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Rethinking the 'Indian Arts Museum': The Evolution of the David T. Vernon Collection  
of American Indian Artifacts

*by*

*Amanda S. Poitevin*

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## COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

American Indian Movement	AIM
Grand Teton Lodge Company	GTLC
Jackson Hole Preserve, Incorporated	JHPI
Museum of the American Indian (as of 1989, the National Museum of the American Indian)	MAI
National Park Service	NPS
Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act	NAGPRA
Native American Rights Fund	NARF
Rocky Mountain Regional Office	RMRO

RETHINKING THE 'INDIAN ARTS MUSEUM': THE EVOLUTION OF THE  
DAVID T. VERNON COLLECTION OF AMERICAN INDIAN ARTIFACTS  
*by Amanda S. Poitevin*

Thesis Abstract–Idaho State University (2016)

Through the lenses of ethnohistory, museum studies, cultural geography, and national park studies, this thesis uses the David T. Vernon Collection of American Indian artifacts that was displayed in Grand Teton National Park as the basis for an analysis of how the display and consumption of American Indian culture changed in the twentieth century. The thesis studies the history of the collection from the early twentieth century when the objects were acquired by Vernon through the collection's purchase by the Rockefeller family in 1965 and its subsequent donation to the National Park Service (NPS) in the 1976. Using discourse analysis, historical landscape evaluation, and the Indigenous paradigm, I trace the shifting narratives of American Indian material culture presented by American Indians, Vernon, museum staff at the Museum of the American Indian, the Rockefeller family, NPS cultural resources staff, and visitors at Grand Teton National Park.



## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Quietly nestled in a visitor center overlooking Jackson Lake in Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming, the Indian Arts Museum was the type of museum that tourists stumbled upon rather than sought out from afar. Beneath this quiet façade, however, the Indian Arts Museum had been a site of contention for decades. This thesis analyzes the history of the Indian Arts Museum and the David T. Vernon Collection of American Indian artifacts that it displayed. In this thesis, I study the history of the collection from the time when the collection was owned by Vernon through its acquisition by the Rockefeller family and its eventual donation to the National Park Service (NPS). In addition, this thesis examines how the various renditions of the Indian Arts Museum corresponded to or contrasted with social and cultural rights movements that unfolded across the United States during those decades. The time frame for this analysis is approximately 1920 to the present. Through the lenses of ethnohistory, museum studies, cultural and historical geography, and national park studies, I use the David T. Vernon Collection as the basis for an analysis of how the display and consumption of American Indian culture changed in the twentieth century. Using discourse analysis and historical landscape evaluation, I trace the shifting narratives presented by David T. Vernon, museum staff at the Museum of the American Indian, the Rockefeller family, NPS cultural resources staff, and tourists at Grand Teton National Park. I argue that Euro-American colonial ideas shaped early twentieth-century collection practices and the museum interpretation of the David T. Vernon Collection. In turn, American Indians presented narratives that offered complimentary as well as contrasting ideas to Euro-

American presumptions, creating a discourse that materialized in the cultural landscape of Grand Teton National Park and its museum displays and interpretation.

This thesis is guided by the following question: how do museum display practices, ideas about cultural resources protection and management, and American Indian rights issues shape the collection and display of American Indian arts in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century in U.S. national parks? In order to answer this question, this thesis follows the David T. Vernon Collection roughly chronologically through the twentieth and early-twenty-first century. After this introduction, the methodology chapter and the literature review introduces some of the guiding studies and background information that is important for understanding how the history of the Vernon Collection unfolded. Chapter Four provides background on the artifacts that comprise the Vernon Collection and illuminates the myth of the “vanishing Indian” that propelled people such as Vernon to amass collections of American Indian goods. This chapter also explains how colonialism and genocide are inextricable parts of the history of American Indians and the United States.

Chapter Five introduces David T. Vernon and explains how and why Vernon amassed his collection of approximately 10,000 items over forty years. This chapter describes Vernon’s collecting practices and also the collecting culture in which he participated in suburban Chicago. While the chapter is primarily about Vernon, it is important to remember that Vernon was one half of an exchange, whether he was buying artifacts from the people who made them, other collectors, dealers, auctions, or museums.

Chapter Six follows the collection of artifacts from Vernon’s home in Illinois to the storerooms of the Museum of the American Indian (MAI) in New York City after

Vernon sold the collection to Laurance S. Rockefeller and the Jackson Hole Preserve, Incorporated (JHPI). The JHPI entered into a contract with the MAI to store and curate the Vernon Collection, and while the collection was in New York City, it was divided. The lesser quality and duplicate pieces from the collection were sold or exchanged until the collection contained approximately 1,428 items. The decisions made by the JHPI and the MAI illuminate how the artifacts in the Vernon Collection represented a monetary and cultural investment for the two groups.

Chapter Seven centers on the planning for the Indian Arts Museum in Grand Teton National Park and the dedication for the museum that occurred on June 29, 1972. Through an analysis of the design documents, the dedication program, and what actually happened at the dedication, I highlight how the multiple narratives of American Indians, the NPS, Vernon, and Rockefeller impacted the design and interpretation of the museum at this time.

Chapter Eight concerns the NPS travelling exhibit of artifacts from the Vernon Collection, *Indian Pride on the Move*, which toured the country in 1976 and 1977. Similar to the opening of the Indian Arts Museum, the planning for *Indian Pride on the Move* reveals the NPS's narrative concerning American Indian artifacts and the purpose of museum displays. Specifically, *Indian Pride on the Move*, which corresponded with the NPS celebrations of the American Revolution's Bicentennial, was designed to bring American Indian artifacts to rural communities and reservations in order to create a more inclusive and accessible NPS experience.

Chapter Nine follows the Indian Arts Museum from the late 1970s until it was closed in 2011. During this time, the Indian Arts Museum was redesigned in the early

1980s, and the collection was fully reassessed after the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990. During this time period, the NPS became increasingly sensitive to the concerns of American Indians who visited the museum. The Indian Arts Museum was closed in 2011 due to environmental concerns and the deterioration of the artifacts on display.

The history of the David T. Vernon Collection is noteworthy because it demonstrates how the stories that we tell about the past are actually webs of narratives coming from different people and different times. The Vernon Collection has been the subject of overlapping, diverging, and changing narratives since the time Vernon began collecting, but, significantly, the artifacts were important to American Indians before Vernon started collecting, and they are still important to American Indians. Over time, the artifacts in the Vernon Collection have been treated as curiosities, commodities, art, and now as culturally relevant ethnographic items. The collection continues to be a source of controversy as the community in and around Grand Teton National Park debates the collection's future in the park. The story of the Vernon Collection is a story of good intentions and debatable practices, a story of ignorance, arrogance, and sincerity. This story is filled with documentation that sometimes reveals a disquieting lack of documentation, but it is also a story of earnest efforts to ameliorate the problematic display of American Indian arts, culture, and history in order to move toward a more truthful, respectful, and meaningful future for these artifacts.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

This study of the display of a collection of American Indian artifacts builds upon the fields of cultural and historical geography, cultural resources protection and management in U.S. national parks, museum studies, ethnohistory, and regional histories of the American West. Additionally, this study pulls from literature streams pertaining to David T. Vernon and the Rockefeller family. This literature review highlights key studies within each field and shows how those studies form a foundation for the analysis of the group of ethnographic artifacts known as the David T. Vernon Collection.

The literature of cultural and historical geography is central to the study of the Vernon Collection in Grand Teton National Park because this field demonstrates the interplay between landscape, people, and culture. The culture surrounding the creation of Grand Teton National Park and the management of it, including the management of the Indian Arts Museum that housed the David T. Vernon Collection, is exemplary of the interplay of place and society that is at the heart of cultural geography. To help frame the Vernon Collection within the National Park Service, this thesis draws upon the research of Richard H. Schein's "The Place of Landscape: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting an American Scene."<sup>1</sup> In this article, Schein discusses the growth of the field of cultural geography, and the question of authorship of the landscape, and he introduces the term "discourse materialized." When a discourse, a commonly shared set of ideas, is applied to the landscape, it becomes a discourse materialized, a literal embodiment of ideas in the built and natural environment. Schein illustrates this concept through an

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<sup>1</sup> Richard H. Schein, "The Place of Landscape: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting an American Scene," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87, no. 4 (Dec. 1997): 660-680.

examination of the residential neighborhood of Ashland Park, a suburb outside of Lexington, Kentucky. Schein shows that a landscape can be read like a text, but the text must be constantly reinterpreted as society is impacted by the landscape and, in turn, the landscape is molded by society. Schein's research is an excellent example of the type of analysis that this thesis undertakes in examining the role of the Indian Arts Museum in Grand Teton National Park. As Schein demonstrates with Ashland Park, this thesis explores the cultural landscape of Grand Teton National Park and the exhibits of the David T. Vernon Collection as a discourse materialized.

Likewise, continuing within the field of cultural and historical geography, Mona Domosh's *Invented Cities, The Creation of Landscape in Nineteenth-Century New York and Boston* is a key exploration of the creation of elite landscapes.<sup>2</sup> On the surface, it may seem that Domosh's study has little relevance to the study of the Indian Arts Museum in Grand Teton National Park, but the museum and the park are also examples of elite landscapes. In *Invented Cities*, Domosh uses the examples of New York and Boston to show how different groups of people and historical trends created distinct landscapes in the nineteenth century. Domosh deals almost entirely with the elite circles of each city and shows how the contrasting ideologies and structures of power resulted in different building trends (Domosh uses New York's skyscraper and retail pattern in Manhattan and Boston's Back Bay homes and the Boston Commons in particular). Domosh outlines how, as Boston lost economic dominance to New York City, the elites of Boston demonstrated their power and wealth as guardians of culture and morality. Ostentatious displays of wealth were rare as evidenced by the uniformity of residences in Boston's

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<sup>2</sup> Mona Domosh, *Invented Cities, The Creation of Landscape in Nineteenth-Century New York and Boston* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

Back Bay. The elite of New York City, on the other hand, were in a constant state of flux as New York became the center of industry and shipping on the East Coast. The elite of New York demonstrated power through outward displays of wealth: ostentatious homes and tall buildings. The creation of parks in the cities also reflected the differences in the elite circles. In Boston, the preservation of the Boston Commons and the “Emerald Necklace,” a series of parks throughout the city, was spearheaded by the elite as a way of preserving open space as the city rapidly filled with immigrants. In New York, the city’s earliest park, City Hall Park, was built not as a preserve but as a place of civic aggrandizement. In order to better display the beauty of City Hall, city leaders preserved the park across from the building so that the building could be seen better in the crowded streets. This concept of open space and preservation of sightlines soon gained advocates throughout the country and materialized in landscapes ranging from the densely-settled East Coast to the rocky, dry valleys of Wyoming.

Domosh’s work is an example of urban historical geography, and it illuminates the cultural milieu that surrounded the Rockefeller family. After visiting the Grand Tetons in the 1920s, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., founded the Snake River Land Company and began to buy land in the Jackson Hole area with the intent of protecting the land from unchecked commercialism. As such, the Rockefeller family impressed the cultural trends of New York City and Boston upon the landscape of the Grand Tetons. The Rockefeller family gained prominence after the time frame that concerns Domosh, but the trend among the elites of preserving open space and promoting high culture, whether for the purpose of displaying wealth or engaging in civic philanthropy, was at play in the purchase of the land in Jackson Hole by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and the eventual

purchase of the Vernon Collection and creation of the Indian Arts Museum by Laurance S. Rockefeller.

In the vein of urban historical geography, William Wyckoff's chapter titled "Imposing Landscapes of Private Power and Wealth" in *The Making of the American Landscape* outlines the cultural trends that had an impact on the cultural landscape of Grand Teton National Park and Jackson Hole more broadly. Building on Domosh's study of Boston and New York, Wyckoff identifies the elite movement towards "social and spatial exclusivity" in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At this time, the elite favored planned "garden" communities that featured "low-density housing on large lots, a lack of commercial land uses, often gently curving and landscaped streets, and a stylized architecture that blend[ed] well with a predominantly pastoral surrounding."<sup>3</sup> While Wyckoff does not write of national parks, Jackson, Wyoming (the town) and Jackson Hole, Wyoming (the land in the valley east of the Grand Teton Mountain Range) fall into the category of "latté towns" (a term he borrows from David Brooks) inhabited by "bourgeois bohemians" whose "values and preferences represent a fusion of bohemian anti-materialism (beatniks, hippies, the counter-culture, the environmental movement) and the ongoing bourgeois penchant for the good life (gourmet food, expensive outdoor equipment and recreational activities, health clubs, and comfortable, but not showy residences)."<sup>4</sup> Whether he knew it or not, when John D. Rockefeller, Jr., began buying land in Jackson Hole with the intent of protecting it from further development, he placed Jackson Hole on the path of elite landscapes. From the founding of Grand Teton National

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<sup>3</sup> William Wyckoff, "Imposing Landscapes of Private Power and Wealth" in *The Making of the American Landscape*, ed. Michael Conzen (New York: Routledge, 2010), 386.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 387-388.



Park to the current price of land in and around Jackson, the private land around the Tetons reflects elite preferences and healthy bank accounts.

The value (monetary and symbolic) of Jackson Hole echoes the meanings humans assign to it. As such, the inscription of meaning onto the space of the Grand Tetons and the Indian Arts Museum is another guiding theme for this thesis. In “Ethnographic Landscapes: Transforming Nature into Culture,” Donald L. Hardesty discusses how people assign meaning to the landscape around them and how different groups’ meanings often conflict with each other.<sup>5</sup> Hardesty states, “Unlike vernacular landscapes, which generally reflect, often unintentionally, repetitive human activities such as farming or mining, ethnographic landscapes mirror the systems of meanings, ideologies, beliefs, values, and world-views shared by a group of people.”<sup>6</sup> In this way, the place of the Grand Teton mountain range is the ancestral homeland to some American Indians, an iconic mountain range to mountain climbers and hikers, the last vestige of the “Wild West” to many tourists, and an area with a complex ecological and human history to the National Park Service. Likewise, the placement of the Indian Arts Museum in Grand Teton National Park and, specifically, at Colter Bay represents a connection with the Jackson Lake Lodge (and thus the Rockefeller family) and a (mis)representation of American Indian material culture in the West.

Adding to the literature of the representation of Native peoples in the West, Kevin S. Blake explores the interplay of Native voices and historical landscape in “Great Plains

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<sup>5</sup> Donald L. Hardesty, “Ethnographic Landscapes, Transforming Nature into Culture,” in *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America*, ed. Arnold R. Alanen and Robert Z. Melnick (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 169.

Native American Representations Along the Lewis and Clark Trail.”<sup>7</sup> In this article, Blake presents his research on the trail markers and monuments along the Lewis and Clark Trail. Based on his findings, Blake groups the presentations of Native Americans along the trail into four categories: Councils of Power, Hostile Encounters, Good Neighbors, and Sacagawea Reinterpreted. Speaking broadly of historic markers, which connect to the interpretative materials (and lack thereof) at the Indian Arts Museum, Blake postulates, “Memorializing history in the landscape reflects deep-seated cultural needs. This process not only pays homage to the actions, events, or persons deemed significant at a particular point in time, but it also offers a chance for the creators of the historic marker to write their version of history and to use an interpretive format that highlights their own understanding and values.”<sup>8</sup> As will be discussed later in this thesis, the narrative that the NPS presented at the Indian Arts Museum fell within Blake’s category of “Good Neighbors” where American Indian cultures were presented as “static, passive culture groups worthy of study” through the fixed displays of artifacts.<sup>9</sup>

Taking the idea of ethnographic landscapes beyond literal places, this thesis also examines the cultural meanings assigned to items, an idea known as material culture. As a collection of artifacts from distinct tribes and from varying time periods, the people who made the items assigned meaning to them, the people who bought (or found, stole, bartered for) the items assigned meaning, the people who collected (in our case, Vernon) the items assigned meaning, and the pattern continued through Laurance S. Rockefeller and the Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc., the Museum of the American Indian, and the

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<sup>7</sup> Kevin S. Blake, “Great Plains Native American Representations along the Lewis and Clark Trail,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (2004): 263-282.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

National Park Service. Due to the wide range of people included in this study (the most substantial diversity coming from American Indian communities), I draw upon a broad field of literature concerning material culture. For example, though Troy Bickham's "'A Conviction of the Reality of Things': Material Culture, North American Indians and Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain" speaks mostly of British culture, Bickham's observations and conclusions relate to the acquisition and display of the David T. Vernon Collection.<sup>10</sup> For example, Bickham writes, "Auctions, like museums, provided a material-culture reinforcement of British categories of civilizations and the popular assumption that the contemporary British were in the highest tier."<sup>11</sup> The legacy of colonialism and the marginalization of American Indian culture permeated the Vernon Collection and the Indian Arts Museum just as they did the British Museum. More general information on material culture comes from Nancy Odegaard's "Artists' Intent: Material Culture Studies and Conservation," in which Odegaard provides the following description of material culture: "material culture studies tends to evaluate the importance of an object based on what can be learned from its context, the ideas behind it, and the forces that create it. Material culture is studied because it helps us understand the workings of individuals and societies."<sup>12</sup> While this description is almost so broad as to be opaque, it points to the breadth of this field. Finally, while it is out of the scope of this thesis to explore the material culture of every American Indian society represented in the David T. Vernon Collection, this thesis draws from Alan Ferg's (ed.) *Western Apache*

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<sup>10</sup> Troy Bickham, "'A Conviction of the Reality of Things': Material Culture, North American Indians and Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39, no. 1 (Fall 2005): 29-47.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>12</sup> Nancy Odegaard, "Artists' Intent: Material Culture Studies and Conservation," *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 34 (1995): 187-193, 189.

*Material Culture* and Sherelyn Ogden's (ed.) *Caring for American Indian Objects*.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the literature of ethnographic landscape and material culture, the literature of museum studies provides context for the history of the management of the Indian Arts Museum. In particular, Karen Coody Cooper's 2008 book, *Spirited Encounters, American Indians Protest Museum Policies and Practices*, exists at the intersection of the fields of museum studies and American Indian rights.<sup>14</sup> *Spirited Encounters* is a comprehensive resource regarding the changes in museums and museum policies that have been affected by American Indian protest. Cooper details protests of inappropriate displays of American Indian artifacts and human remains in the United States and Canada from approximately 1950 to the present. In addition, she writes extensively about legislation enacted in the 1970s and 1980s and the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGRPA) in 1990. NAGRPA has had a profound effect on museums and Native communities, and Cooper examines many of these changes. While Cooper includes a discussion of the changes at the National Museum of the American Indian (where the Vernon Collection was housed for approximately two years in the 1960s) and the National Park Service, Cooper does not discuss Grand Teton National Park or any aspect of the Vernon Collection. This thesis therefore builds upon Cooper's research and furthers the reconsideration of the display of American Indian artifacts in the twentieth and twenty-first century.

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<sup>13</sup> Alan Ferg, ed., *Western Apache Material Culture* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987), and Sherelyn Ogden, ed., *Caring for American Indian Objects*, (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Library Press, 2004), 10.

<sup>14</sup> Karen Coody Cooper, *Spirited Encounters, American Indians Protest Museum Policies and Practices* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008).

A contemporary controversy over the Sand Creek Massacre Exhibit in Colorado also contextualizes the management of the Indian Arts Museum and the decisions that are being made about its future by the National Park Service. The Sand Creek Massacre was a massacre of a peaceful Cheyenne and Arapahoe village by the Colorado military in 1864. Approximately two-thirds of those who were killed were women and children. The site of the massacre is currently operated by the National Park Service, and the History Colorado Center opened an exhibit in 2012 titled *Collision: The Sand Creek Massacre 1860s-Today*. The exhibit was swiftly criticized, however, for presenting the event as an inevitable conflict rather than as a tragic massacre. History Colorado closed the exhibit in 2013 in order to consult with the Northern Cheyenne tribe. Useful background for the exhibit and the ensuing controversy comes from Patricia Calhoun's "History Colorado Could Shutter Its Controversial Sand Creek Massacre Exhibit," Carol Berry's "Sand Creek Massacre Exhibit to Close for Tribal Consultation," Steven K. Paulson's "History Colorado Center Closes Sand Creek Massacre Display," and the Denver Post Editorial Board's "Right Call (but late) on Sand Creek Massacre Exhibit."<sup>15</sup> While *Collision*

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<sup>15</sup> Patricia Calhoun, "History Colorado Could Shutter Its Controversial Sand Creek Massacre Exhibit," Westword.com, April 25, 2013, accessed January 6, 2016, <http://www.westword.com/news/history-colorado-could-shutter-its-controversial-sand-creek-massacre-exhibit-5120374>; Carol Berry, "Sand Creek Massacre Exhibit to Close for Tribal Consultation," Indian Country Today Media Network.com, April 18, 2013, accessed December 28, 2015, <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/04/18/sand-creek-massacre-exhibit-closes-tribal-consultation-148896>; Steven K. Paulson, "History Colorado center closes Sand Creek Massacre display," *The Denver Post*, August 28, 2013, accessed December 28, 2015, [http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci\\_23959631/history-colorado-center-closes-sand-creek-massacre-display](http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci_23959631/history-colorado-center-closes-sand-creek-massacre-display); Denver Post Editorial Board, "Right call (but late) on Sand Creek Massacre Exhibit," *The Denver Post*, August 30, 2013, accessed December 28, 2015, [http://www.denverpost.com/editorials/ci\\_23976554/right-call-but-late-sand-creek-massacre-exhibit](http://www.denverpost.com/editorials/ci_23976554/right-call-but-late-sand-creek-massacre-exhibit).

opened long after the Indian Arts Museum was opened, this thesis traces similar themes pertaining to exhibits of American Indian history and culture by museums and the National Park Service.

