion about how speaking sovereignty in these spaces might be accomplished more effectively.

Rhetorical sovereignty, then, is invoked at the NMAI in the balance between reaching Native rhetorical, narrative goals using the familiar

museum exhibit structure and educating a wide non-Native audience and affirming its Native audiences. Though the museum exhibit structure carries a burden from past uses in the service of monolithic history building, rhetorical sovereignty does find possibilities and potential for new meaning making and therefore paves the way for mutually understood cultural sovereignty. More than saying the NMAI does or does not work, rhetorical sovereignty demonstrates how communication at the NMAI might function: the chosen communicative goals, the selected means, the anticipated audiences, and the possible gaps in communication between the Native speakers and the non-Native audiences. It suggests the work yet to be done. And, perhaps most important, it reminds us of the dynamic nature of Native peoples' speaking sovereignty to the rest of the world.

#### NOTES

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1. See Elizabeth Archuleta, "Gym Shoes, Maps, and Passports, Oh My!: Creating Community or Creating Chaos at the National Museum of the American Indian?"; Aldona Jonaitis and Janet Catherine Berlo, "Indian Country' on the National Mall"; Sonya Atalay, "No Sense of the Struggle: Creating a Context for Survivance at the National Museum of the American Indian"; Amy Lonetree, "'Acknowledging the Truth of History': Missed Opportunities at the National Museum of the American Indian"; and Amanda J. Cobb, "The National Museum of the American Indian as Cultural Sovereignty," all in *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversations*, ed. Amy Lonetree and Amanda J. Cobb (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

2. Cobb, "The National Museum," 335.

3. Ernest Stromberg, "Rhetoric and American Indians: An Introduction," in *American Indian Rhetorics of Survivance: Word Medicine, Word Magic*, ed. Ernest Stromberg (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 3.

4. Simon Ortiz, "Foreword: Speaking-Writing Indigenous Literary Sovereignty," in *American Indian Literary Nationalism*, by Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack, and Robert Warrior (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), vii–xiv.

5. Cobb, "The National Museum," 350.

6. Joanne Barker, "For Whom Sovereignty Matters," in *Sovereignty Matters: Locations of Contestation and Possibility in Indigenous Struggles for Self-Determination*, ed. Joanne Barker (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 21 (italics in the original).

7. Scott Richard Lyons, "Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want from Writing?" *College Composition and Communication* 51, no. 3 (2000): 447–68.

8. Lyons, "Rhetorical Sovereignty," 456.

9. Lyons, "Rhetorical Sovereignty," 453, 452, 449 (italics in the original).

10. See Roy Harvey Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind* (1953; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); and Robert F. Berkhofer Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

11. Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*; Robert E. Bieder, "The Representations of Indian Bodies in Nineteenth-Century American Anthropology," in *Repatriation Reader: Who Owns American Indian Remains?* ed. Devon A. Mihesuah (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 19–36; Curtis M. Hinsley, "Digging for Identity: Reflections on the Cultural Background of Collecting," in Mihesuah, *Repatriation Reader*, 37–55; and Evan M. Mauer, "Presenting the American Indian: From Europe to America," in *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian: Museums and Native Cultures* (Washington, DC: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, 2000), 15–28.

12. Lawrence M. Small, "A Passionate Collector," *Smithsonian Magazine*, November 2002, Smithsonian Institution, August 5, 2007, [http://www.smithsonian-mag.com/issues/2000/november\\_small\\_nov00.htm](http://www.smithsonian-mag.com/issues/2000/november_small_nov00.htm). As a result of the NMAI Act and NAGPRA and with the acquisition of the Heye Foundation's collections, the present NMAI has three branches: the new NMAI site on the National Mall in Washington, DC; the NMAI Cultural Resources Center, the housing for the collections, archives, and the NMAI research programs; and the George Gustav Heye Center, the New York branch of the NMAI and a smaller-scale exhibition space.

13. "About the National Museum of the American Indian," Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, August 5, 2007, <http://www.nmai.si.edu/subpage.cfm?subpage=visitor&second=about&third=about>.

14. For the purposes of this study, the Washington, DC, site takes precedence, as it has the highest public profile, and in many ways, given its location on the National Mall, it is the most accessible and therefore the point of interest. When I refer to the NMAI, I mean the DC site.

15. Ann McMullen, personal interview, May 17, 2007; Emil Her Many Horses, interview by the author, May 16, 2007.

16. Paul Chaat Smith, "Making History at the National Museum of the Amer-

ican Indian,” in *Indigenous Experience Today*, ed. Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn (New York: Berg Publishers, 2007), 393.

17. “Historic Native Nations Procession Kicks Off Opening of NMAI,” Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, August 25, 2010, [http://www.nmai.si.edu/subpage.cfm?subpage=collaboration&second=community\\_procession](http://www.nmai.si.edu/subpage.cfm?subpage=collaboration&second=community_procession).

18. The terms *display* and *exhibit* are often used interchangeably in museological discourse, though sometimes the distinction is made between an exhibition or exhibit that is featured within a gallery and the displays that constitute it. In this analysis I use them interchangeably.

19. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 4.

20. Gwyneira Isaac, “What Are Our Expectations Telling Us?: Encounters with the National Museum of the American Indian,” in Lonetree and Cobb, *National Museum of the American Indian*, 245.

21. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums*, 4.

22. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums*, 4, 5.

23. Technically, there is a very small fourth inaugural installation, called *Return to a Native Place*, on the second floor. It exists to document the history of the NMAI site as a Native space with a Native history; however, because of its comparatively small size and its lack of emphasis on maps and publicity literature, the focus here remains on the three major inaugural NMAI exhibits.

24. This is the original grouping of Native communities at the NMAI site; since my May 2007 visit, two new communities, the Blackfeet Nation (Browning, Montana, United States) and the Chiricahua Apache (Mescalero, New Mexico, United States), have replaced the Seminole and Tapirapé sections in the exhibit space.

25. Paul Chaat Smith, “Critical Reflections on the *Our Peoples* Exhibit: A Curator’s Perspective,” in Lonetree and Cobb, *National Museum of the American Indian*, 135.

26. While such goals may appear obvious or “old hat” to scholars in Native and Indigenous studies, these ideas are often revolutionary to the larger non-Native population and therefore cannot be taken for granted.

27. Smith, “Critical Reflections,” 138.

28. For the sake of clarity, it should be noted that the term *survivance* is key to Gerald Vizenor’s understanding of how “*indian*” simulations are overturned; however, the term is not defined or attributed to him within the exhibit.

29. Paul Chaat Smith and Herbert R. Rosen, “Narration: This Is about History and about the Past—Two Different Things,” *Our Peoples: Giving Voice to Our Histories*, directed by Jeff Weingarten.

30. Smith, “Critical Reflections,” 133–34.

31. Smith defines “cognitive dissonance” as “a psychological conflict resulting from incongruous beliefs and attitudes held simultaneously. That’s what happens when you tell visitors of [American] wealth Europeans had never imagined” (“Critical Reflections,” 136). Though Smith does not provide a citation for “cognitive dissonance,” one may assume his is derived from Leon Festinger’s original concept.

32. McMullen, interview by the author, May 17, 2007.

33. Gerald Vizenor, preface to *Manifest Manners* (1994; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), vii. Like the term *sovereignty*, survivance has taken on a life of its own in both scholarship and in its physical and conceptual embodiments. What survivance is will depend on who, where, and how it is invoked.

34. Though the labels written by the NMAI curators do not address sovereignty specifically, the word *sovereignty* does appear in labels written by some community curators, most overtly in the Kahnawake section.

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