Amy Lonetree's *Decolonizing Museums, Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* is a critical piece of scholarship at the intersection of museum studies and American Indian rights.<sup>16</sup> Lonetree examines the depiction of Native Americans at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), the Mille Lacs Indian Museum in Minnesota, and the Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture & Lifeways in Michigan, and she analyzes how each center deals with the complex legacy of colonialism, genocide, and survival inherent in American Indian history. While Lonetree's study focuses on contemporary issues in museum studies and representations of Native American history, she also provides essential background on how the field of museum studies pertaining to American Indians has changed over time. Lonetree's chapter on the NMAI is particularly valuable to this thesis because in this chapter, she explains the background of the NMAI and how the museum's policies changed over time.

Leah Dilworth's "Tourists and Indians in Fred Harvey's Southwest" is another important piece of analysis for museum studies pertaining to the display of American Indian artifacts.<sup>17</sup> Of particular interest to this thesis, Dilworth introduces the idea of

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<sup>16</sup> Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums, Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Leah Dilworth, "Tourists and Indians in Fred Harvey's Southwest," in *Seeing & Being Seen, Tourism in the American West*, ed. David M. Wrobel and Patrick T. Long (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001).

“touristic consumption” of the visual display of the American Indian.<sup>18</sup> She examines the Fred Harvey Company, a restaurant and hotel company that served the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway (AT&SF) in the American Southwest in the early 1900s. In conjunction with the AT&SF, the Fred Harvey Company promoted an image of the “vanishing” American Indian through “collections of Indian-made objects, exhibited in museumlike settings with the occasional presence of actual American Indians to demonstrate crafts and dances.”<sup>19</sup> As I demonstrate later in this thesis, the Indian Arts Museum employed similar tactics that arguably continue to the present day. In addition, the Vernon Collection, taken broadly from its inception in the 1920s to its creation as a museum, represents Renato Rosaldo’s “imperialist nostalgia” as quoted in Dilworth. This particular nostalgia is “a sense of longing for what one is complicit in destroying or altering, in which the feeling of nostalgia is ‘innocent’ and what is destroyed is simply rendered as ‘lost.’”<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Dilworth’s research is applicable to this thesis because she examines the exhibits of the Fred Harvey Company from the perspective of the company, the tourists, and the American Indians who participated in the exhibits. In other words, Dilworth investigates multiple viewpoints in order to create to a dynamic review of the practices of the Fred Harvey Company.

The idea of examining history from multiple viewpoints has gained traction recently, and this thesis builds upon this movement to create a more complete image of the Vernon Collection compared with what has been written in the past. Glenda Riley, in “Writing, Teaching, and Recreating Western History through Intersections and

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<sup>18</sup> Dilworth, “Tourists and Indians,” 144.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 146-147.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 143.

Viewpoints,” explains the complications inherent in examining Western history from multiple viewpoints.<sup>21</sup> Riley writes, “the customary heroes of western history wore black hats in other people’s eyes.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, the legacies of the Euro-American “pioneers,” American Indian tribes, and the U.S. government (as well as the French, Spanish, and British governments) depend on the person or group telling the story. Riley encourages historians to tell a multivariate history. “There is no single story of the West,” Riley writes, “nor do any one set of intersections and viewpoints constitute its history. Thus, although reconstructing the details of the various intersections and viewpoints demands thought and effort, it is an immensely enlightening, as well as a moral and fair, undertaking.”<sup>23</sup> While the Indian Arts Museum presented a Euro-American image of American Indians and the West, this thesis endeavors to seize Riley’s suggestions and examine the museum from multiple viewpoints and perspectives.

Another key article in the field of museum studies is Shelley Ruth Butler’s “The Politics of Exhibiting Culture: Legacies and Possibilities.”<sup>24</sup> In this article, Butler analyzes two controversial museum exhibits and the diverse reactions that they provoked. The two exhibits, *Into the Heart of Africa* (1989-1990) and *Miscast: Negotiating Khoisan History and Material Culture* (1996), showed at the Royal Ontario Museum and the South African National Gallery, respectively. Butler discusses the differences between critical and optimistic museology as they relate to exhibiting cultures. In particular,

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<sup>21</sup> Glenda Riley, “Writing, Teaching, and Recreating Western History through Intersections and Viewpoints,” *Pacific Historical Review* 62, no. 3 (Aug. 1993): 339-357.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 347.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.

<sup>24</sup> Shelley Ruth Butler, “The Politics of Exhibiting Culture: Legacies and Possibilities,” *Museum Anthropology* 23, no. 3 (Dec. 2000), accessed December 28, 2015, doi:10.1525/mua.2000.23.3.74.



Butler focuses on the museum as a postcolonial space with diverse goals. Thus, while Butler's research falls in line with the promptings of Glenda Riley to include more voices in the telling of history, Butler also cautions that the dialogue of history is entrenched in the politics of power, race, class, and gender. Butler writes, "calls for the inclusion of new voices in museum exhibits may be overly optimistic, simplistic, and too detached from intricate power relations involved in institutional projects of decolonization and democratization."<sup>25</sup> As the Indian Arts Museum presented the culture of an "other" for consumption by predominantly Euro-American tourists, this thesis examines the legacy of the colonization of American Indian lands and culture and how the Indian Arts Museum interacted with that colonization. In addition, this thesis follows the insight illustrated by Butler that "exhibits are never neutral, and that they are informed by the cultural, historical, institutional, and political contexts of the people who make them."<sup>26</sup> I build upon Butler's examination of these two exhibits to show how the Indian Arts Museum was another example of problematic cultural display, dialogue, and a disparity of power even as it aimed to celebrate American Indian culture.

Peggy Levitt's recent book *Artifacts and Allegiances, How Museums Put the Nation and the World on Display* adds to the literature of how to view and interpret the role of museums in society.<sup>27</sup> Levitt analyzes museums in Stockholm, Copenhagen, Gothenburg, Boston, New York, Singapore, and Doha to illustrate how museums navigate their competing roles as sanctuaries of national identity and emissaries of cultural diversity. Though Levitt deals sparingly with American Indian artifacts and

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<sup>25</sup> Butler, "The Politics of Exhibiting Culture," 75.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>27</sup> Peggy Levitt, *Artifacts and Allegiances, How Museums Put the Nation and the World on Display* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

exhibits, she offers critical insights into the state of museum studies today. Levitt identifies four types of museums—art museums, ethnographic museums, constituency museums, and cultural history museums—and she states, “Each type of museum plays some role—whether purposefully or by default—in citizenship creation and showcases the national from a slightly different angle.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, museums tell a story about their countries and their citizens: their past, their present, and their future. This thesis examines what stories American Indians told about their artifacts, and what stories David T. Vernon, the Rockefeller family, the Museum of the American Indian, and the National Park Service were telling about themselves in their acquisition and preservation of American Indian artifacts.

As Grand Teton National Park is situated in one of the most scenic and iconic areas of the American West, the history of the American West and how the idea of the West has changed over time informs the interpretation of this national park and the Indian Arts Museum. One critical piece of literature in this field is D. W. Meinig’s “American Wests: Preface to a Geographical Interpretation.”<sup>29</sup> In this article, Meinig outlines how the American West developed as separate cultural regions. This is in contrast to previous conceptions of the West as a monolith, a place with little important history before Lewis and Clark, the “frontier” prior to nineteenth-century expansion by Euro-American settlers. Meinig challenges this description as he identifies six distinct regions in the West (Hispano New Mexico, the Mormon Region, Colorado, the Oregon Country, Northern California, and Southern California), each with its own history (albeit Euro-American

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<sup>28</sup> Levitt, *Artifacts and Allegiances*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> D. W. Meinig, “American Wests: Preface to a Geographical Interpretation,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 62, no. 2 (June 1972), accessed January 5, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2569401>.

history). Additionally, he identifies four stages of development in four categories (circulation, population, culture, and political areas) that further differentiate the various regions in the West. Meinig's research is important because Meinig claims that the American West is not uniform in landscape, culture, history, or climate. In addition, he claims that the differences throughout the West are "rooted in historical legacies as well as environmental settings, in what kinds of people came and in what they have created and experienced in particular places."<sup>30</sup> While Grand Teton National Park is on the periphery of "the Mormon Region," Meinig's interpretation of the West is relevant to this thesis because David T. Vernon's collecting practices and, later, the Indian Arts Museum were built upon the legacy of the mythical West that Meinig dismantles. I draw additional information on the historical roots of the mythical West and its impact on tourism from Robert G. Athearn's *The Mythic West in Twentieth-Century America*.<sup>31</sup> Athearn's work is also useful due to its explanation of the battle over the Jackson Hole National Monument in Wyoming.

The concept of the mythical West (and its debunking) is closely related to the study of American Indian history and culture, which are the focal points of ethnohistory. While ethnohistory began as the study of America and the "frontier" primarily by anthropologists, the field expanded over the twentieth century to include historians and other subject matters such as "the cultural history of state societies, industrialized societies, colonizing societies, and capitalist societies in regions all over the globe."<sup>32</sup> As

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<sup>30</sup> Meinig, "American Wests," 182.

<sup>31</sup> Robert G. Athearn, *The Mythic West in Twentieth-Century America* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986).

<sup>32</sup> James Axtell, "The Ethnohistory of Native America," in *Rethinking American Indian History*, ed. Donald L. Fixico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 13.

James Axtell points out in “Ethnohistory: An Historian’s Viewpoint,” ethnohistory is difficult to define, but “[h]istorians and anthropologists now have no difficulty agreeing that ethnohistory is essentially the use of historical and ethnological methods and materials to gain knowledge of the nature and causes of change in a culture defined by ethnological concepts and categories.”<sup>33</sup> In other words, ethnohistory is a bridge, albeit an often-unstable bridge, upon which historians, ethnologists, anthropologists, and others stand in order to share data, methods, and hypotheses. In this thesis, I use ethnohistory, with particular reference to Richard White’s “Indian Peoples and the Natural World, Asking the Right Questions”<sup>34</sup> and Angela Cavender Wilson’s “Power of the Spoken Word, Native Oral Traditions in American Indian History,”<sup>35</sup> as a framework for how American Indians and Euro-Americans (recognizing both as heterogeneous groups) impacted the collecting practices of David T. Vernon and shaped the interpretation of the collection at the Indian Arts Museum.

Adjoining the literature of ethnohistory is the stream of literature concerning American Indian history. In this thesis, I make particular use of Karl W. Butzer’s chapter “Retrieving American Indian Landscapes” in *The Making of the American Landscape*<sup>36</sup> wherein Butzer succinctly describes the movement and settlement patterns of American Indians, and he hints at the revised narratives that increasingly characterize American

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<sup>33</sup> James Axtell, “Ethnohistory: An Historian’s Viewpoint,” *Ethnohistory* 26, no. 1 (Winter 1979): 2.

<sup>34</sup> Richard White, “Indian Peoples and the Natural World, Asking the Right Questions” in *Rethinking American Indian History*, ed. Donald L. Fixico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 87-100.

<sup>35</sup> Angela Cavender Wilson, “Power of the Spoken Word, Native Oral Traditions in American Indian History” in *Rethinking American Indian History*, ed. Donald L. Fixico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 101-116.

<sup>36</sup> Karl W. Butzer, “Retrieving American Indian Landscapes,” in *The Making of the American Landscape*, ed. Michael P. Conzen (New York: Routledge, 2010), 32-57.

Indian histories. Challenging the nineteenth and twentieth century narratives that white immigrants settled undeveloped, uninhabited land, Butzer writes, “Determined Indian resistance by the Comanche, Sioux, Apache, and other tribes probably affected rates and patterns of settlement as much in a negative way as passive tribes or thinly settled lands did in a positive way.”<sup>37</sup> This thesis draws motivation from and builds upon this revisionist stream in order to show how American Indians evolved and had agency throughout the history of the American West.

Tomes have been written about the Rockefeller family, and this thesis draws primarily from research about John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and Laurance S. Rockefeller. Peter Collier and David Horowitz’s *The Rockefellers, An American Dynasty* outlines how John D. Rockefeller, Sr., rose from modest beginnings and became one of the wealthiest men in the United States through the success of the Standard Oil Company.<sup>38</sup> Collier and Horowitz’s work is useful primarily as an overview of the family, detailing the family lineage from John D. Rockefeller, Sr., to his three daughters who reached maturity, Bessie, Alta, and Edith, and his son, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. This son and his progeny feature prominently in most histories of the Rockefellers, and for the purpose of studying the David T. Vernon Collection, I do not veer away from this pattern. For more information on John D. Rockefeller, Jr., I turn to Raymond B. Fosdick’s explanation in *John D. Rockefeller, Jr.: A Portrait* of how the oil magnate’s son took over the family mantle of industry into the twentieth century and began, in full force, the tradition of philanthropy, especially towards conservation, a cause to which the family increasingly

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<sup>37</sup> Butzer, “Retrieving American Indian Landscapes,” 57.

<sup>38</sup> Peter Collier and David Horowitz, *The Rockefellers: An American Dynasty* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976).

became connected.<sup>39</sup> This book is especially useful as it details Rockefeller's role in restoring Colonial Williamsburg, a precursor to the family's later conservation work in the Virgin Islands and Grand Teton National Park, among many other sites. Furthermore, Fosdick's work details the family structure into which John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and his wife, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, raised their children, Abby, John D. Rockefeller, 3<sup>rd</sup>, Nelson, Laurance, Winthrop, and David.

Laurance S. Rockefeller, the third of the five sons of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., is instrumental in the story of the David T. Vernon Collection. While many histories of the Rockefellers cover the contributions of each of the children, Robin W. Winks's *Laurance S. Rockefeller: Catalyst for Conservation* is an important source of context for this study.<sup>40</sup> This book is rather laudatory in tone (perhaps because it was published in 1997 when Laurance S. Rockefeller was still alive), but Wink's detailing of his involvement in diverse conservation projects throughout the twentieth century is useful. Wink's overall argument is that Laurance was open to change, and his opinions did change over time concerning conservation (the belief that land and resources should be protected for the public) and preservation, or using Wink's term, environmentalism (the belief that land and resources should be protected from the public). Wink writes, "Laurance Rockefeller was a conservationist like his father for much of his life. By the late 1960s he moved closer to an environmentalist position. He was one of the most influential individuals in America to make that journey, from conservation to a muted environmentalism. He had the capacity to put his money into that journey, to educate teachers, politicians, and

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<sup>39</sup> Raymond B. Fosdick, *John D. Rockefeller, Jr.: A Portrait* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956).

<sup>40</sup> Robin W. Winks, *Laurance S. Rockefeller: Catalyst for Conservation* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1997).

policy analysts.’’<sup>41</sup> The result of Winks’s study is an image of a complex businessman and conservationist who warrants praise or criticism (or both) depending on the matter at hand and the viewer’s lens.

Intertwined with the history of the Rockefeller family, the history of Grand Teton National Park shapes this thesis’s analysis of the Indian Arts Museum and its place in the National Park Service. Briefly, Grand Teton National Park was established in 1929 when President Calvin Coolidge signed the bill that had been proposed by Senator John Kendrick of Wyoming.<sup>42</sup> At this time, however, the park boundaries were limited to the rugged mountains and the piedmont lakes, and much of the remaining land in Jackson Hole was held privately. By 1929, however, another scheme was brewing concerning the land in the picturesque valley.

In 1926, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., had begun, under the name of the Snake River Land Company, to buy privately held lands to the east of the mountain range with the intent of preserving the land from rampant commercialism and development. By 1930, when Rockefeller’s connection to the Snake River Land Company was revealed to the public, Rockefeller had purchased over 25,000 acres of private land in Jackson Hole.<sup>43</sup> The next two decades did not see a simple transfer of lands from Rockefeller to the National Park Service, however. Battles ranging from the halls of Congress to the sagebrush plains of Wyoming resonated through the country as Jackson Hole locals, politicians, the National Park Service, the Forest Service, conservationists, and others advocated for or fought against the expansion of Grand Teton National Park. In 1943,

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<sup>41</sup> Winks, *Laurance S. Rockefeller*, 16.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Righter, *Crucible for Conservation: The Creation of Grand Teton National Park* (Colorado Associated University Press, 1982), 40.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Jackson Hole National Monument with the remaining federal land in the area and the 35,000 acres donated by John D.

Rockefeller, Jr., though those lands were held privately until December 16, 1949.<sup>44</sup> On September 14, 1950, Congress expanded Grand Teton National Park by combining the Jackson Hole National Monument (including the Rockefeller lands) with the 1929 Grand Teton National Park lands. In 1940, the Snake River Land Company was renamed the Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc., and John D. Rockefeller, Jr., appointed his third youngest son, Laurance S. Rockefeller, to be its President.<sup>45</sup> While the Indian Arts Museum was not established until 1972, the museum is another link in the long history of the Rockefeller family in Grand Teton National Park. The studies that this thesis draws upon for background information about Grand Teton National Park include Frank Calkin's *Jackson Hole*, John Daugherty's *A Place Called Jackson Hole*, Robert Righter's *Parks, Politics, and Passion: Grand Teton National Park Comes of Age* and *Crucible for Conservation: The Creation of Grand Teton National Park*, and Margaret Sanborn's *The Grand Tetons: The Story of Taming the Western Wilderness*.<sup>46</sup>

The history of the National Park Service provides context for this study of Grand Teton National Park. The literature on the National Park Service is vast, and for this thesis, I focus primarily on the history of the National Park Service as it pertains to

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<sup>44</sup> "Creation of Grand Teton National Park," National Park Service, accessed February 13, 2016, <http://www.nps.gov/grte/planyourvisit/upload/creation.pdf>.

<sup>45</sup> Winks, *Laurance S. Rockefeller*, 57.

<sup>46</sup> Frank Calkins, *Jackson Hole* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973); John Daugherty, *A Place Called Jackson Hole* (Moose, WY: Grand Teton Natural History Association, 1999), accessed March 10, 2016, <http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS116374>; Robert Righter, *Parks, Politics, and Passion: Grand Teton National Park Comes of Age* (Moose, WY: Grand Teton Association, 2014); Righter, *Crucible for Conservation*; Margaret Sanborn, *The Grand Tetons: The Story of Taming the Western Wilderness* (Moose, WY: Homestead Publishing, 1993).



American Indians and Grand Teton National Park. On March 1, 1872, President Ulysses S. Grant signed the act establishing Yellowstone National Park as the first national park in the world. Notably for this thesis concerning American Indian land dispossession and cultural representation, the Yellowstone Act mandated that park lands be “reserved and withdrawn from settlement, occupancy, or sale under the laws of the United States” and protected “as a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.”<sup>47</sup> The National Park Service was officially established in 1916 when President Woodrow Wilson signed the “Organic Act,” the stated purpose of which was “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life” in “Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations.” Additionally, the Organic Act’s purpose was “to provide for the enjoyment” of the lands “by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”<sup>48</sup> The National Park Service now oversees more than 400 sites throughout the United States and its territories.

Currently, the National Park Service maintains that its “Cultural Resource Management Guiding Principle” is to “protect, preserve, and foster appreciation of the cultural resources in its custody and demonstrate its respect for the peoples traditionally associated with those resources through appropriate programs of research, planning, and stewardship.”<sup>49</sup> This “Guiding Principle” points to an important aspect of National Park Service history: its relationship to indigenous peoples. For informing literature on this

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<sup>47</sup> “Yellowstone National Park Protection Act (1872),” National Park Service, accessed February 1, 2016,

<http://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/management/yellowstoneprotectionact1872.htm>.

<sup>48</sup> “Act To Establish A National Park Service (Organic Act), 1916,” America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents, National Park Service, accessed February 1, 2016, [http://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online\\_books/anps/anps\\_1i.htm](http://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/anps/anps_1i.htm).

<sup>49</sup> “History,” National Park Service, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://www.nps.gov/history/about.htm>.

subject, I turn to Robert Keller and Michael Turek's *American Indians & National Parks*<sup>50</sup> and Robert B. Keiter's sixth chapter in *To Conserve Unimpaired, The Evolution of the National Park Idea*, "'Ancestral lands,' Nature, Culture, and Justice."<sup>51</sup> These studies detail the complex relationship between Native communities, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the National Park Service in meticulous case studies throughout the United States.

Mark David Spence's *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* adds another layer of interpretation to American Indian relationships and history with the National Park Service.<sup>52</sup> In this work, Spence details how American Indians were removed from their lands in order to create Yellowstone National Park, Glacier National Park, and Yosemite National Park, and how the lands were then promoted as previously uninhabited wilderness. Grand Teton National Park is not a focus of Spence's work, but due to Yellowstone and Grand Teton's proximity, the removal of American Indians from Yellowstone closely relates to that of Grand Teton. Additionally, Spence links one of his central arguments, that American Indians have extensive histories in these lands that have become associated with wilderness, with Grand Teton National Park. For example, he writes that in 1872, when Ferdinand Hayden, a government surveyor, and another man climbed one of the peaks of the Grand Tetons, they found "a space about sixty feet square, in which there is a curious enclosure, formed with stones, some six feet in height . . . [that] must be several hundred years

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<sup>50</sup> Robert H. Keller and Michael F. Turek, *American Indians & National Parks* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1998).

<sup>51</sup> Robert B., *To Conserve Unimpaired: The Evolution of the National Park Idea* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2013), 121-142.

<sup>52</sup> Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

old.”<sup>53</sup> In other words, what they viewed and later advertised as uninhabited wilderness was never devoid of human affairs.

This thesis contributes to studies of the collecting practices of David T. Vernon and the Rockefeller family. Dozens of newspaper and magazine articles were written about Vernon from the 1950s to the present day, and this thesis analyzes each piece in turn. Furthermore, this thesis builds upon Christine Landrum’s MA thesis titled “The Collector’s Gaze and the Legacy of David T. Vernon.”<sup>54</sup> While Landrum’s thesis contains inaccuracies about Vernon, it is a useful analysis of how Vernon fits into the greater field of collectors in the twentieth century.

While by no means a complete list of every secondary source used in this thesis, this literature review represents the scope of the topics that this thesis knits together. Through the literature of cultural and historical geography, ethnohistory, American Indian history, the history of the National Park Service, museum studies, and the histories of the Rockefeller family and Vernon himself, this thesis explores how the David T. Vernon Collection is a model of how the consumption of American Indian culture shifted throughout the twentieth century and illuminates the complicated interplay between Euro-American and American Indian cultures.

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<sup>53</sup> Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 44.

<sup>54</sup> Christine Marie Jacobs Landrum, “The Collector’s Gaze and The Legacy of David T. Vernon” (PhD diss., University of Colorado at Denver, 2003).

### **Chapter Three: Sources and Methodology**

For this thesis, my sources include documents held in the Grand Teton National Park Archives located in Moose, Wyoming, and administered by the U.S. National Park Service. The documents comprise newspaper clippings; Vernon's own notes on his collection; personal letters; an audio interview (and transcript) with Vernon from 1972; a video interview (and transcript) with Vernon's son, Christopher (Kit) Vernon, from 2005; internal Grand Teton National Park records and memoranda; visitor comments; damage reports; photos of the exhibits; slides of the artifacts; and other miscellaneous documents. The sources held in the Grand Teton National Park Archives also include research I completed in the summer of 2015 when I was a National Park Service and University of Wyoming intern tasked with writing a comprehensive history of David T. Vernon's collecting practices. These sources comprise emails sent between me and the Field Museum of Natural History (Chicago, Illinois), the National Museum of the American Indian (the archives of which are located in Suitland, Maryland and administered by the Smithsonian Institution), and Kit Vernon. These emails are printed in full for public access in the archives as I was working under the auspices of the National Park Service at the time they were sent and received.

The Grand Teton National Park Archives also holds copies of documents pertaining to the Vernon Collection from the National Museum of the American Indian and from the Rockefeller family archives in New York City. Elizabeth Engle, the architectural historian for Grand Teton National Park, amassed these documents as a part of preliminary research on the Rockefeller family's involvement with the Vernon Collection and the restoration of Menor's Ferry near Moose, Wyoming, in Grand Teton

National Park. All of the documents from the outside archives are stamped with their provenance, and I have attributed the sources to the original archives but as available through the Grand Teton National Park Archives.

Oral histories are another component of my primary sources. As a part of my research, I interviewed Clyde Hall (Shoshone-Metis) and Laine Thom (Shoshone, Goshute, Paiute), two men who have worked since the 1970s on the Vernon Collection. In addition, I interviewed Lorraine Edmo (Shoshone), the Deputy Director of Tribal Affairs in the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice, who wrote and presented the piece “It Was Their Day, Dedication of the Indian Art Museum” for KID TV (Idaho Falls, Idaho) in 1972.

Additional primary sources include maps of Grand Teton National Park that show the changing boundaries between 1929, 1943, 1950, and 1972. The maps are available on the cultural history page of Grand Teton National Park’s website:  
<http://www.nps.gov/grte/learn/historyculture/cultural.htm>.

Newspaper articles from the digital archives of *The New York Times* provide information on the investigation of the accessioning and deaccessioning policies at the Museum of the American Indian in the 1970s and before. Additionally, *The New York Times* archives include a limited number of articles written about (or mentioning) the Indian Arts Museum in Grand Teton National Park. The articles can be accessed (behind a pay wall) at <http://www.nytimes.com/ref/membercenter/nytarchive.html>.

Concerning the Museum of the American Indian (now the National Museum of the American Indian administered by the Smithsonian Institution), I accessed images and photographs of artifacts that were a part of the Vernon Collection before they were

transferred to the Museum of the American Indian from the Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc., in approximately 1966-1968. By searching the entire collection through their website for “David T. Vernon” under “Name of individual/organization,” I accessed 189 artifacts and images that are attributed to Vernon and the Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc. I searched the collection via this link: <http://www.nmai.si.edu/searchcollections/advanced.aspx>.

Documents available through Idaho State University in Pocatello, Idaho, complete the list of the primary documents I use in this thesis. The pamphlet titled “The Indian Arts Museum,” which would have been given to a visitor of the museum, is available in the Eli Oboler Library of Idaho State University. Also available via Idaho State University is NewsBank, Inc., a searchable database of newspaper articles from 1978 to the present. I obtained many newspaper articles pertaining to the Indian Arts Museum through NewsBank, Inc. Next, interlibrary loan through Idaho State University brought me two important primary documents. The first is the document “Indian Pride on the Move: Final Report” by Joel H. Bernstein, which was loaned to Idaho State University from the University of Montana in Missoula, Montana. Second, the transcript of an interview of Frederick J. Dockstader from 1970 was loaned to Idaho State University from the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

## **Methodology**

Throughout this thesis, I use discourse analysis, cultural landscape analysis, and historical landscape reconstruction to examine the dialogues between people, place, and artifacts as well as the representations of American Indian culture in museum collections

and exhibits that result from the dialogues. Furthermore, I study what each phase of the artifacts' history reflects on the broader narrative of American Indian history.

I use discourse analysis to study what people wrote and said about the artifacts and the David T. Vernon Collection through time. Though discourse analysis has a multitude of definitions, I follow the definition that discourse analysis is the study of “a broad conglomeration of linguistic and nonlinguistic social practices and ideological assumptions...”<sup>55</sup> Moreover, I follow that statement made by Chad N. Steacy et al. that “Conversations with text never occur in isolation but in dialogue with other discourses, social practices, and power relations.”<sup>56</sup> Through exploring what people wrote and said about the artifacts, I illuminate the broader narratives that American Indians, David T. Vernon, Laurance S. Rockefeller and the Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc., the Museum of the American Indian, the National Park Service, museum staff, and visitors promulgated about American Indian history and its connection to the history of the United States.

Beginning with the artifacts, it has proven difficult to find Native voices and descriptions of the various artifacts' use and meaning because most of the artifacts contained in the Vernon Collection were produced and purchased before 1950. Additionally, the artifacts came from tribes throughout the United States, and due to the change in ownership throughout the decades, most of Vernon's collecting notes have been lost. The notes that survive typically only list the tribe of provenance, approximate year the artifact was made, and sometimes the price Vernon paid. To complicate the

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<sup>55</sup> Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen, and Heidi E. Hamilton, eds. *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 1.

<sup>56</sup> Chad N. Steacy, Brian S. Williams, Christian L. Pettersen, and Hilda E. Kurtz, “Placing the ‘Analyst’ in Discourse Analysis: Iteration, Emergence and Dialogicality as Situated Process,” *The Professional Geographer* 68, no. 1 (2016): 166-173.

matter further, many of Vernon's dates and descriptions of provenance have been challenged by professionals in recent years. Moreover, since the Vernon Collection that arrived in Grand Teton National Park had already been culled by the Museum of the American Indian, most of what was displayed was (and is) considered sacred or ceremonial by tribes. Understandably, many tribes are reluctant to release detailed information about such significant artifacts for fear that the information will be used in inappropriate or disrespectful ways by cultural voyeurs. Nevertheless, as limited as it may be, I analyze the discourse of written documents and oral histories to study the artifacts in the Vernon Collection.

Furthermore, I use discourse analysis to study the narratives put forth by the groups that maintained the collection in the twentieth century. Here, the documents are more accessible and centralized. These documents include the sources listed in the primary sources section of this thesis and the many secondary sources that have been written about the Vernon Collection since the early 1950s.

Taken as a whole, the David T. Vernon Collection and the Indian Arts Museum is, borrowing a term from Richard H. Schein, a discourse materialized.<sup>57</sup> I draw upon Schein's methodology to show David T. Vernon indelibly marked the collection through his valuation of American Indian culture and through his limitations (monetary, geographic, linguistic) as a collector. Next, I show how the JHPI, the MAI, and the NPS impressed their directives on the collection and the Indian Arts Museum and how the JHPI and the NPS responded to complaints lodged by many American Indians about the museum. The history of this collection is multi-faceted, and the collection gathered new

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<sup>57</sup> Richard H. Schein, "The Place of Landscape."



layers of discourse every time it moved or reorganized. This thesis endeavors to unpack those layers of discourse following Schein's example.

Cultural landscape analysis, or the study of how people imprint their ideas, customs, and values on the land, is another important methodological framework for this thesis. For this type of analysis, I use William Wyckoff and Lary M. Dilsaver's "Promotional Imagery in Glacier National Park" as a model of interrogating the "history of place perceptions" and "the origins of . . . imaginative geographies" in the American West.<sup>58</sup> Wyckoff and Dilsaver's article is especially useful in its analysis of how images and the presence of American Indians were used to create and fulfill touristic expectations in Glacier National Park. I argue that the primacy of the visitor experience extended to Grand Teton National Park (once it was established), and contributed to the placement of the Indian Arts Museum at Colter Bay. Additionally, I explore the ideas that the Rockefellers were promoting by helping to establish Grand Teton National Park. I build upon the extensive research of Robert Righter and Margaret Sanborn who have shown that John D. Rockefeller, Jr., was moved by the mission of Horace Albright (the Superintendent of Yellowstone National Park from 1919-1929 and director of the NPS from 1929-1933) to expand the NPS and protect the lands of the Grand Tetons from development. Just as Grand Teton National Park represents much more than the physical land it occupies, so was the Indian Arts Museum more than just a museum of artifacts. The museum was a statement of value, a statement of a vision of history, and a statement of power, erected purposely on the shores of Jackson Lake in the shadow of the Tetons.

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<sup>58</sup> William Wyckoff and Lary M. Dilsaver, "Promotional Imagery in Glacier National Park" *Geographical Review* 87, no. 1 (Jan. 1997): 3.

In this same vein, historical landscape reconstruction is the final methodological approach that I use in this thesis. I draw upon the works of scholars such as Kevin Blake to explicate the connections between historical landscapes and representations of history.<sup>59</sup> Grand Teton National Park looked much different in 1950 than it does today, and I use historical records to reconstruct the development of infrastructure from the 1950s until now, with particular emphasis on the north side of the park in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I analyze the impact of the construction of the Jackson Lake Lodge in order to expose the role that the Indian Arts Museum played in Grand Teton National Park.

For Natives and non-Natives alike, the colonial history of the United States is complex, and in this thesis, I endeavor to employ what Amy Lonetree describes as an “Indigenous paradigm.” Lonetree writes:

Those following the Indigenous paradigm adhere to a research methodology that includes producing scholarship that serves Native communities; following Indigenous communities’ protocols when conducting research; rigorously interrogating existing scholarship and calling out the “anti-Indigenous concept and language” embedded in existing literature; incorporating Indigenous languages, such as place-names, names of people, and proper nouns; and, finally, privileging Indigenous sources and perspectives over non-Indigenous ones.<sup>60</sup>

The artifacts in the David T. Vernon Collection form an important part of the ongoing history and survival of American Indian communities. In using the Indigenous paradigm,

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<sup>59</sup> Blake, “Great Plains Native American Representations.”

<sup>60</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 8.

this thesis aims to illuminate the history of these artifacts so that the artifacts' colonial past may be different from their future.

Finally, I would like to address the complexities of writing about American Indian artifacts and histories as a Euro-American, privileged graduate student educated in Idaho and Massachusetts. Wherever possible, I have relied upon studies of artifacts, museums, and American Indian culture that were written by members of American Indian communities. Additionally, I have privileged the accounts of Laine Thom, Clyde Hall, Lorraine Edmo, and other members of American Indian tribes where applicable in recognition of my limitations as a scholar of American Indian history. My hope is that this study of the David T. Vernon Collection helps to discontinue rather than perpetuate the history of colonialism and power disparity in the narratives concerning American Indians in the West.

## Chapter Four: The Culture of Collecting and Colonialism

“The museum and collector should always be aware when adding to their collections that the items they are handling are from a living and vibrant culture. No object exists in a cultural vacuum. There are people who care deeply about how you are handling, displaying, and storing the cultural material in your care.”<sup>61</sup> Joan Celeste Thomas (Kiowa)

American Indian artifacts, no matter where or by whom they are held, tell important stories and are critical links between the past, present, and future of American Indian communities. Joan Celeste Thomas’s above statement reflects a modern respect for American Indian objects, and the statement is all the more poignant when considered in the context of how American Indian objects were treated in the past. As such, this study of the David T. Vernon collection begins with the history of collecting American Indian objects in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and the legacy of colonialism in North America. The bulk of this thesis concerns the movement, display, and interpretation of these artifacts, and while a study of the construction or path of specific artifacts is out of the scope of this thesis, I wish to emphasize that the artifacts are the reasons why the history of this collection is important. The artifacts are the physical embodiment of culture, tradition, and identity for millions of people, and they are the heart of this thesis. Through exploring the history of collecting American Indian artifacts in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, this chapter elucidates how artifacts were viewed as colonial commodities at this time.

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<sup>61</sup> Joan Celeste Thomas, “Handling Considerations: One Person’s Story,” in *Caring for American Indian Objects*, ed. Shereilyn Ogden (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Library Press, 2004), 10.

Before examining the history of these artifacts, however, it is helpful to recognize the scale of the collection.<sup>62</sup> According to the most recent (2014) inventory of the collection done by the National Park Service, the David T. Vernon collection contains: amulets, animal callers, aprons, arrows, awls, awl cases, axes, bandoliers, bandolier bags, banner stones, baskets, beads, belt drops, blankets, blanket strips, boots, boot strips, blouses, boards, boats, bonnets, bows, bowls, boxes, bracelets, braid holders, breastplates, breech cloths, bridles, brushes, paint brushes, buckskin cleaners, buffalo horns, buffalo skulls, buffalo tail swishes, buttons, miniature canoes, capes, carvings, concho belts, umbilical cord cases, charms, saddle cinches, clubs, baby cradles, cradleboards, miniature cradleboards, cradleboard covers, horse cruppers, discs, dishes, dolls, dresses, drills, drums, fans, feather bonnets, fetishes, a fiddle, flutes, gambling counters, gaming pieces, garters, gorgets, gloves, gun cases, gun powder measures, hair wraps, hats, headbands, headdresses, heddles, headstalls, horse neck and chest decorations, horse head ornaments, fish hooks, meat hooks, game hoops, cupping horns, powder horns, jackets, jars, a model kayak, dance kilts, a fire lighting kit, ladles, lanyards, lariats, leggings, knives, knife sheaths, masks, mats, martingales, medicine bags, medicine bundles, mirrors, moccasins, a moose call, a naja, necklaces, needles, ollas, ornaments, hair ornaments, tipi ornaments, paddles, paintings, parfleches, parfleche trunks, pebbles, pestles, peyote bags, peyote buttons, peyote lighters, pipes, pipe bags, pouches, tobacco pouches, pins, pipe tampers, totem poles, pouches, projectile points, purses, quirts, rattles, robes, ropes, roaches, beaded rosettes, saddles, saddle bags, saddle cloths, saddle blankets, sashes, scabbards,

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<sup>62</sup> As I will explain in later chapters, the current Vernon Collection contains only a fraction of the items it contained when Vernon sold it in 1965. Thus, this list may not represent all of the items that Vernon collected. Nonetheless, as broad as the list is, it probably represents most of the categories of items Vernon collected.

shields, shirts, snowshoes, spears, spoons, sticks (dance, lacrosse, rabbit, walking, coup), stirrups, stone blades, straps, tipi backrests and poles, tipi cloths, tomahawks, tweezers, vests, war shirts, whistles, and yokes.<sup>63</sup>

As if that list was not dazzling enough, the artifacts are affiliated with 110 tribes from throughout the United States. These tribes are (in alphabetical order): Achumawi, Aleut, Algonquin, Apache, Arapaho, Arikara, Bannock, Blackfeet, Blood, Brule, Carrier, Cherokee, Cheyenne, Chippewa, Chiricahua Apache, Chitimacha, Choctaw, Clallam, Coast Salish, Comanche, Cree, Crow, Diegueno, East Cree, Eskimo, Flathead, Fox, Gros Ventre, Haida, Hopi, Hupa, Huron, Iowa, Iroquois, Jicarilla Apache, Karok, Kickapoo, Kiowa, Klamath, Laguna, Maidu, Makah, Mandan, Maricopa, Menominee, Mescalero Apache, Miami, Micmac, Missouri, Modoc, Mohawk, Muskogee, Navajo, Nez Perce, Nootka, Northern Ojibwa, Northern Paiute, Oglala, Ojibwa, Omaha, Oneida, Onondaga, Osage, Oto, Ottawa, Paiute, Panamint, Papago, Pawnee, Penobscot, Piegan, Pima, Plains Cree, Plains Ojibwa, Pomo, Ponca, Potawatomi, Pueblo, Quileute, San Ildefonso, Santa Clara, Santee, Sauk, Seneca, Shawnee, Shoshone, Sioux, Sitka, Slavey, Squamish, Teton, Tlingit, Umatilla, Ute, Wahpeton, Walapai, Wasco, Western Apache, Western Mono, Wichita, Winnebago, Wishram, Yakima, Yankton, Yokuts, Zia, and Zuni. In addition to these tribes, some of the objects' origins are unknown because of their age and their material composition (for example, bone or stone).<sup>64</sup>

When David T. Vernon was born in 1900, it is estimated that 250,000 American Indians were alive in the United States, a mere fraction of the five million that scholars

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<sup>63</sup> Bridgette Guild, e-mail correspondence to author, February 11, 2016.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

estimate lived on the land before European contact.<sup>65</sup> Some scholars refer to the time between the 1500s and the 1900s as the “American Indian holocaust” due to the United States’ tactics of eradication of American Indian culture and forced assimilation.<sup>66</sup> In addition, disease ravaged American Indian communities. Speaking of the connection between disease and material culture, Amy Lonetree writes in *Decolonizing Museums, Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*, “Not only did [disease’s] devastating impact lead to the notion of Indians as a vanishing race, but disease also played a role in dispossessing tribal peoples of their material culture by disrupting traditional ownership patterns.”<sup>67</sup> A result was that when collectors entered a community, sometimes artifacts were sold by people who did not have the right or authority, in the eyes of the tribe, to sell the artifacts. Unscrupulous collecting practices, including collectors disturbing graves and collecting human remains, are also well documented in this era.<sup>68</sup>

This era of collecting intersected with the colonization of American Indian lands, culture, and heritage by the United States and its citizens.<sup>69</sup> In this thesis, colonialism is taken to mean the systematic dispossession of land and eradication of people and their culture. As it applied to American Indians, this colonialism was built on romantic notions of the American Indian as a brave and stoic sacrifice to American “progress.” Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, a leading American Indian scholar and activist, stated in a speech in 2015:

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<sup>65</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 10.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>69</sup> This colonization also happened in other parts of North America and South America, but this thesis is limited in scope to the United States.

Governmental policies and actions related to Indigenous peoples, though often termed “racist” or “discriminatory,” are rarely depicted as what they are: classic cases of imperialism and a particular form of colonialism—settler colonialism. . . . The history of North America is a history of settler colonialism. The objective of government authorities was to terminate the existence of Indigenous Peoples as peoples—not as random individuals. This is the very definition of modern genocide.<sup>70</sup>

The terms “colonialism” and “genocide” are not a part of the traditional narrative of American history that is disseminated in schools and museums, but if service to our communities is the primary goal of these institutions, teachers, scholars, and museum staff must commit themselves to addressing the effects of colonialism and the legacy of American Indian genocide. As Dakota scholar Waziyatawin writes, colonialism is ingrained in the United States, but it has been largely erased from the history books.

Waziyatawin writes:

. . . American schools teach our children that the “colonial era” ended when the United States gained its freedom from Great Britain. However, this denial itself is simply one of colonialism’s myths. . . . [T]he interest in domination and control over territories was established even before the entity of the United States was born. As American colonies gained their independence from their Mother Country, they sought to further expand their wealth and influence through the

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<sup>70</sup> Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, IC Magazine, “Settler-Colonialism and Genocide Policies in North America,” November 28, 2015, accessed February 25, 2016, <https://intercontinentalcry.org/settler-colonialism-genocide-policies-north-america/>.



continuing invasion and acquisition of other Peoples' lands and resources and the subjugation of the Original Peoples.<sup>71</sup>

Colonialism is deeply entrenched in the history of the United States, and this history is the foundation for the collecting culture in which David T. Vernon participated in the twentieth century.

Ironically, as Native peoples faced immense adversity at the hands of the United States, the material culture of American Indians gained popularity among anthropologists, museums, and amateur collectors. As Lonetree states, "Native people were believed to be 'vanishing,' and anthropologists at the turn of the twentieth century thought they were in a race against time. They saw themselves engaged in 'salvage anthropology' to collect the so-called last vestiges of a dying race."<sup>72</sup> Museums of natural history and museums of art at this time seized the ideas of anthropologists and began amassing collections of American Indian artifacts with the intent of preserving them for future generations (but, notably, without concern for the future of American Indian communities). It was in this era when the following major museums were established and began stockpiling artifacts in earnest: the Smithsonian Institution (1846), the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard (1866), the American Museum of Natural History in New York City (1869), the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago (1893), and the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation in New York City (1922).

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<sup>71</sup> Waziyatawin, "Taku Iwowahdake Kin He, Colonialism on the Ground," n.d., accessed February 25, 2016, [http://web.archive.org/web/20130509211430/http://waziyatawin.net/commentary/?page\\_id=20](http://web.archive.org/web/20130509211430/http://waziyatawin.net/commentary/?page_id=20) and <https://intercontinentalcry.org/colonialism-ground/>.

<sup>72</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 10.

Significantly, some American Indians sold artifacts willingly, and some collectors did not engage in unscrupulous practices, but historians must consider the context of these purchases. For example, during this time period, American Indians began creating items specifically to be sold to tourists, and some American Indians believed that, by selling artifacts to reputable museums, the item would be preserved for future generations. For example, in *Spirited Encounters, American Indians Protest Museum Policies and Practices*, Karen Coody Cooper recounts the history of the Sacred Pole of the Omaha. Cooper writes that in 1888, Yellow Smoke, the keeper of the Sacred Pole, was convinced by Francis La Flesche, “a fellow tribesman who also happened to be an ethnologist employed by the Peabody Museum of Harvard University,” to sell the Pole for \$45 to the museum for “safe keeping.”<sup>73</sup> In 1988, after lengthy negotiations, the Omaha tribe successfully regained possession of the Sacred Pole after they had negotiated at length with the Peabody Museum. The case of the Sacred Pole, including its sale and removal from the Omaha tribe and its eventual repatriation, show how important it is to examine the context in which these decisions were being made. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were times of overwhelming loss and suffering for Native communities, and “extreme poverty and ongoing colonial oppression permeated tribal life . . . as it does for many Native people today.”<sup>74</sup>

A specific example of the early-twentieth-century discourse that American Indians and their cultures were disappearing is the “National Memorial to the North American Indian.” Congress ratified “An act to provide a suitable memorial to the

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<sup>73</sup> Cooper, *Spirited Encounters*, 75-76.

<sup>74</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 12.

memory of the North American Indian” on December 8, 1911,<sup>75</sup> and in February of 1913, President William Taft broke ground for the memorial on Staten Island in the harbor of New York City. At 165 feet tall, the statue was planned to be taller than the neighboring Statue of Liberty, and it would have depicted an American Indian man “with hands uplifted and two fingers extended in the universal peace sign of the red man.”<sup>76</sup> *The New York Times* reported, “The statue is to be the Nation’s memorial to a vanishing race.”<sup>77</sup> The words of supporter Carl E. Tefft demonstrate this colonial mindset even further. Tefft stated that the statue of the American Indian man would be “on high in all his solemn and majestic grandeur, with arms slightly lifted in recognition and welcome to the inevitable certainty—the something he perceives and sanctions far to the east. . . [I]n the overpowering personality above one notes in the masterful features the same firm touch of beauty observed in a river as it sacrifices itself to the sea.”<sup>78</sup> (See Figure 1) The statue was planned to be “erected in memory of the North American Indian and dedicated to the school children of the United States of America.”<sup>79</sup> Tefft’s language denotes many of the Euro-American feelings towards American Indian cultures at the time. Tefft’s description of the statue implies that the Euro-American settlement of the American West and the dispossession of American Indians of their ancestral lands were “inevitable.” The

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<sup>75</sup> U.S. Senate, *Indian Affairs, Laws and Treaties, Vol. 3, Compiled to December 1, 1913*, Charles J. Kappler, ed., 512, accessed February 26, 2016, <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=7hJAAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=fr&pg=GBS.PR1>.

<sup>76</sup> “Indians See Taft Handle the Spade,” *The New York Times*, February 23, 1913, accessed February 26, 2016, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9E07E1DA133BE633A25750C2A9649C946296D6CF>.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> “Peace Memorial For Staten Island,” *The New York Times*, January 2, 1910, accessed February 25, 2016, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9D01E5DD1139E333A25751C0A9679C946196D6CF>.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

metaphor of American Indian “sacrifice” (like a river to the sea) connotes that the displacement of American Indians was natural and beneficial. Additionally, the very fact that this “Peace Memorial” was being “erected in the memory of the North American Indian” signifies a feeling of finality: the idea that American Indians and their cultures were already or soon to be gone.

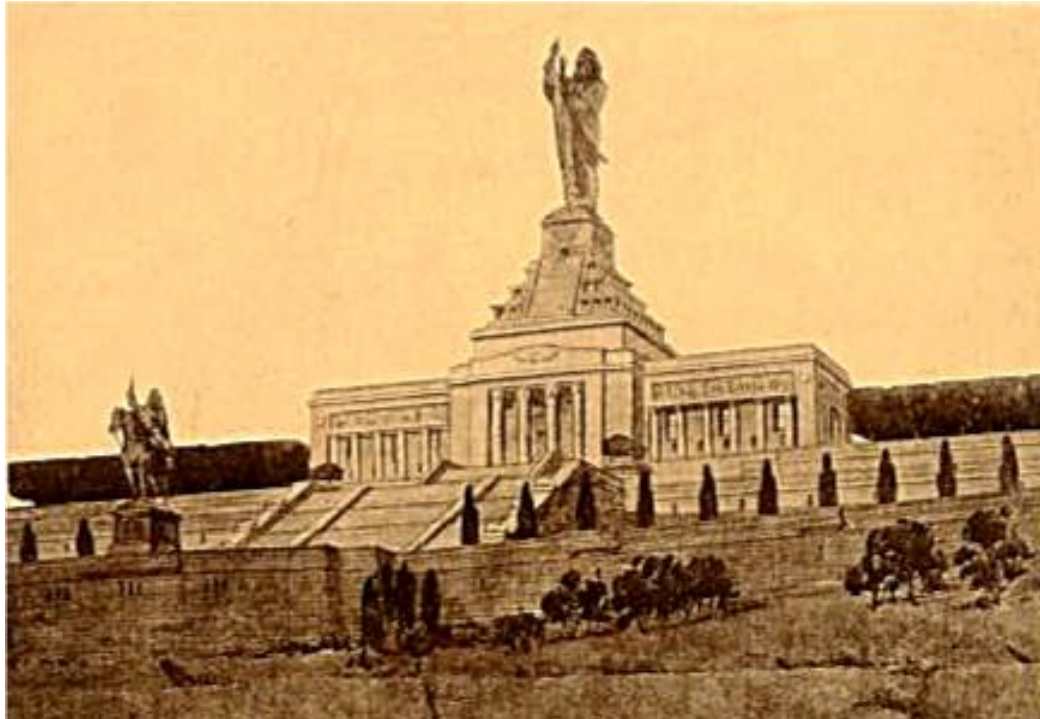


Figure 1: Detail of drawing of the proposed National American Indian Memorial, Staten Island, New York, USA<sup>80</sup>

At the dedication, which was attended, among others, by thirty-two American Indian chiefs, politicians, academics, and military officers, President Taft declared:

[H]ere . . . will stand this monument to the red man, recalling his noble qualities, of which he had many, and perpetuating the memory of the succession from the red to the white race in the ownership and control of this Western Hemisphere. . .

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<sup>80</sup> Rodman Wanamaker, “National American Indian Memorial,” 1913, Wikimedia Commons, accessed March 30, 2016, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:National\\_American\\_Indian\\_Memorial\\_1.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:National_American_Indian_Memorial_1.jpg).

At the gate of the New World and facing the old, it tells the story of the march of empire and the progress of Christian civilization to the uttermost limits.”<sup>81</sup>

Taft’s use of the past tense when describing American Indians once again reveals the idea that American Indians were antiquated relics. Taft’s language also reveals the continuation into the twentieth century of the colonial idea that Euro-Americans were destined to occupy the vast lands of the United States in the name of progress, religion, and civilization.

The statue’s construction was interrupted by the outbreak of World War I, and it was never finished.<sup>82</sup> Additionally, the planning and construction of the statue was complicated by the tours of reservations that Rodman Wanamaker (the primary supporter of the memorial) took following the dedication. Rodman and Joseph Kossuth Dixon (a man who had spoken at the dedication) undertook the “Rodman Wanamaker Expedition of Citizenship to the North American Indian,” and at each of the sixty-six reservations they visited, they reenacted the flag raising ceremony of the dedication and convinced American Indians to sign the “Declaration of Allegiance to the United States,” which the tribal chiefs had also signed at the dedication. The trouble was, according to William C. Franz:

[T]he Indians—most of whom had not yet been granted even second-class citizenship—came under the delusion that they suddenly had been enfranchised as participating members of the Republic. . . [B]ackpedaling, [they] hastened to

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<sup>81</sup> “Indians See Taft Handle the Spade,” *The New York Times*, February 23, 1913, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9E07E1DA133BE633A25750C2A9649C946296D6CF>.

<sup>82</sup> William C. Franz, “The Colossus of Staten Island,” *American Heritage* 30, no. 3, April/May 1979 accessed February 26, 2016, <http://www.americanheritage.com/content/colossus-staten-island?page=2>.

explain that the “citizenship” of the expedition’s title meant only that the Indian was given the right to honor his country, not the right to vote or otherwise become a real citizen.<sup>83</sup>

The planning for this statue was a materialization of the colonial discourse wherein Vernon and other twentieth century collectors established their (mis)understanding of American Indian culture.



Figure 2: American Indian Chiefs and Rodman Wanamaker at the Ground Breaking Ceremony for the National American Indian Memorial<sup>84</sup>

The discourse surrounding American Indian culture changed dramatically in the course of the twentieth century, and it is still changing in the early decades of the twenty-

<sup>83</sup> Franz, “The Colossus of Staten Island.”

<sup>84</sup> Bain News Service, “Rodman Wanamaker and Indian Chiefs,” 1913, photograph, *Library of Congress*, accessed March 30, 2016, <https://www.loc.gov/item/ggb2005011059/>.

first century. The discourse moved away from one dominated by white collectors who promulgated the colonial narrative of the “vanishing” native to one that tells the story of native survival, agency, and vibrancy. Furthermore, an understanding that American Indian objects should not be treated as inert commodities and that information concerning these objects should not be freely disseminated permeates the modern discourse. For example, Joan Celeste Thomas, a museum professional and member of the Kiowa tribe, stated that her grandmother “stressed aspects of [Kiowa] culture of which only certain individuals should possess knowledge. This has always made me a little different from my non-Native colleagues, as I do not automatically assume I should be given all the cultural information regarding an item in a collection.”<sup>85</sup> This statement applies in many ways to the objects in the David T. Vernon collection and my decision to refrain from an in-depth examination of the objects it contains.

As previously stated, David T. Vernon collected a kaleidoscope of artifacts from at least 110 tribes in the United States. In addition to everyday items such as clothing and tools, Vernon collected many sacred objects that were and are important to many tribes. These latter artifacts are subject to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990. The Act, which applies to all public and private museums that have received funds from the federal government, created a process for all sacred objects, human remains, funerary objects, and objects of cultural patrimony to be repatriated to lineal descendants, culturally affiliated tribes, and Native Hawaiian

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<sup>85</sup> Joan Celeste Thomas, “Handling Considerations: One Person’s Story,” in *Caring for American Indian Objects*, ed. Shereilyn Ogden (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Library Press, 2004), 7.

organizations.<sup>86</sup> While these artifacts have held an intense fascination for non-natives (including Vernon), a close examination of these artifacts would amount to nothing more than cultural voyeurism. These artifacts are an important aspect of the history of this collection and its display through time, but, as I am not a member of any indigenous community, I do not closely examine them in this thesis due to the NAGPRA restrictions and because they are not my story to tell.

The artifacts in this collection are important because they are a materialization of the past. The artifacts represent the diverse American Indian people who made and used them, and they represent the era of colonialism in the United States. While the rest of this study largely concerns the men (and a few women) who amassed and managed the collection in the twentieth century, it is important to remember that this thesis's primary concern is presenting the story of these artifacts to help illumine their future. As Sven Haakanson, Jr. (Alutiiq-Sugpiaq) states, "We have several challenges to meet and goals to achieve in the future. We need to convey that American Indian cultural items are more than objects of art or representations of primitive people. They are cultural links between the past, present, and future for specific groups of people."<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> "Frequently Asked Questions, National NAGPRA" National Park Service, accessed February 25, 2016, [http://www.nps.gov/nagpra/FAQ/INDEX.HTM#What\\_is\\_NAGPRA?](http://www.nps.gov/nagpra/FAQ/INDEX.HTM#What_is_NAGPRA?).

<sup>87</sup> Sven Haakanson, Jr. "Handling Considerations: One Person's Story," in *Caring for American Indian Objects*, ed. Shereelyn Ogden (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Library Press, 2004), 5-6.



## Chapter Five: Formation of the David T. Vernon Collection

Speaking of the collection and display of American Indian skeletal remains and artifacts in the decades prior to the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990, Suzan Harjo (Cheyenne and Muscogee) stated, “We were treated like collections of toy whistles and butterflies, and we were simply pressed between the pages of other people’s history.”<sup>88</sup> Extending this statement beyond skeletal remains and associated objects, Harjo speaks of the attempted subjugation of American Indian cultures that anteceded and accompanied white collectors as they gathered objects for museum collections or their personal “cabinets of curiosity.”<sup>89</sup> In other words, many Euro-American collectors treated American Indian artifacts as commodities and viewed American Indians and their cultures as a distant and exotic chapter in U.S. history.<sup>90</sup>

The narrative of David T. Vernon both confirms and complicates this broader narrative of collecting in this era. Importantly, while this chapter focuses on Vernon, his narrative is merely one voice in the history of this collection. The “David T. Vernon Collection” comprises diverse artifacts that have changed hands many times, and the collection has been shaped by a series of discourses by American Indians, Vernon, Laurance S. Rockefeller, and the National Park Service. All these groups and individuals have impressed meaning on the objects, and the social and political discourses concerning this collection continue to evolve. Though the present historical record presents only a few written alternative narratives to Vernon’s at the time that he amassed

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<sup>88</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation, “Bones of Contention,” accessed February 20, 2016, <http://search.alexanderstreet.com.libpublic3.library.isu.edu/view/work/1646958>.

<sup>89</sup> Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 9.

<sup>90</sup> Leah Dilworth, “Tourists and Indians in Fred Harvey’s Southwest,” 144.

the collection, it is important to remember that Vernon acted in concert with some individuals and groups and in exclusion of others. Vernon's narrative is but one thread in the complex history of this collection.

Expressed through his own writings, interviews, and the memories of his family, Vernon's narrative, which provides a perspective about his motivations for collecting and information about his collecting practices, centered on preserving the culture of American Indians, a culture that he perceived as disappearing. Vernon's interest did not extend to all areas and tribes in the United States, however. Vernon was most interested in the "primitive" cultures of American Indians, and he sought artifacts from tribes that he viewed as untouched by Euro-American society. Additionally, many documents reveal that Vernon was drawn to the cultures of American Indians as a result of his dissatisfaction with "white man's ways." The consistent narrative that runs throughout Vernon's acquisition of objects is Vernon's belief that the preservation of American Indian culture lay in the hands of collectors such as himself. Furthermore, Vernon claimed that he had acquired most of the objects in his collection from the people who had made them, a claim that the historical record complicates. Vernon's narrative materialized in his collecting practices and his interpretation of the objects from the time of his childhood until he sold the collection in 1965. The background of each object in this collection is important, and Vernon's acquisition of the objects is a part of this background. While this thesis cannot examine the history of each individual object, Vernon's general practices of collecting and his motivations are an important aspect of the history of this collection.

Vernon's narrative generally begins in 1906 when he was five years old. On an expedition to Maramech Hill, an area in Illinois that was thought to have been the site of an encampment (and later massacre by the French) of a Fox tribe, Vernon discovered a few arrowheads. The following excerpt was written by Vernon as an adult (the date is unfortunately unknown), but Vernon's tone reveals his passion for collecting and his dreamy vision of the past [note that the spelling, punctuation, and capitalization in all of the quoted passages from Vernon are his own]:

I was with my Father on that Lazy June day and as we climbed Old Maramach Hill. I was thinking many things . . . I was around 6 surely not more than seven and as Dad read the stone marker my mind was in a whirl of Deep reverence – for on this ground on which we stood . . . 300 Fox women . . . were besieged by 700 French and their Indian allies – capturing, tortured, killed – . . . I had a strong feeling for things Histoire – and while I was in a trance, picturing vividly the whole tragic affair – my Father spoke – If you look carefully you may find some remnants of the Fracus before he had Finished my bright young eyes were scanning the bear spots . . . digging at any suspicious object . . . in the next hour or so I had gathered 5 or 6 nicely flashed arrowheads- If you are a collector, you will know how I felt- <sup>91</sup>

The scene that Vernon describes imagining as a child is tied to idealized images of the American West. Vernon was in a “Deep reverence” while thinking about this tragic massacre of “300 Fox women” who were “captur[ed], tortured, killed.” With the image of

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<sup>91</sup> David T. Vernon, “I was with my father,” n.d., Folder: KVC 4.7, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

this event and these people in mind, Vernon pocketed the arrowheads he found. Vernon's narrative thus begins with the image of a young boy entranced by the tale of a long-ago battle and a culture distinct from his own.

After that "Lazy June day," Vernon's narrative gained complexity as he continued to collect small artifacts throughout his youth. Vernon collected from a Potawatomi man every summer at Boy Scout camp, he bought small artifacts from a friend at school, and he purchased artifacts on road trips with his family.<sup>92</sup> Vernon was immersed in the societal narrative that American Indian cultures were disappearing, and he was influenced by the narratives of the people from whom he collected. As such, Vernon and his story was one node in a web of social and political discourses. For example, the exhibits at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago presented one set of narratives that Vernon likely integrated into his own. As a child, Vernon visited the Field Museum so frequently that the staff began to know him. Recognizing his interest in American Indian cultures, the staff sometimes took young Vernon to the storerooms for an inside look at the museum.<sup>93</sup> As a teenager, Vernon's narrative further evolved when he visited Glacier National Park and Yellowstone National Park. In Vernon's notes, he wrote that while in Glacier he "Bought Blackfoot Indian material from agent's wife and others," and from "a mute Blackfoot wood Carver."<sup>94</sup> Vernon also wrote that he collected artifacts at the gift shops in Yellowstone National Park, a curious connection to the future of his own

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<sup>92</sup> David T. Vernon, "In 1906, I was with my father...", n.d., Folder: KVC 7.13, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY, 1.

<sup>93</sup> Christopher (Kit) Vernon, interview by the National Park Service, August 2005, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY, 2.

<sup>94</sup> Vernon, "In 1906, I was with my father...", 2-3.

collection as artifacts that he collected would one day be sold in the gift shop at Jackson Lake Lodge in Grand Teton National Park. Vernon wrote, “At each of the Hotels [in Yellowstone]. . . I picked up more material. I knew that Indian material would soon be sparse.”<sup>95</sup> At this early juncture, Vernon was immersed in the discourse that had been propagated for decades by white collectors of American Indian culture. The discourse broadcast the myth of the vanishing Indian and spurred more and more people to start collecting American Indian objects. The discourse promoted the idea that American Indian culture was dying and the objects belonging to American Indians were soon going to be hard to purchase. Vernon’s growing collection was a reflection of this narrative, and Vernon’s narrative (and that of many other white collectors) in turn propelled the myth of the vanishing Indian.

Beginning in the 1920s, Vernon’s narrative solidified into the narrative that he collected fine artifacts through close contact with American Indian tribes. For this time period, the written historical record is better established for Vernon and other Anglo collectors because the narratives of the American Indians with whom Vernon collected have not been thoroughly documented or recorded. As always, it is critical to remember that the documents in the written historical record (especially those in the Grand Teton National Park Archives, from which I draw extensively) illuminate Vernon’s perspective, and in every instance, there are other points of view and other narratives at play.

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<sup>95</sup> Vernon, “In 1906, I was with my father...,” 4.

An important aspect of Vernon's narrative is that Vernon was "adopted" by the Sac and Fox tribes and by the Menominee, and he spent time among other tribes.<sup>96</sup> The most pertinent primary records that survive are Vernon's own notes, in particular those in the small notebook titled "DTV Collecting Stories." The stories in this notebook indicate two of Vernon's most prominent motivations for collecting. First, while he never uses the words "Deep reverence" again, Vernon's writings point to his ongoing fascination with and attraction to American Indian history and culture. For example, on the first page of the notebook, Vernon wrote, "Did you ever lye in an Indian lodge at night – while the rhythmic beat of the drums- The high falsetto voices blending with animal (like) yips and the high nasal whine of the Squaws made your blood run hot and cold . . . I have fought off sleep so I might listen for hours and dream of the days gone by."<sup>97</sup> Vernon's narrative reflects his adulation of what he perceived as American Indian culture, especially the practices he understood as distinct from his own.

Another feature of Vernon's narrative indicates Vernon's anger and disgust with the Anglo "way of life" and treatment of Natives. For example, Vernon wrote, "Here were a people once primitive and free now shackled to our way of life we had the only way to live. We had no time to find the good in them. . . Whites . . . ape him all they can."<sup>98</sup> As this statement indicates, Vernon was unhappy with the ways American Indians had been treated by whites. Furthermore, in another set of notes, Vernon wrote, "The

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<sup>96</sup> Christopher (Kit) Vernon, interview by the National Park Service, August 2005, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY, 11.

<sup>97</sup> David T. Vernon, "DTV Collecting Stories," n.d., Folder: KVC 3.1, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY, 1.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

treatment of the American Indian has been shameful in many cases by individuals, by groups and by the government itself. Sometimes through lack of understanding, partially through necessity of growth [sic] and sometimes because of unscrupulous government employees.”<sup>99</sup> Ironically, American Indians and others contend that Vernon and collectors like him were a significant part of this “shameful” treatment of American Indian cultures.

Vernon’s narrative extended beyond his critique of the unscrupulous actions of Anglos to a broader critique of his own society. In “DTV Collecting Stories,” Vernon wrote, “There are times when the vast openness of the west points a finger at me and asks ‘Are you truly happy in your crowded today cramped for space and time’ and I must reply- ‘Sometime, I hope soon, I will be back to take up where I left off and live.’”<sup>100</sup> Vernon’s love of American Indian cultures was rooted in an idealized vision of the West and his dissatisfaction with the realities of his day-to-day life.

The most noteworthy passages from Vernon’s “DTV Collecting Stories” center on his acquisition of objects. These passages also provide significant complexity to Vernon’s overall narrative. Unfortunately, Vernon did not write extensively about his acquisition of artifacts. Most of his notes (at least those that are held in the Archives of Grand Teton National Park) are filled with his narration of American Indian history as if he were writing for the edification of future generations. The passages about his collecting practices (and the narratives they partially reveal of the people from whom he collected) are all the more significant as a result. Vernon presumably had thousands of

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<sup>99</sup> David T. Vernon, “I don’t know how much you fellows know,” n.d., Folder: KVC 4.1, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 4.

stories about collecting, but he wrote down very few. Two passages are important in particular because they are the most direct evidence in the entire set of primary sources that Vernon engaged in unscrupulous collecting practices. On page twelve of “DTV Collecting Stories,” Vernon wrote, “Once among the Sac and Fox I had arrived after the death of an old Midewin Woman two of the lead men had buried some of her medicines believing them to be Witch med. I asked if I could see them and was much considered but finally they consented to dig them up providing I took them away with me.”<sup>101</sup> Throughout his life, Vernon insisted that none of his collection had been taken from American Indian graves, but this story contradicts Vernon’s narrative.

The other story that is noteworthy shows that Vernon took advantage of poverty and hardship while collecting. Vernon wrote:

Joe Andy (Pott) told me he had a baby carrier a couple of miles away, as I had several I did not care specially to buy it and did not want to turn him down if he had to go and get it but said I would give a Dollar and a half or two Dollars – I had hardly gotten the words out when Joe quickly said ‘I’ll take the Dollar anna Haf’ apparently thinking he picked the larger amount and then proceeded to walk 4 miles for it. It turned out to be a good carrier.<sup>102</sup>

American Indians have expressed anger and concern that many items in Vernon’s collection would have never been rightfully sold, and these stories indicate that Vernon’s collecting practices were not as principled as he maintained.

The dates and places of Vernon’s stories are unknown, but they, along with Vernon’s own words from two newspapers articles from the 1950s, paint a picture

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<sup>101</sup> Vernon, “DTV Collecting Stories,” 12.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 13.



distinct from the more sanitized narrative that Vernon propagated. In 1951, *The Evanston Review* reported:

On collecting trips, [Vernon] will pick out the general area to visit, then obtain an interpreter-guide. He brings along beads, eagle feathers, money and cigarettes to swing his bargains.

“An Indian will sell you very few things at a time,” he said. “A few items, and he’ll want to come back tomorrow if you want more.”

Mr. Vernon finds it harder to get authentic costumes, ceremonial and religious items because the present generation is “modernized.” The tribes have been milked from so many angles, little is left, he added.<sup>103</sup>

This passage indicates two features of Vernon’s collecting: one is difficult to substantiate and the other is not. The newspaper’s reference to “beads, eagle feathers, money and cigarettes” as Vernon’s methods of payment is not repeated in any other document. Presumably the reporter obtained the information from Vernon, and the information paints a colorful (and disquieting) image of Vernon’s collecting practices, but any documentation of the prices or form of payment that Vernon kept has been lost since the 1960s.

The other feature of Vernon’s narrative that the article from 1951 illustrates is Vernon’s desire to collect from tribes that had not been “modernized.” Christopher (Kit) Vernon, David Vernon’s second son, reinforced this aspect of Vernon’s collection in an

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<sup>103</sup> “Artist, Historian Collaborate to Form New Firm – Publish Western Documents,” *The Evanston Review* (Evanston, IL), September 6, 1951, Copy in folder: Vernon Publications, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

interview with cultural resources staff at Grand Teton National Park in 2005. Kit Vernon stated:

I'm not sure how to say this quite right, my dad wasn't much interested in the southeast tribes; he wasn't particularly interested in the Cherokee or the Creek or any of those people. One of the other things is he thought they had become acculturated much too early and that there wasn't probably much stuff that would be of interest there. He was never as interested in the southwest Indians or the northwest Indians as he was the Woodlands and the Plains people.<sup>104</sup>

Kit Vernon goes on to explain that another defining aspect of his father's collecting was time and distance. Living in Illinois, Vernon was best poised to collect from Midwestern tribes, but it is notable that when he did travel great distances, Vernon chose to travel to the tribes in the West rather than in the South or the Northeast. The paradox of Vernon's statements in the 1951 article is that Vernon was one of the people "milking" the tribes and treating their cultural heritage as commodities.

During this time, Vernon was a part of a group of amateur collectors who amassed private collections in their homes. The narratives of these men generally overlapped, and interactions of these men reveal strains of Vernon's narrative that are not manifest in his own writings. Among Vernon's friends in the Chicago area were Adolf Spohr and Milford Chandler, whose collections are featured in the Detroit Museum of Art and the Buffalo Bill Historic Center in Cody, Wyoming. Vernon, Spohr, and Chandler referred to themselves as "The Three Musketeers" and periodically gathered to admire

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<sup>104</sup> Christopher (Kit) Vernon, interview by the National Park Service, August 2005, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY, 12.

recent purchases and exchange new contacts. While the term “Three Musketeers” may have been chosen simply to indicate a triad, its connotations speak to the narrative that Vernon and presumably Chandler and Spohr publicized. As the musketeers of Alexander Dumas’s classic novel were tasked with protecting the King of France, so too did Vernon, Spohr, and Chandler see themselves as protecting American Indian cultures and artifacts from what many believed to be imminent destruction. A passage from Chandler’s musings about this time period illustrates how the “Three Musketeers” learned about and obtained artifacts in the Chicago area. “Each of us canvassed the whole area almost once a week,” Chandler wrote, “It was worthwhile, for good things did turn up quite frequently. There were dealers scattered all over the city. The wealthy families were moving to the North Shore. Their dens were being cleared out, and as individuals died, their collections passed into the hands of dealers who were willing to dispose of them.”<sup>105</sup> Chandler wrote this passage in 1970, long after the prime days of “The Three Musketeers,” but Chandler’s memories are significant because they help to illuminate a part of Vernon’s narrative at a time where we have little documentation of Vernon’s collecting.

One event that reveals the overlapping narratives of “Three Musketeers” was the Birth of Chicago pageant which Vernon, Chandler, and Spohr attended in 1926. Although documentation of the event is scarce, this event is pertinent to the Vernon collection because the National Museum of the American Indian (which is currently administered by the Smithsonian Institution) holds many photos of the event that were once a part of

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<sup>105</sup> Milford G. Chandler, “David T. Vernon,” 1970, Folder: Vernon Collection Appraisals and Background / General Info on Vernon and the Vernon Collection, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY, 4.

Vernon's collection.<sup>106</sup> The Birth of Chicago "spectacle" took place July 1–7 at Soldier's Field in Chicago. According to an Associated Press article in the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* published June 26 of that year, the event planned to depict "the founding of Chicago and the westward sweep of the pioneers against stubborn Indian resistance."<sup>107</sup> According to Chandler, the pageant was "given by a group of Flathead and Chippeway performers. In addition, Dr. Charles A. Eastman, a noted three-quarters Santee physician, lawyer and author, appeared on that occasion. He was seated on a horse with a searchlight playing on him – sort of a living representative of the famous statue 'Vanishing Race.'"<sup>108</sup> The photographs of the event that are attributed to Vernon center on Dr. Eastman and other men dressed in what seems to be items from their collections of artifacts. One of the photographs (see Figure 3) shows John Young Bear, Adolph Spohr, Milford Chandler, Dr. Eastman, and Carl Spohr dressed from head to toe in American Indian regalia.<sup>109</sup> Another photograph from the event (see Figure 4) shows Dr. Eastman (dressed in full "Indian" attire) and a young white woman, identified as Genevieve Irwin,

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<sup>106</sup> See "Collections Search," National Museum of the American Indian, accessed February 29, 2016, <http://www.nmai.si.edu/searchcollections/results.aspx?&catids=0&partyname=David+Vernon&src=1-5&size=75&page=3>.

<sup>107</sup> "Indian Pageant Features Birth of Chicago Show," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* (Sarasota: FL), June 26, 1926, accessed February 29, 2016, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1787&dat=19260626&id=6ulhAAAIAIAJ&sjid=GWQEAAAAIAIAJ&pg=6665,3862323&hl=fr>.

<sup>108</sup> Chandler, "David T. Vernon," 3.

<sup>109</sup> "Title: John Young Bear, Spohr, Milford Chandler, Dr. Charles A. Eastman, Carl Spohr," National Museum of the American Indian, accessed February 29, 2016, <http://www.nmai.si.edu/searchcollections/item.aspx?irn=303224&catids=0&partyname=David%20Vernon&src=1-5&size=75&page=3>.

“Miss Fort Dearborn,” who is examining a pipe in her hands.<sup>110</sup> These photographs illustrate an era of displaying American Indian culture that is linked to the colonial narrative. *The Birth of Chicago*, in portraying the “westward sweep of pioneers against stubborn Indian resistance” reinforced the narrative that American Indian cultures were relics of the past. In this narrative, American Indian culture (writ large) was a spectacle to be displayed and observed.

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<sup>110</sup> “Description: Dr. Charles A. Eastman wearing feather headdress with beaded headband . . .” National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, accessed February 29, 2016, <http://www.nmai.si.edu/searchcollections/item.aspx?catids=0&partyname=David+Vernon&src=1-5&size=75&page=3&irn=303990>.



Figure 3: Birth of Chicago Pageant<sup>111</sup>

In writing about his collection and in interviews, Vernon repeatedly stated that he obtained most of the objects in his collection from the people who made them. Vernon's narrative is apparent in a letter he wrote to Professor A. R. Kelley of Athens, Georgia.

Vernon wrote:

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<sup>111</sup> National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution (P22636), accessed March 20, 2016.

[http://nmai.si.edu/searchcollections/item.aspx?irn=303224&catids=4&partyname=David %20T.%20Vernon&src=1-5](http://nmai.si.edu/searchcollections/item.aspx?irn=303224&catids=4&partyname=David%20T.%20Vernon&src=1-5).

I . . . have a very extensive collection of American Indian material, mainly ethnological with some archeological material, most of which I have collected first-hand over the past twenty-five years. . . . And I cannot stress too strongly that it is all fine, rare, old material which it would be extremely difficult and in many cases impossible to assemble now. My collecting mania and interest in the American Indian dates back, roughly, to my seventh birthday and I have been at it ever since -- travelling about the country, reading and studying, visiting with the Indians in the various sections, sometimes living with them for brief periods.<sup>112</sup>

This passage, in addition to asserting his claim as to the provenance of the objects, demonstrates Vernon's narrative that his collection was a preserve of American Indian culture that was no longer available for purchase, a direct heir to the myth of the "vanishing" Indian. Even now, Vernon's family upholds his claim of provenance. In 2005, Kit Vernon estimated that Vernon collected ninety percent of his artifacts from the people who made them.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> David T. Vernon, letter to A. R. Kelly, August 1, 1950, Folder: KVC 2.15, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>113</sup> Christopher (Kit) Vernon, interview by the National Park Service, August 2005, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY, 17.



Figure 4: Dr. Charles Eastman and Miss Fort Dearborn<sup>114</sup>

Unfortunately, proving or denying Vernon's claim of origin is impossible, but such is the nature of a person's narrative. Vernon stated that he tagged all of the items in his collection with identifying information (tribe of origin, who made the item (if known), price he paid), but when Vernon sold the collection to the Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc., and it was transferred to the Museum of the American Indian in New York

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<sup>114</sup> National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution (P21880), accessed March 20, 2016.  
<http://nmai.si.edu/searchcollections/item.aspx?irn=303990&catids=4&partyname=David%20T.%20Vernon&src=1-5>.



City, these identifying tags were lost. Additionally, Vernon (and his son) stated in various instances that Vernon also collected from other collectors, dealers, auctions, and pawnshops, and, as previously detailed, Indian agents' wives.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, in 1931, Vernon exchanged nineteen items ("stone items" and a ceramic pipe) with the Field Museum in Chicago. In return, Vernon received twelve items from the Field Museum: a gun case (Sioux), a clothes bag (Sioux), leggings (Wichita), a spoon (Gros Ventre), a beaded bag (Nez Perce), a quirt (Nez Perce), moccasins (Bannock), a pipe (Kiowa), a headdress (Tonkawa), a saddle blanket (Nez Perce), a pipe tamper (Sioux), and a tomahawk pipe (Sioux).<sup>116</sup> Regarding the provenance of all of the items in his collection, Vernon could not have known where every item came from. Regrettably, we will never know the precise details of origin for every piece in the collection, and this reality of the written historical record contrasts with Vernon's narrative.

As previously indicated, Vernon's narrative of collecting coexisted with the narratives of many other people, both Native and non-Native. John Young Bear (Meskwaki) is one person who contributed to the web of narratives surrounding the Vernon collection. Young Bear is one of the men in the picture from the Birth of Chicago Pageant, and Vernon frequently mentions him in his writings. Young Bear was an artist, and some of his pieces are now held in the collections of the Minneapolis Institute of Art

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<sup>115</sup> See Christopher (Kit) Vernon, interview by the National Park Service, August 2005, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY, 3, 5, 16, 20; and Milford Chandler, "David T. Vernon," 1970, Folder: Vernon Collection Appraisals and Background / General Info on Vernon and the Vernon Collection, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Moose, WY.

<sup>116</sup> Jamie Kelley (Field Museum), email to author, June 30, 2015, Folder: Amanda Poitevin's Emails Pertaining to Vernon Collection, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Moose, WY.

and the Buffalo Bill Center of the West in Cody, Wyoming.<sup>117</sup> A letter between Young Bear and Vernon shows a glimpse of John Young Bear's attitude toward collectors at that time. In the letter, dated November 6, 1933, Young Bear wrote:

Dear friend,

I will now write to you this evening while I have a little opportunity. I was very glad to hear from you. And I also received those bags. My wife is making use of those bags.

Oh yes, you asked me if I could get a tobacco bag for you. I know an old lady who always have that kind of buckskin bags. That was my wife's mother. She always makes bags. I will ask her if she wanted to sell it. I'll let you know next time.

Say, when we were at [unclear] store, we saw an old man who buys pipes.

I lost his address, I wish you would tell me his address.<sup>118</sup>

Young Bear ends the letter by writing that he hopes to hear from Vernon again soon, and closes with "Your friend, John Young Bear."

In the absence of more written primary sources from Young Bear, we can only infer Young Bear's narrative as it pertained to the sale of American Indian artifacts.

Young Bear's letter to Vernon is casual in tone, denoting that Vernon and he were in

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<sup>117</sup> "Artist: 'John Young Bear,' Minneapolis Institute of Art, accessed March 2, 2016, <http://collections.artsimia.org/search/artist:%22John%20Young%20Bear%22>; and "Plains Indian – Young Bear," Buffalo Bill Center of the West, accessed March 2, 2016, <http://collections.centerofthewest.org/treasures/index/bbm:0/wg:0/cfm:0/pim:1/dmnh:0/searchall:young%20bear/d:0/n:25#search-results>.

<sup>118</sup> John Young Bear, letter to David T. Vernon, November 6, 1933, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY. Note: As with other letters, I have not made any changes to Young Bear's writing.

frequent and friendly contact with each other. Young Bear is acting in tandem with Vernon, providing Vernon with information and asking Vernon for help as well. Based on this information, Young Bear's narrative is that he, and it seems his family, were willing participants in the sale of artifacts. This inferred narrative points to an important thread in the history of this era of collecting. American Indians were not the passive victims of collectors. While some collectors engaged in unscrupulous practices during this time, some members of tribes willingly sold artifacts to collectors, and their motivations for selling were as diverse as the motivations that collectors had for collecting.

As the intent of this thesis is to explore the various social and political discourses of this time period, the involvement and agency of American Indians in this process of collecting is important. However, as I described in the previous chapter, the context of this time period is important. There is a reason why some scholars have termed this era the "American Indian holocaust."<sup>119</sup> Anglo collectors were not necessarily dishonorable pillagers, and American Indians were not passive targets of these collectors, but there is a reason why culturally significant objects have been repatriated to tribes even where there is a clear record of sale. As Amy Lonetree writes of this era of collecting, "even when objects were sold voluntarily, we must remember the deeper historical context."<sup>120</sup> Vernon, and collectors like him, was collecting at a time of enormous cultural disruption and uncertainty in American Indian communities. These collectors took advantage of the massive losses wrought by white settlers and the policies of colonialism, including forced

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<sup>119</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 10-11.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

movement to reservations, assimilation, and other genocidal policies directed by the United States against Native communities.<sup>121</sup>

This “deeper historical context”<sup>122</sup> forms the backdrop of Vernon’s narrative and the narratives of those people with whom he interacted. In the 1950s, Vernon’s collection became more visible through a series of displays and interviews in which Vernon disseminated his narrative. By this decade, Vernon had collected thousands of artifacts, and the entire second story of his family’s home in suburban Chicago was devoted to his collection. According to Kit Vernon, Vernon was “reticent to talk about [his collection], fearing burglars.”<sup>123</sup> Vernon first publically displayed his collection in 1951 when, “as a favor to a friend who owned the store,” he displayed some of his artifacts in the windows of Lord’s Department Store in Evanston, Illinois, as a part of the celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Northwestern University.<sup>124</sup> He later did a similar display in the store windows of Schear’s Department Store in Evansville, Illinois, “when he was short on money.”<sup>125</sup> In the same year, the *Evanston Review* featured Vernon and his collection in an article titled “Artist, Historian Collaborate to Form New Firm – Publish Western Documents.”<sup>126</sup> The article’s text (part of which was already quoted above) explains how Vernon and his colleague had recently founded a new publishing company,

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<sup>121</sup> Wakeham, *Taxidermic SignsI*, 18.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Kit Vernon, “Corrections/Suggestions, The History of the David T. Vernon Collection, July 1 Draft,” July 8, 2015, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Moose, WY.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> “Artist, Historian Collaborate to Form New Firm – Publish Western Documents,” *The Evanston Review* (Evanston: IL), September 6, 1951, Folder: Vernon Publications, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

the Branding Iron Press, but most of the text focuses on Vernon's extensive collection on the second floor of his home. Indeed, the pictures associated with the article display Vernon holding parts of his collection to the extent that, at a glance, the article seems to be solely about Vernon's collection. Vernon's collection gained further publicity in 1952 when the *Chicago Daily Tribune* published "Arrow Flint Hits Bull's Eye in Boy's Mind," an article, again with prominent photographs of Vernon amongst his collection, written almost exclusively about Vernon's holdings.<sup>127</sup>

By the 1960s, the web to which Vernon's narrative belonged acquired new nodes. Vernon suffered a stroke in 1961, and in 1965, he began actively seeking buyers for his collection. In July of 1965, Vernon sent a letter to the Ford Foundation and a letter to Laurance S. Rockefeller, the son of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. In the letter, Vernon outlined the contents of his collection and his intent to sell it. This letter is the zenith of the narrative that Vernon and his family propagated to the public. Vernon wrote:

Because of my love of the primitive, I became interested in the American Indian. Indeed, the study of the material culture of the American Indian has become my life-long hobby. Over a period of nearly sixty years, I have lived and worked and collected material in most of the major reservations and Indian settlements throughout the country because I realized that this material would be lost if it was not gathered while it was still available. . .

I have earned my living as an artist and, in choosing material, I have used my training to collect those pieces which are rare, old, fine examples of

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<sup>127</sup> Genevieve Flavin, "Arrow Flints Hit Bully's Eye in Boy's Mind," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago: IL), January 31, 1952, Folder: Vernon Publications, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

workmanship and typical of the cultures they represent. . . Often this material has included pieces dating from the earliest days of the Indians' contact with the white man's civilization and handed down in a family generation after generation. Most of this material is now unobtainable through the Indians or, for that matter, through any other source.<sup>128</sup>

Echoing previous statements and even his decision to buy American Indian objects in the gift shops of Yellowstone National Park when he was a teenager, Vernon marketed his collection with the argument of scarcity. Though Vernon professed a great respect for the objects in his collection, he marketed them as rare commodities rather than as objects of cultural importance to American Indians that they were and are.

Moreover, Vernon's letter to Rockefeller reveals a new aspect of Vernon's narrative: his monetary assessment of the collection. After describing the collection and his guidelines for collecting, Vernon wrote:

I wish I could donate [the collection] as my contribution to your work in preserving our American heritage. . . Unfortunately, I am not in a position to donate it. Practically my whole estate is tied up in this material, and I must handle the disposition of it in a way that will give the Vernon family some sort of security.

I feel certain, however, that if properly housed and located and displayed, my collection would be very valuable to you not only in terms of its ethnological

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<sup>128</sup> David T. Vernon, letter to Laurance S. Rockefeller, July 25, 1965, Folder: KVC 2.3, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

and historical importance but also as a museum which would pay for itself and before long become a money-making proposition.<sup>129</sup>

Taken within the context, Vernon was trying to sell his collection, and he was presenting it in as advantageous a light as possible to a nationally known conservationist and businessman. Nonetheless, Vernon's statements reflect the broader trend of the commodification of American Indian artifacts and culture. In order to sell his collection, Vernon emphasized the scarcity of the objects and their "money-making" value as opposed to their importance to American Indians and the survival of American Indian culture.

At the end of the letter, Vernon suggested that Rockefeller "must see the material to form any judgment of its value . . ."<sup>130</sup> Rockefeller, acting as the head of the Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc. (JHPI), sent William Stiles, an employee of the Museum of the American Indian in New York City, to inspect the Vernon collection a month after Vernon sent his letter.<sup>131</sup> Stiles's report is held in the archives of the Museum of the American Indian but presumably it crossed the desks of the JHPI. The report represents a new narrative of the Vernon collection. Regarding the Central Woodlands artifacts in the collection, Stiles wrote:

This portion of the collection is remarkable; in addition to costume, etc., many objects of ceremonial use are included. These were acquired through close contact

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<sup>129</sup> David T. Vernon, letter to Laurance S. Rockefeller, July 25, 1965, Folder: KVC 2.3, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Kenneth Chorley, letter to David T. Vernon, August 18, 1965, Folder: KVC 2.6, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

at a time when the ceremonial sequences were beginning to lose their hold and the Indians were turning to other religions. There are approximately 1000 major specimens in this segment.<sup>132</sup>

Stiles recorded that the “South Western Desert Collection” contained 201 baskets, and he stated, “The Southern American specimens are few and contain among them two shrunken human heads, one being genuine and of Jivaro origin, the other is of questionable origin.” Later in the document, Stiles identifies one of the shrunken heads as a “fraud.” Further distancing the historical record and Vernon’s narrative as to the origins of the items, Stiles wrote that the collection contained “An important collection of early trade silver, both British and American, retrieved from Indian graves. At least 75 specimens.”<sup>133</sup> Unfortunately, Stiles did not elaborate on how he knew that the silver came from graves. Vernon vigorously maintained that none of this collection came from graves, so it is unlikely that Stiles made this statement based on information from Vernon.

At the close of the report, Stiles echoed the narrative of scarcity that Vernon employed in his letter to Rockefeller. Stiles stated, “In my opinion, the entire collection is worthy of acquisition by such persons who may be interested in the development of an American Indian Museum. It would be physically impossible at this late date to accumulate such a treasure of American Indian ethnology without endless time and

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<sup>132</sup> William F. Stiles, “A Report on the David Vernon American Indian Collection in Evanston, Ill.” September 1965, Folder: NMAI 5 OC 30.7, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.



finances.”<sup>134</sup> Stiles’s report was evidently persuasive because within a few weeks, Kenneth Chorley of the JHPI visited Vernon’s wife, Ruth Vernon, and Kit Vernon in Illinois (David T. Vernon was in the hospital at the time), and offered to buy the collection for \$100,000 and designate it as the “David T. Vernon Collection.”<sup>135</sup> Vernon accepted the sale price, and in November of 1965, the collection was shipped in ninety-nine boxes without being inventoried to New York City.<sup>136</sup>

In the first half of the twentieth century, the objects that Vernon collected were points of contact in a complex web of narratives that included the narratives of the American Indians who made and used them, the tribes to which the artifacts originally belonged, and those people who bought and sold American Indian artifacts (collectors, dealers, U.S. agents on reservations, museums, etc., including Natives and non-Natives). Concerning the artifacts in the Vernon collection, the narratives at play have included the narratives of American Indians (as partially illuminated by Vernon’s writings and by the letter from John Young Bear), Vernon himself, Vernon’s friends in the “Three Musketeers,” William Stiles, and others. Vernon’s narrative is but one voice in this history of this collection, and each narrative impacts our understanding of this collection. As the artifacts moved from Vernon’s care to that of Rockefeller and the JHPI, the web of narratives grew more complex, but rather than dimming the light of the previous narratives, the complexity of the web highlighted their importance, especially those of

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<sup>134</sup> Stiles, “A Report.”

<sup>135</sup> Ruth Vernon, letter to Kenneth Chorley, October 2, 1965, Folder: KVC 2.11, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>136</sup> Packing list, February 15, 1966, Folder: JHPI Archives 22, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

American Indians. Though the collection was named for Vernon, the collection did not originate with Vernon. Vernon was merely one person among many who impressed his narrative on these artifacts.

## **Chapter Six: The Jackson Hole Preserve, Incorporated, and the Museum of the American Indian**

The web of discourses surrounding the artifacts Vernon collected grew in intricacy as the collection changed hands in the 1960s. Significantly, each new narrative did not replace an old one, but instead formed an accretion of layered narratives and meanings as the narratives of American Indians and Vernon continued to change and be relevant to the collection. The new narratives of this time came from the Jackson Hole Preserve, Incorporated (JHPI) with Laurance S. Rockefeller serving as president and the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation (MAI). The MAI became the National Museum of the American Indian operated by the Smithsonian Institution in 1989. In the 1960s, Vernon, the JHPI, and the MAI treated the ethnographic objects in the Vernon collection as consumptive goods, and their narratives reflect this treatment. Under the management of the JHPI and the MAI, the artifacts were preserved and admired for their beauty at the MAI, sold in gift shops, exchanged in the place of cash, and used as lodge decorations in Grand Teton National Park. This chapter follows the discourses that surrounded the collection in this decade (including the rise of the American Indian Movement) and the new narratives that were impressed on the collection at this time.

The chronology of events concerning the Vernon collection in this decade is important as it informs the narratives that shaped the collection. The chronology for these years is as follows: in 1962, American Indians in California petitioned the federal government for property rights on Alcatraz Island based on the terms of a 1865 treaty.

Their request was rejected.<sup>137</sup> In 1965, the JHPI shipped the Vernon collection from Vernon's home in Illinois to the storerooms of the MAI in New York City. The following year, the JHPI entered into a contract with the MAI to store and curate the collection. At the MAI, the collection was divided: part of the collection was transferred to the Jackson Lake Lodge for display, part was exchanged with the MAI as payment for the MAI's services, part was sold in the gift shops of the MAI and the Jackson Lake Lodge, and part of the collection remained in the care of the MAI. In 1968, the JHPI loaned the artifacts that were held at the MAI to the NPS, and the items were sent to the museum headquarters of the NPS in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia. In 1969, a planned "float by" occupation of Alcatraz Island by Indians of All Nations, a group of American Indian activists, turned into a nineteen-month protest on the island that dovetailed with the beginning of the American Indian Movement that had begun unofficially in 1968.<sup>138</sup> While the chronology is multifaceted, the complexity of this time period is largely due to the different narratives that each group etched on the history of this collection. The narratives at play in these years include the narratives of Vernon, Laurance S. Rockefeller and the JHPI, the MAI, and American Indians.

The decade of the 1960s was a bridge between the public activism of American Indians in the 1970s (and later) and the earlier activism that was less visible to the white American public. Importantly, while American Indian protests gained national attention beginning in the 1960s, Karen Coody Cooper reminds the reader, "there have been American Indian protests throughout time."<sup>139</sup> Before the 1960s, she states, "Native

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<sup>137</sup> Cooper, *Spirited Encounters*, 8.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

concerns were rarely publicized and early protests generally brought terrible repercussions upon the protestors, including massacre, impoundment, starvation, removal, reduction of rights or land, execution, curtailment of treaty agreements, and other punishments.”<sup>140</sup> Coinciding with the social and political discourses of the 1960s, Cooper states, “Protests by American Indians . . . achieved more of the goals sought by the protesting groups, due in part to the leverage provided by increasingly complex laws concerned with historic preservation, freedom of religion, and with human rights that grew out of the civil rights movement.”<sup>141</sup> The strengthening of American Indian protest was evident in 1962 when Natives in San Francisco asserted their 1865 treaty rights to Alcatraz Island and when they began their occupation of the island in 1969 on the same grounds.<sup>142</sup> Additionally, American Indian protest was publicized in 1968 when a group of people mostly from the Chippewa tribe informally founded the American Indian Movement (AIM) after they gathered to protest police brutality.<sup>143</sup> The founding of the AIM began a new era of American Indian protest, though once again, the leaders of the AIM emphasize that “the movement existed for 500 years without a name” and they recognize the contributions of “all those who have traveled on before, having given their talent and their lives for the survival of the people.”<sup>144</sup> American Indian protestors had not yet begun to protest culturally insensitive displays of artifacts and human remains, but

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<sup>140</sup> Cooper, *Spirited Encounters*, 7-8.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>142</sup> See *Ibid.*, 8; and Laura Waterman Wittstock and Elaine J. Salinas, “A Brief History of the American Indian Movement,” accessed March 11, 2016, <http://www.aimovement.org/ggc/history.html>.

<sup>143</sup> Cooper, *Spirited Encounters*, 8-9.

<sup>144</sup> Wittstock and Salinas, “A Brief History of the American Indian Movement.”

these events in the 1960s demonstrate that American Indians and their concerns were present on the national stage during this time period.

Another important event in the history of American Indian rights was the passage of the Indian Civil Rights Act (ICRA) in 1968. Beginning in 1962, Congress held a series of hearings about the administration of law by tribal governments based on the complaints of many American Indians that some tribal officials and practices were corrupt.<sup>145</sup> The result of these Congressional hearings was the ICRA (commonly called the “Indian Bill of Rights”) that “made applicable most, though not all, of the provisions expressed in the first eight amendments to the U.S. Constitution.”<sup>146</sup> The ICRA was the first in a series of Congressional acts in the 1960s and 1970s that asserted American Indian sovereignty and tribal rights and contributed to the cultural and political discourse concerning American Indian rights.

The ICRA and the American Indian protests of the 1960s form part of the matrix of narratives concerning the Vernon collection. In what is a telling reflection of the social and political discourses of that time, none of the written historical records concerning the Vernon collection to which I have access mention American Indian rights or concerns. This silence on the part of Vernon, the JHPI, the MAI, and the NPS illustrates that the interests of American Indians did not figure into the decisions those organizations and individuals made in this decade, and this lack of awareness of the rights of American Indians is a part of the contemporaneous discourses of these groups. The Vernon collection, the artifacts held at the MAI, and the creation of Grand Teton National Park

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<sup>145</sup> Stephen L. Peyar, *The Rights of American Indians and Their Tribes* (New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc., 1997), 169.

<sup>146</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr., and Clifford M. Lytle, *American Indians, American Justice* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 229.

were made possible by the colonization of American Indian lands and cultures. White settlers and their descendants, including Vernon, Rockefeller, and George Heye, the founder of the MAI, profited from the removal of American Indians from their ancestral lands and the commodification of their material culture. While we do not have letters or documented conversations between American Indians and Vernon, Rockefeller, or the MAI for this time period, the protests and concerns of American Indians in the 1960s form an important part of the history of the management of the artifacts in the Vernon collection.

While this atmosphere of civil rights protests grew during the 1960s, Laurance S. Rockefeller and the JHPI began to imprint their narrative on the artifacts in the Vernon collection. The narrative of Rockefeller and the JHPI concerning the Vernon collection is the best viewed within the history of Grand Teton National Park. While some historians begin the history of Grand Teton National Park in earnest in the nineteenth century, it is important to remember that the settlement of the American West (and the United States more broadly) and the creation of the national park system rested on the relocation and attempted decimation of American Indian tribes.<sup>147</sup> Grand Teton National Park was no different, and the area around the Tetons was and is a part of the homeland of various American Indian tribes, such as the Shoshone, Bannock, Paiute, Arapahoe, Crow, Gros Ventre, Nez Perce, Blackfoot, and Flathead. The human history of the Tetons extends back thousands of years to the time when Pleistocene-era glaciers retreated and scarred the land in their tracks. American Indians travelled through the Tetons each summer in

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<sup>147</sup> For more information, see Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*.

search of game and fish and to gather berries and bulbs.<sup>148</sup> These diverse people left behind tipi rings, stone tools, remnants of fire pits, and trails, some of which are still used today. Importantly, American Indian presence in the Tetons is not merely a part of history to be written about in the past tense. While Grand Teton National Park is not an official part of any American Indian reservation, the land holds meaning to various tribes, and as Euro-American settlers began to occupy the Tetons, American Indians did not disappear from the historical stage.

In the nineteenth century, white settlers began to congregate in the valleys around the Tetons encouraged by measures such as the Homestead Act of 1862. The following decades in Jackson Hole history has been detailed extensively by other scholars, but suffice it to say that this was a time of homesteaders, ranchers, and eventually dude ranches that catered to wealthy families from the Eastern United States who craved “authentic” western experiences.<sup>149</sup> The Easterners—the “dudes”—represented a steady income stream for struggling homesteaders, and by the 1920s, the land in the shadow of the Tetons had begun to be filled with billboards, gas stations, and shops catering to tourists.<sup>150</sup> The increasing commercialization of the Tetons alarmed both visitors and residents alike, and in 1923, a group of concerned local acts residents met in Maud Nobel’s cabin, a small cabin on the banks of the Snake River, to discuss possible ways to preserve the land of the Tetons.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> “American Indians,” National Park Service, accessed March 11, 2016, <http://www.nps.gov/grte/learn/historyculture/ind.htm>.

<sup>149</sup> See Sanborn, *The Grand Tetons*; Righter, *Crucible for Conservation*; Calkins, *Jackson Hole*; Daugherty, *A Place Called Jackson Hole*.

<sup>150</sup> Righter, *Crucible for Conservation*, 47.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.



In 1926, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and his family visited the Tetons with Horace Albright, the superintendent of Yellowstone National Park, which had been a national park since 1872. Concerned by the commercialization and privatization of the land and inspired (albeit quietly) by Albright, Rockefeller founded the Snake River Land Company and began purchasing private land in the valley after his 1926 visit with the intent of donating the land to the federal government as a national park.<sup>152</sup> Meanwhile, Congress created the original boundaries of Grand Teton National Park in 1929 to include the Teton Mountain Range and some of the lakes near the mountains. Over the next decades, Rockefeller's Snake River Land Company continued to purchase land from private owners in the valley of Jackson Hole. Although Rockefeller attempted to donate his valley holdings to the federal government with the intent of expanding the park boundaries, local resistance to the idea and national sentiment delayed the transition. Jackson Hole National Monument was established by presidential executive order in 1943 and included some of the land in the valley that John D. Rockefeller Jr. had donated to the federal government. Finally, in 1950, Congress expanded Grand Teton National Park beyond the original 1929 boundaries to include Rockefeller's 1949 land donation to reach approximately its current boundaries. In sum, the Rockefeller family funded the purchase of more than 35,000 acres of land.<sup>153</sup> Of all of the children of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Laurance, his third oldest son, was the most interested in the conservation work that his father and grandfather had begun.<sup>154</sup> In 1940, John D.

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<sup>152</sup> Righter, *Crucible for Conservation*, 46-49.

<sup>153</sup> "Creation of Grand Teton National Park," accessed March 10, 2016, <http://www.nps.gov/grte/planyourvisit/upload/creation.pdf>.

<sup>154</sup> Winks, *Laurance S. Rockefeller: Catalyst for Conservation*, 8.

Rockefeller, Jr., renamed the Snake River Land Company the Jackson Hole Preserve, Incorporated, and he appointed thirty-year-old Laurance as the president.<sup>155</sup>

Laurance S. Rockefeller made his living as a commercial entrepreneur, and his first major investment was in aviation and aerospace companies in the years following World War II.<sup>156</sup> Rockefeller had been born into great wealth, but, according to Robin Winks, “he did not rest on his inheritance; rather, he ‘grew his money’ by committing himself to culturally significant innovative enterprises where venture capital could have the greatest influence.”<sup>157</sup> Rockefeller was a philanthropist and an entrepreneur, and he channeled much of his energy and money to the development of the JHPI and its goals. At least at the beginning of his life, Rockefeller considered himself a conservationist, which Winks describes as someone who believed that “nature should be protected in order to be useful, or uplifting, indeed ennobling, to mankind.”<sup>158</sup> At this time, “conservation,” Winks writes, “was based on observation, common sense, and pride in the unique North American environment.”<sup>159</sup> It was under this banner of conservation that the Rockefeller family took an interest in the Tetons and Laurance eventually bought the Vernon collection and funded the construction of the Indian Arts Museum at Colter Bay in Grand Teton National Park.

The Rockefeller narrative regarding Grand Teton National Park centered on the balance between preserving the land and providing access to it for visitors.<sup>160</sup> When no concessionaires bid to build accommodations in the new national park in the 1950s, the

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<sup>155</sup> Winks, *Laurance S. Rockefeller: Catalyst for Conservation*, 44.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

JHPI stepped forward with a plan to build three areas of visitor accommodations in the park: Jenny Lake Lodge, Jackson Lake Lodge, and Colter Bay Village.<sup>161</sup> As documented by Elizabeth Engle, the architectural historian for Grand Teton National Park, Jenny Lake Lodge was planned to be a “small, semi-luxury lodge,” Jackson Lake Lodge was meant to serve “an older, middle class public,” and Colter Bay Village was planned to be a center of “visitor services in the park, offering rustic log cabin accommodations, one of the first trailer camps in a national park, an innovative ‘tent village,’ a cafeteria and general store, the first Laundromat in a national park, a shower building, a marina and boat ramp, a picnic area, an amphitheater, two service stations, and a visitor center and museum, all in one fully planned and carefully designed site.”<sup>162</sup> Significantly, Jackson Lake Lodge and Colter Bay Village were planned to be “complementary developments that would offer the widest range of accommodations to park visitors.”<sup>163</sup> Engle maintains that the improvement of “visitor experience” was a key goal in the construction of these accommodations.<sup>164</sup> The NPS and the Grand Teton Lodge Company (GTLC), a subsidiary of the JHPI, jointly funded the new accommodations.

Though the new facilities were immediately popular, not all of Rockefeller’s endeavors in Grand Teton National Park were as successful. In 1948, Laurance S. Rockefeller backed the creation of the Jackson Hole Wildlife Park near Oxbow Bend in the north end of the park (near Colter Bay Village and Jackson Lake Lodge).<sup>165</sup> The

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<sup>161</sup> Righter, *Crucible for Conservation*, 146; and Elizabeth P. Engle, “Colter Bay Village: Understanding the Historic Significance of the Recent Past in Grand Teton National Park” (2010), 1.

<sup>162</sup> Engle, “Colter Bay Village,” 1.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>165</sup> Righter, *Crucible for Conservation*, 147.

preserve enclosed and fed wildlife native to the area in order to provide viewing and photo opportunities for tourists. The preserve was unpopular among NPS officials from the beginning, and it proved to be a source of disease and dependency for the animals. In his 1973 tome, *Jackson Hole*, Frank Calkins remarked, “At best the park was no more than a roadside zoo.”<sup>166</sup> The preserve was jettisoned in 1953, and Rockefeller later admitted that the idea had been naïve.<sup>167</sup>

Though it was dismantled years before the opening of the Indian Arts Museum at Colter Bay, the story of the Jackson Hole Wildlife Park provides a glimpse into the discourse of the JHPI and the larger social and political discourses of the era. The wildlife preserve, while it lasted, was an attraction located on the north side of the park for tourists. Filling in a perceived need, it was meant to be a place where visitors could see animals that might be hard to find elsewhere in the park. In short, it was another form of accommodation for tourists, another attempt to improve visitor experiences. As Robert Righter points out, the Jackson Hole Wildlife Park was “a well-intended but ill-founded attempt to bring the park to the people.”<sup>168</sup> Though the Indian Arts Museum and the wildlife preserve have divergent histories, their underlying purposes were strikingly similar: to satiate the interests and expectations of tourists in a condensed attraction, conveniently located near the visitor services on the north side of the park.

In 1965, when Vernon sold the collection to Rockefeller, two narratives intersected. In his letter to Rockefeller in July, Vernon, with his narrative of preserving the “primitive” cultures of American Indians, had thanked Rockefeller for his work in

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<sup>166</sup> Calkins, *Jackson Hole*, 176.

<sup>167</sup> Winks, *Laurance S. Rockefeller*, 61.

<sup>168</sup> Righter, *Crucible for Conservation*, 147.

“preserving large areas of primitive, natural beauty” and suggested that the collection would make a fine museum in Rockefeller’s “Jackson Hole territory.”<sup>169</sup> Though the written historical record unfortunately does not include any writings from Rockefeller concerning his thoughts as to the Vernon collection, the record does include letters and memoranda from members of the JHPI. Taken as a whole, the narrative of the JHPI was that the Vernon collection would be a good investment: it would be a source of profit for the JHPI, and it would be a fine cultural addition to the existing infrastructure in Grand Teton National Park. As previously noted, the narratives of Vernon and the JHPI that they present in their letters and interviews do not include any consideration of the interests of American Indians.

The discourse of the JHPI is not blatant, however. The narrative of the JHPI is never stated outright in their written correspondence but by piecing together letters and reading between the lines, the narrative of the JHPI comes into focus. For example, after Vernon sent his letter to Rockefeller describing the collection in July of 1965, Raymond Lillie, the Executive Vice President and General Manager of the GTLC, wrote a letter to Allston Boyer, a member of the board of trustees of the JHPI. If Rockefeller bought the Vernon collection and they could interest the NPS, Lillie wrote, “[the collection] might be a theme around which we could build a new ‘Colter Bay’ in another location.”<sup>170</sup> Though another Colter Bay was never established, Lillie’s statement denotes the JHPI’s commodification of the artifacts. Lillie’s statement implies that the Vernon collection

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<sup>169</sup> David T. Vernon, letter to Laurance S. Rockefeller, July 25, 1965, Folder: KVC 2.3, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>170</sup> Raymond Lillie, letter to Allston Boyer, August 28, 1965, Folder: JHPI Archives 18.3, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

would be a sound investment and a good addition to their facilities in Grand Teton National Park. Even at this early juncture, the JHPI demonstrated the basis for their narrative of the Vernon collection; for the JHPI, the Vernon collection was a part of their business plans, a cultural and monetary asset that could fit their needs.

After the artifacts were shipped to New York City, the JHPI entered into a contract with the MAI. The contract that both parties signed reveals their respective narratives concerning the Vernon collection. Before examining the contents of the contract, however, it is prudent first to examine the background of the MAI since this history provides important context for the contract in 1966.

Briefly, George Gustav Heye, a prominent collector of American Indian artifacts whose father had made his fortune by working with John D. Rockefeller, Sr., in the early days of the Standard Oil Company, had opened the Museum of the American Indian in 1922 on 155<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway in New York City (approximately the modern boundary between Harlem and Washington Heights).<sup>171</sup> Heye had been a prolific collector for more than twenty years by this time (in 1929, Heye's collection contained more than 163,000 objects), and by the time Heye died in 1957, the Museum of the American Indian contained approximately 700,000 items made by American Indians from North, South, and Central America.<sup>172</sup> While Heye was alive, he held the position of "Director for Life," and he controlled virtually all decisions concerning the acquisition or

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<sup>171</sup> Frederick J. Dockstader, "Tape-Recorded Interview with Dr. Frederick J. Dockstader," interview by Paul Cummings, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, June 16, 1970, 32.

<sup>172</sup> "History of the Collections," National Museum of the American Indian, accessed March 8, 2016, <http://nmai.si.edu/explore/collections/history/>. Note that the number of artifacts in the collection was vastly overestimated until an inventory in the 1970s revealed the more accurate number.

disposal of objects. Heye has been generally characterized as being obsessive, or at least eccentric, and as Amy Lonetree gently posits, “the needs and interests of Native Americans were not considered primary during his tenure at the MAI.”<sup>173</sup>

One aspect of this fraught relationship with American Indians was the culturally insensitive display of American Indian objects. For example, Lonetree points out that as late as the 1989, the exhibits at the MAI prominently featured ceremonial Iroquois False Face Society masks and “a disturbing display case of seventeen Native American scalps.”<sup>174</sup> After Heye died in 1957, Dr. Frederick J. Dockstader, who had worked at the Museum since 1955, was appointed as director in 1960 after Edwin K. Burnett stepped down.<sup>175</sup> Dockstader, whose father was white and whose mother was half “Indian,” came to the Museum of the American Indian from the Dartmouth Museum at Dartmouth College.<sup>176</sup> Dockstader is important to the history of the Vernon collection because it was under his leadership that the narrative and decisions of the MAI were impressed on the Vernon collection.

With Dockstader at the helm, the MAI faced internal turbulence in the 1960s (the time during which the Vernon collection was held there). The MAI had been in a fashionable neighborhood in the early twentieth century, but crime and urban decay steadily depressed the number of visitors by mid-century.<sup>177</sup> Under the direction of Heye, the MAI had been chronically low on funds, and it nearly closed its doors during the Depression. According to Dockstader in an interview in 1970, the MAI’s tense financial

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<sup>173</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 79.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> “New Director Named For Indian Museum,” *The New York Times*, July 1, 1960.

<sup>176</sup> Dockstader, interview, 1; and “New Director Named For Indian Museum,” *The New York Times*, July 1, 1960.

<sup>177</sup> Dockstader, interview, 44, 46.

situation under Heye was resolved once Heye died. Dockstader claimed that Heye's mother, recognizing her son's penchant for collecting, food, and women ("The three together made a magnificent party," stated Dockstader<sup>178</sup>), placed Heye's inheritance in a trust and stipulated that while he lived, he could only collect money from the interest.<sup>179</sup> Thus while Heye lived, the MAI did not have access to his inheritance, but after he died, Heye's vast inheritance became the MAI's endowment.

The financial situation of the MAI is pertinent to the Vernon collection because it directly influenced the MAI's policies of acquisition. The policies of acquisition affected the terms of the contract that the MAI signed with the JHPI, and this contract dramatically altered the material profile of the Vernon collection. As previously stated, Heye controlled nearly every aspect of the acquisition, accession, and deaccession of objects (the latter two terms meaning the processes by which objects were formally accepted by or removed from a collection) in addition to controlling the financial records of the MAI. Speaking of the MAI under Heye's leadership, Dockstader stated, "No one knew what the museum was like financially. It was his baby completely. There had never been a financial statement published. . . . No one knew what skeletons were in the closet."<sup>180</sup> Given Dockstader's critical statements, it is ironic that this pattern of control continued under Dockstader's tenure. During an investigation in 1974 into the business practices of the MAI, Dockstader told *The New York Times*, "Until 1970 I did all the cataloguing myself, in addition to running the museum . . ."<sup>181</sup> Furthermore, Dockstader admitted that "he had been guilty of erratic record-keeping in attempting to keep track of

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<sup>178</sup> Dockstader, interview, 31.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>181</sup> "State Investigates American Indian Museum," *The New York Times*, October 3, 1974.



the museum's estimated 4.5 million pieces . . .”<sup>182</sup> In addition to continuing the control of the Museum's record books, Dockstader controlled the Museum's acquisitions. In 1970, when Paul Cummings asked Dockstader, “Do you have a systematic plan of acquisitions or exhibition projects?” Dockstader replied, “Acquisitions, no. Because you never know what's going to show up. . . I'm pretty arbitrary: if you have it I want to see it. I have no way of knowing whether I want it or not.”<sup>183</sup>

It was into this context that the JHPI entered into a contract with the MAI. As previously outlined, the JHPI had bought the Vernon collection, which was estimated to comprise 10,000 items, in 1965. The collection was shipped to the MAI's storage facilities in the Bronx at the end of 1965, and on March 3, 1966, the two parties entered into a contract. The contract shows that the JHPI sought to categorize the collection and liquidate the items that the MAI felt were least valuable. This is another example of how the JHPI viewed the collection as an investment meant to fit their needs. The contract also shows an aspect of the MAI's narrative. Namely, the MAI wanted to add to their collections through exchange: they desired objects more than cash. The narratives of both the JHPI and the MAI demonstrate how the objects in the Vernon collection were treated as commodities: they were bought, sold, traded, and admired as things rather than viewed as important links between living people and their cultures.

The contract is a prime example of the intersection of the narratives of the JHPI and the MAI. The contract states that the MAI will:

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<sup>182</sup> “Dealer's Papers Sought in Indian Museum Case,” *The New York Times*, February 28, 1975.

<sup>183</sup> Dockstader, interview, 55.

4. To the best of our judgment, select and apportion the Collection into separate parcels on the following basis:

(A) Top quality material for a temporary display and for a permanent display.

(B) Equally fine material, either duplicating the above, or from areas and tribes not pertinent to the stated purpose of the Jackson Hole Museum. These objects will presumably be available for disposal by exchange for needed specimens, etc.

(C) Average quality material unneeded for any reason. These objects will presumably be available for disposal by sale or exchange.

(D) Non-Indian specimens, or poor quality items subject to disposal.<sup>184</sup>

In addition to creating these four categories of artifacts and indicating how the first three categories were to be “disposed,” the contract illuminates the goals that the JHPI had for its museum in Grand Teton National Park. As written in the contract, the museum would comprise the “top quality material” from the Vernon collection, and it would attempt “to deepen the appreciation of park visitors for the aesthetic and craft values of American Indian culture, with a subordinate emphasis on ethnological considerations.”<sup>185</sup> This emphasis on “aesthetic and craft values” represents a foundation of the JHPI’s narrative for what became the Indian Arts Museum in Grand Teton National Park. The contract also outlines plans for a “temporary exhibit of items” to be displayed in Grand Teton

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<sup>184</sup> Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, letter to the Jackson Hole Preserve, Incorporated, March 3, 1966, Folder: JHPI Archives 24 and NMAI 10 FD 29.4, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

National Park. These items would be “deemed outstanding primarily because of their aesthetic values.”<sup>186</sup> Both of these provisions indicate an important aspect of the JHPI’s narrative concerning the Vernon collection and the display of American Indian artifacts: the artifacts were valued for their aesthetic value, a theme that was emphasized in the eventual Indian Arts Museum. Significantly, the needs and interests of American Indians and the communities from which the artifacts came were not considered by the JHPI or the MAI at this time.

The narrative of the MAI is further illuminated in this contract through the terms the Museum negotiated. The text of the contract implies that the MAI was most interested in an exchange of objects rather than cash as payment for their services. The JHPI and the MAI agreed to the following:

As concerns the rental charges for storage, it is understood that the Museum wishes payment to the extent possible in the form of delivery in kind of material in the Collection from classification 4-B above, following agreement between the Museum and JHPI as to the items to be delivered and their valuation. . . While we would expect that the full amount of rental charges would eventually be paid in this way by JHPI, in the event there is a balance due for rental changes at the close of the term of this agreement, or of any renewal thereof, any remaining balance will be covered by a cash payment to the Museum.<sup>187</sup>

As the “4-B” material referenced was duplicative fine objects or objects “from areas and tribes not pertinent to the stated purpose of the Jackson Hole Museum,” the MAI

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<sup>186</sup> Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, letter to the Jackson Hole Preserve, Incorporated, March 3, 1966.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

expected to receive high quality items from the Vernon collection in exchange for their services to the JHPI.

The background of the MAI consequently informs the terms of this contract. Since the MAI's endowment had received ample funds at Heye's passing, the MAI did not need more money. The MAI instead desired artifacts; but why did the MAI, which was considered to be "home to the world's greatest collection of Indian materials"<sup>188</sup> want more artifacts? The answer is partially revealed in Dockstader's statements in a 1970 interview with Paul Cummings. Dockstader explained:

Every year I total up what acquisitions we have added to the collections and I would guess at a rough average that we add perhaps 2,000 pieces a year; of which 500 will be really meaningful additions. We add ad nauseum, yes. The reason being that there is a certain amount of attrition that always goes on. . . we lend very extensively and when a loan comes back we know that inevitably there will be loss.<sup>189</sup>

Attrition, therefore, was one documented reason why Dockstader maintained an active program of acquisitions. Underneath the surface of the MAI, however, more sinister practices may have been happening at this time.

Though it is difficult to directly show that the artifacts in the Vernon collection were subject to the illicit practices that an investigation of the MAI revealed in 1974, it is likely that the artifacts in the Vernon collection were caught in the fray of this scandal. The website of the National Museum of the American Indian provides a gentle summary

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<sup>188</sup> "Indian Museum Weighs Move to the Southwest," *The New York Times*, July 31, 1974.

<sup>189</sup> Dockstader, interview, 37.

of the time period during which the MAI curated the Vernon collection for the JHPI: “Dockstader’s . . . tenure was marked by questions about his efforts to ‘refine’ the collections through deaccessions and collections sales, many of which supported acquisitions between 1960 and 1975, totaling approximately 25,000 objects.”<sup>190</sup> The extended version of this story (which is skipped or passingly mentioned in most histories of the MAI)<sup>191</sup> is that in 1974, Edmund Carpenter, a recently appointed trustee of the MAI, prompted an investigation into the MAI by the Attorney General of New York. Carpenter accused the MAI of letting collectors and dealers “go shopping” in the storerooms of the MAI, altering object appraisals so that “something appraised quite modestly by the museum was eventually sold in the art market at exorbitant prices,” and permitting trustees and “favored friends of the museum . . . to acquire deaccessioned items, either at advantageous prices or under arrangements that gave them a competitive edge over public buyers.”<sup>192</sup> For his part, Dockstader admitted no wrong doing, and he stated, “There is no question that some people see my policies as resulting in advantageous exchanges for dealers, but always I was exchanging, selling, in an effort to balance the collection.”<sup>193</sup> The accusations against Dockstader and his administration were found to be true, and in 1975, the State Supreme Court of New York stripped

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<sup>190</sup> “History of the Collections,” National Museum of the American Indian, accessed March 8, 2016, <http://nmai.si.edu/explore/collections/history/>.

<sup>191</sup> See Karen Coody Cooper, *Spirited Encounters*, 83.

<sup>192</sup> “State Investigating Museum of the American Indian for Abuses,” *The New York Times*, October 3, 1974.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

Dockstader of his “powers of administration” and ordered a complete inventory to be taken of the MAI.<sup>194</sup>

A puzzle for this thesis concerns what happened to the artifacts in the Vernon collection while it was in the care of the MAI. Were any of the artifacts subject to Dockstader’s efforts to “balance” his collection?<sup>195</sup> After the JHPI and the MAI signed the contract in 1966, the written historical record shows that the Vernon collection was apportioned by the MAI and the artifacts that were not deemed “fine” or chosen for exchange were labeled as “Vernon rejects.”<sup>196</sup> It is unclear how many objects in total were exchanged with the MAI from the Vernon collection, but we know that at least thirty-eight objects were traded.<sup>197</sup> In addition, in 1972, when Vernon wondered why his collection of trade silver was not on display at the Indian Arts Museum, George Lamb, the Treasurer and Assistant Secretary of the JHPI revealed:

the trading silver . . . collection is all in one piece, namely, at the Museum of the American Indian. After going through our records, I found that this silver was used to pay the considerable storage and curatorial charges for the entire collection while it was under the care of the Museum of the American Indian. Fred Dockstader proposed that we pay these charges by turning over to him the collection of trading silver. Since this was not material of Indian origin, we felt

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<sup>194</sup> Grace Glueck, “Court Orders an Inventory of Indian Museum Objects,” *The New York Times*, September 6, 1975.

<sup>195</sup> “State Investigating Museum,” *The New York Times*, October 3, 1974.

<sup>196</sup> Allston Boyer, letter to Raymond Lillie, October 10, 1968, Folder: JHPI Archives 35, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>197</sup> “Exchanged to Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc. 12/1/67,” Folder: GRTE VC 1960-1969, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

that this was an appropriate use and did so. Fred has assured me that the silver is in his permanent collection at the Museum and it has not been offered for sale.<sup>198</sup>

The story of the trading silver is evidence that the MAI received objects for their collections as per the 1966 contract. However, at present, it is unknown what happened to the artifacts from the Vernon collection once they were exchanged with the MAI. Some are clearly still in the collections of the National Museum of the American Indian,<sup>199</sup> but it is unclear how many, if any, were sold after the MAI gained possession of them.

The MAI also separated from the collection a “temporary display” of artifacts for Jackson Lake Lodge. In June of 1966, the JHPI paid for Alice Dockstader, an architect and Frederick Dockstader’s wife, to set up two displays of artifacts from the Vernon collection in the mezzanine (currently known as the “Crow’s Nest”) above the Jackson Lake Lodge lobby.<sup>200</sup> The artifacts were displayed without labels identifying the tribes from which they came, their uses, etc., and this lack of labels, Dockstader reported, displeased “the Lodge people.”<sup>201</sup> Dockstader wrote to Gene Setzer of the JHPI, “If it is agreeable to you, we could prepare the labels and send one of our people out to take care

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<sup>198</sup> George Lamb, letter to Ruth and David Vernon, December 11, 1972, Folder: JHPI Archives 49 and KVC 2.10, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>199</sup> “Collections Search,” National Museum of the American Indian, accessed March 11, 2016, <http://www.nmai.si.edu/searchcollections/results.aspx?catids=0&partyname=David+Vernon&src=1-5>.

<sup>200</sup> Frederick Dockstader, letter to Raymond Lillie, June 7, 1966, Folder: JHPI Archives 25; and Museum of the American Indian, “For: Exhibition at Jackson Lake Lodge,” July 1, 1966, Folder: JHPI 26. Both Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>201</sup> Frederick Dockstader, letter to Gene Setzer, July 19, 1966, Folder: JHPI 28, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

of the placement, etc., within the next two weeks.”<sup>202</sup> This lack of labels is relevant to the history of the Vernon collection because the Indian Arts Museum was also criticized for its sparing use of labels and written interpretation. This display of the Vernon collection at the Jackson Lake Lodge foretells an important and controversial element of its display in later years. Notably, the written historical record is not clear as to what happened to the artifacts at the Jackson Lake Lodge once the Indian Arts Museum opened in 1972. It is likely that the artifacts currently on display in Jackson Lake Lodge are the remnants of this 1966 exhibit. These artifacts are attributed to the Vernon collection, but they are fully owned by the GTLC, not the NPS.

In what is arguably the greatest demonstration of how the objects in the Vernon collection were treated as commodities, the “Vernon rejects” (as they were labeled by the MAI) were sold in the gift shop of the MAI and then at the gift shop of the Jackson Lake Lodge. It is not known how much of a commission the MAI made off of the “Vernon rejects,” but the GTLC kept a twenty percent commission off of each sale. In a letter to Gene Setzer, the Executive Vice President of the JHPI, Raymond Lillie of the GTLC wrote, “We are in agreement with selling the items in our gift shops on a consignment basis with JHPI retaining title to the merchandise. The Grand Teton Lodge Company will retain 20 per cent of the sales price of each item and will remit 80 per cent to JHPI.”<sup>203</sup> Thus the agreement between the JHPI and the MAI was a materialization of their respective narratives and the social and political discourses in which they were operating. The Vernon collection was winnowed by the MAI to meet the needs of the JHPI and the

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<sup>202</sup> Frederick Dockstader, letter to Gene Setzer, July 19, 1966.

<sup>203</sup> Raymond Lillie, letter to Gene Setzer, June 14, 1969, Folder: JHPI Archives 39, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.



MAI, and the narratives of the JHPI and the MAI ignored the interests of the American Indian communities from which the objects came.<sup>204</sup>

The year 1968 was notable in the history of the Vernon collection and the discourses that tell its story. It was in this year that a group of people mostly from the Chippewa tribe met to protest police brutality against American Indians. This meeting is recognized as the beginning of the American Indian Movement, and it presaged the American Indian occupation of Alcatraz Island that began in 1969. Also in 1968, the JHPI formally loaned the Vernon collection to the NPS.<sup>205</sup> The narratives of Vernon, the JHPI, the MAI, and American Indians were impressed on the Vernon collection in these years. In the case of American Indians, protestors asserted Native rights, and their voices gained traction on a national scale. Even with this happening, Vernon, the JHPI, and the MAI asserted their narratives, which ignored the interests and growing protests of American Indians. When the JHPI bought the artifacts from Vernon, the collection comprised approximately 10,000 items. Through the course of the 1960s, the collection was exchanged with the MAI or sold in the gift shops of the MAI and the Jackson Lake Lodge until the collection comprised only 1,428 items. This reduction and reshaping of the Vernon collection was a direct materialization of the narratives of the JHPI and the MAI, including their ignorance of the narratives of American Indians. This reduced collection was loaned to the NPS in 1968, and by the time the Indian Arts Museum

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<sup>204</sup> David Vernon, letter to “Miss Layne,” February 20, 1966, Folder: KVC 2.7, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>205</sup> Director, NPS, letter to Gene Setzer, August 1968, Folder: JHPI 30, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

opened at Colter Bay in Grand Teton National Park in 1972, few people knew how dramatically the collection had been transformed in the 1960s.

## **Chapter Seven: Early Years of the Indian Arts Museum**

When the Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc. (JHPI) shipped the remaining artifacts in the Vernon collection from New York City to the storerooms of the National Park Service (NPS) in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, the narrative threads of the Museum of the American Indian (MAI) and the JHPI dimmed in the light of the new layers of narratives placed on the artifacts. In the coming years, while the collection was on loan to the NPS from the JHPI, the artifacts fell under the public eye in a way they had not before. The artifacts were displayed in the newly built Indian Arts Museum in Grand Teton National Park beginning in 1972, and the dedication and early years of the Indian Arts Museum demonstrate many of the themes and tensions that surrounded the museum for the next forty years. During this time period, the narratives of the NPS, American Indians, and to a lesser extent, Vernon and the JHPI shaped the display and interpretation of the collection. Furthermore, the Indian Arts Museum did not exist in cultural vacuum, and the cultural and political discourses of the 1960s and 1970s impacted how the artifacts were presented to and interpreted by the public. As demonstrated by the program for the dedication and the written memoranda sent by the NPS at this time, the NPS's narrative indicated a desire to include American Indian voices in the day-to-day operations of the Indian Arts Museum, but the words and actions of the NPS reveal ongoing hostility concerning the involvement and requests of American Indians. Concurrently, the new museum highlighted Vernon and his narrative, and American Indians in particular began to question Vernon's collecting practices and ethics. Additionally, visitors to the museum, both Native and non-Native, raised concerns about the inappropriate display of certain artifacts. These new narratives considered the Indian

Arts Museum within the framework of colonization and began to transform how the Indian Arts Museum and similar cultural institutions displayed American Indian history and cultures.

By the early 1970s, the protests of American Indians gained widespread attention and began to include demonstrations against the inappropriate display of sacred objects and ancestral remains. In 1970, two years after the American Indian Movement (AIM) had begun, American Indian leaders such as Dennis Banks, Vernon Bellecourt, and Russell Means organized the first national conference in St. Paul, Minnesota.<sup>206</sup> According to Laura Waterman Wittstock and Elaine J. Salinas, “The movement was founded to turn the attention of Indian people toward a renewal of spirituality which would impart the strength of resolve needed to reverse the ruinous policies of the United States, Canada, and other colonialist governments of Central and South America.”<sup>207</sup> Specifically, according to the Minnesota History Center, “AIM's leaders spoke out against high unemployment, slum housing, and racist treatment, fought for treaty rights and the reclamation of tribal land, and advocated on behalf of urban Indians whose situation bred illness and poverty.”<sup>208</sup> In the 1970s, groups associated with the AIM staged occupations of Mount Rushmore, the Trail of Broken Treaties, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C., and they executed an “armed standoff at Wounded Knee, South Dakota.”<sup>209</sup> In order to defend the legal rights of these protestors, law firms such as the Native American Rights Fund (NARF) began to “advocate the Indian position

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<sup>206</sup> Cooper, *Spirited Encounters*, 9.

<sup>207</sup> Wittstock and Salinas, “A Brief History of the American Indian Movement.”

<sup>208</sup> “American Indian Movement (AIM),” Minnesota History Center, accessed March 18, 2016, <http://libguides.mnhs.org/aim>.

<sup>209</sup> Cooper, *Spirited Encounters*, 9.

on *major* policy issues of a legal nature,” and in 1983, two-thirds of the lawyers at NARF identified themselves as American Indian.<sup>210</sup> NARF’s five priorities are “Preserve tribal existence, protect tribal natural resources, promote Native American human rights, hold governments accountable to Native Americans, and develop Indian law and educate the public about Indian rights, laws, and issues.”<sup>211</sup>

Emboldened by the Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968, the growth of the AIM, and legal support from groups such as NARF, American Indian protestors began to turn their attention to museums. According to Karen Coody Cooper, in 1972, protestors:

took a detour to the Wounded Knee Trading Post and Museum. Resentful of the practices of the owners, the demonstrators made threats and reportedly stole objects and broke pottery. . . . A year later, during the occupation of Wounded Knee, the trading post and its museum were thoroughly destroyed, all objects were stolen or broken, and the owners became hostages.<sup>212</sup>

These protests were an important part of the social and cultural discourse into which the Indian Arts Museum was being born. As the museum and its dedication were planned by the NPS in the late 1960s and 1970s, the memoranda sent within the NPS indicate that the NPS was aware that the cultural climate concerning the display of American Indian artifacts was changing. This chapter outlines how the narrative of the NPS changed, and how the protests of American Indians affected the discourse surrounding the Indian Arts Museum.

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<sup>210</sup> Deloria, Jr., and Lytle, *American Indians, American Justice*, 156-157.

<sup>211</sup> “Our Work,” Native American Rights Fund, accessed March 23, 2016, <http://www.narf.org/our-work/>.

<sup>212</sup> Cooper, *Spirited Encounters*, 10.

After the JHPI proposed the loan of the David T. Vernon Collection to the NPS in 1968,<sup>213</sup> the NPS, in conjunction with the JHPI, began planning for the Indian Arts Museum.<sup>214</sup> The Visitors Center at Colter Bay had been originally dedicated on June 21, 1959, and it housed a natural history exhibit explaining the ecology of Grand Teton National Park. Remodeling work on the Visitors Center began in September of 1970, and the exhibits from the old museum were stored in “the old wildlife station at Oxbow Bend” (the site of Rockefeller’s failed wildlife park).<sup>215</sup> The remodeled Visitors Center at Colter Bay included a new two-story museum with large windows facing toward Jackson Lake and the Tetons. The artifacts in the museum were grouped into categories of like items (as opposed to tribal or regional affiliation), and the visitors walked among large glass cases of moccasins, pipes, masks, and shields, and many others items. A stylized wooden tipi “housing a display of articles dealing with home life”<sup>216</sup> occupied a central space on the ground floor, and medicine bundles and their contents were laid out for view in the “Medicine Room,” also on the ground floor. In addition to the artifacts, the lower level of the Indian Arts Museum featured a “demonstration room” where American

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<sup>213</sup> Director, NPS, letter to Gene Setzer, August 1968, Folder: JHPI Archives 30, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>214</sup> The document “Fact Sheet, Colter Bay Visitor Center Remodeling Project” states that planning began in 1967, but the official paperwork proposing the loan is dated 5/29/1968: Gene Setzer, letter to Hartzog, Folder: JHPI Archives 31, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>215</sup> Superintendent, Grand Teton National Park, memorandum to Acting Director, Midwest Region, November 23, 1970, Folder: GRTE VC 1970-1972 Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>216</sup> Katherine Baley, “A Heritage Preserved: The David T. Vernon Collection of Indian Artifacts,” “*Teton Magazine*, Summer/Fall 1972, Folder: Vernon Publications, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

Indians could demonstrate their crafts.<sup>217</sup> The museum was free, and the visitor entered from the uppermost floor, which was attached to the rest of the Visitors Center. In addition to the regular cultural resources staff, the NPS employed American Indian college students as “roving interpreters” for the museum during the summer months.<sup>218</sup>



Figure 5: Inside the Indian Arts Museum<sup>219</sup>

The planning for the new museum began in 1967 by the NPS and by the MAI, with whom the artifacts remained until 1968. In July of 1967, William Everhardt, the

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<sup>217</sup> “Lower Floorplan,” GRTE 352, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>218</sup> Superintendent of GRTE (Howard H. Chapman), memorandum to Director, Midwest Region, August 25, 1970, Folder: GRTE VC 1970-1972, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>219</sup> “Vernon Collection within Colter Bay Indian Arts Museum at Grand Teton National Park in March 2009,” photograph, ca. 2009, National Park Service, ID# a16e1a7c-1e37-45b5-af76-bfcdbd4ae9d69, accessed March 30, 2016, <http://focus.nps.gov/AssetDetail?assetID=a16e1a7c-1e37-45b5-af76-bfcdbd4ae9d69>.

Assistant Director of Interpretation at Grand Teton National Park, wrote to architect Eldridge Spencer about the plans for the new museum. Most notably, Everhardt confirmed the overall museum concept: “the philosophy of the museum will be to present the Indian materials as works of art.”<sup>220</sup> The NPS therefore imposed this narrative on the museum and the artifacts before the collection was transferred from New York City to Harpers Ferry. Meanwhile, the MAI also imposed its narrative on the upcoming museum. In late 1967, the MAI prepared the document titled “Colter Bay Indian Museum, Background Information” for the JHPI. The document states that the objectives for the new museum were:

1. To relate a few of those aspects of the Plains Indians’ way of life that can be best revealed by means of museum objects.
2. To make the museum visitor aware of some of the many environmental and cultural influences that are reflected in objects made and used by the American Indian.
3. To exhibit some very fine American Indian ethnographic objects as works of art.
4. To show the manufacture of Indian arts and crafts through living demonstrations, preferably by representatives from several different Indian tribes.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> William Everhardt, letter to Eldridge Spencer, July 18, 1967, Folder: GRTE VC 1960-1969, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>221</sup> “Colter Bay Indian Museum, Background Information,” December 1967, Folder: NMAI 18 FD 29.4, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.



This last objective was indeed implemented, and the practice of American Indians demonstrating and selling their crafts continues today at the Colter Bay Visitors Center. The other three objectives represent a beginning for the design of the exhibits that was later challenged by Natives and non-Natives who visited the museum. As I demonstrate in this chapter and the next, the museum was criticized for conflating American Indian cultures and for classifying the artifacts as art rather than as important cultural and spiritual objects that were and are meaningful to living people.

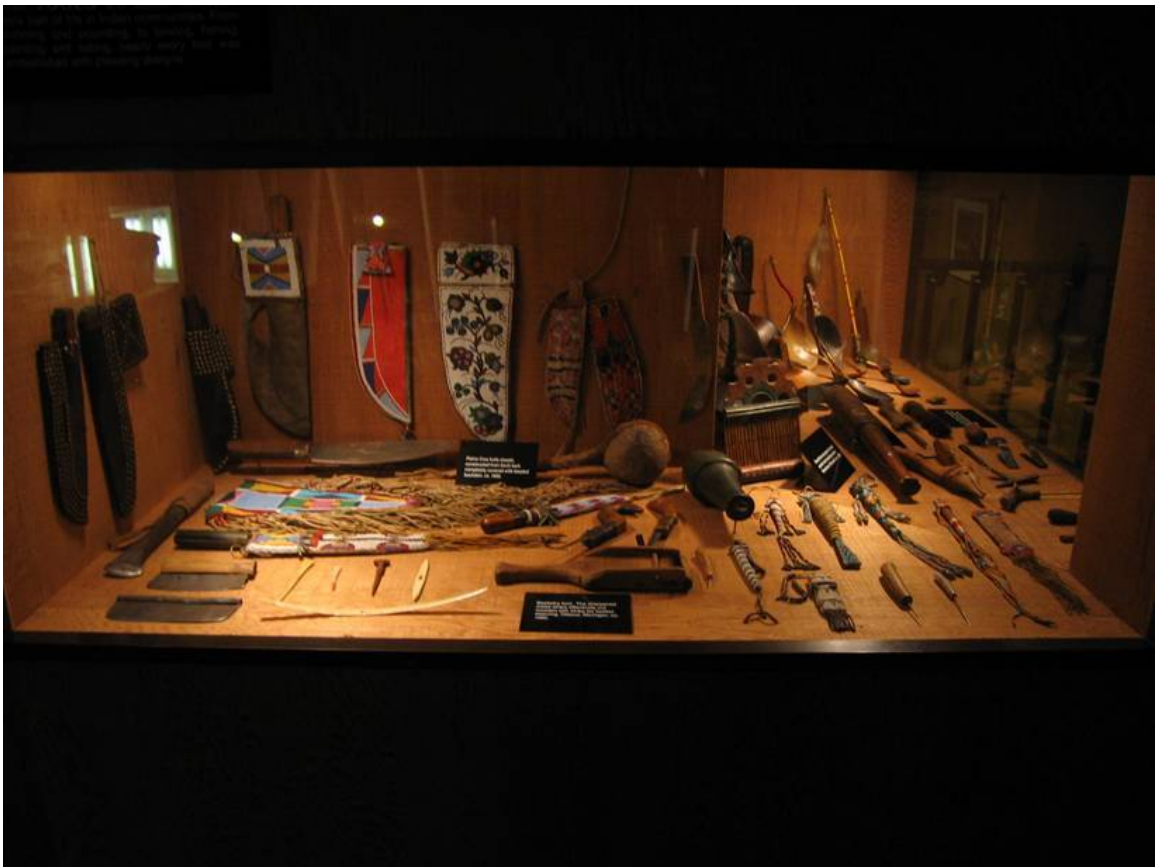


Figure 6: Knives and Scabbards on display in the Indian Arts Museum<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> "Vernon Collection within Colter Bay Indian Arts Museum at Grand Teton National Park in March 2009," photograph, ca. 2009, National Park Service, ID# 47e04abb-433f-48b9-bb2c-a239883f4a7c, accessed March 30, 2016, <http://focus.nps.gov/AssetDetail?assetID=47e04abb-433f-48b9-bb2c-a239883f4a7c>.

The design document from the MAI is also significant because it foresees what eventually became another criticism of the Indian Arts Museum: that it did not directly relate to the history of Grand Teton National Park. The document states, “The usual policy for museums in our National Parks is to have the exhibits relate to prominent features of the area. . . In the past we have resisted describing features or events that could not be construed as helping the visitors to better understand the park. The Colter Bay Indian Museum will be an exception to this tradition. It will not relate in any significant way to the Grand Teton National Park story.”<sup>223</sup> This acknowledgment of the limitations of the museum at this early date is meaningful because it raises the question of why the NPS allowed the development of this museum. I have not found any documentation of the NPS’s reasoning, but I surmise that the NPS allowed this exception because of the importance of the JHPI and the Rockefellers to Grand Teton National Park. As I explained in the previous chapter, in addition to the legacy of John D. Rockefeller and his enormous donations of land, Laurance S. Rockefeller and the JHPI were influential in the development of Jenny Lake Lodge, Jackson Lake Lodge, and Colter Bay Village in the 1950s and 1960s. Since the JHPI was loaning the artifacts in the Vernon collection for display in Grand Teton National Park, the NPS likely overlooked the inconsistency of the museum.

The official design documents from the early 1970s further illustrate the narrative of the NPS for the new museum. Under contract with the NPS, Imaginetics, Inc. wrote that their first goal for the new museum was “to capture some of the environmental and

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<sup>223</sup> “Colter Bay Indian Museum, Background Information,” December 1967, Folder: NMAI 18 FD 29.4, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

cultural influences which motivated and are reflected by the objects contained within the Vernon Collection.”<sup>224</sup> This language strongly echoes the objectives written by the MAI. I have found no evidence that Imaginetics viewed the MAI’s design document, but based on the similarity of the language, I think it is likely, and Imaginetics’ design demonstrates the continuing impact of the narrative of the MAI on the display of the collection. For the second objective, Imaginetics stated, “of equal importance is the ambition to utilize the newly composed spaces in a most dramatic fashion so as to create a meaningful and homogenous experience for the public.”<sup>225</sup> As Imaginetics goes on to explain and as this thesis has previously demonstrated, the objects in the Vernon collection came from over 100 different tribes, most of whom did not spend time in the land of the Tetons. Thus Imaginetics’ emphasis on the word “homogenous” becomes clearer – their challenge was to convey a coherent story despite the diversity of artifacts. In order to tell this story, Imaginetics “decided to present the Collection in a forthright manner and by the application of word and graphic image, suggest the environment of the Plains Indians rather than describe these conditions in detail.”<sup>226</sup> To “suggest” their story rather than state it outright, Imaginetics planned to use:

supporting text and audio impressions . . . throughout the presentation not as specific copy but rather as environmental information which will make the Collection more meaningful without tending to document it. Naturally the objects

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<sup>224</sup> Bob Nichols, memorandum to Charles McCurdy, May 8, 1972, Folder: GRTE VC 1970-1972, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

themselves will be defined, but no attempt will be made to relate each object to the deeper significance and role which it played in the Plains culture.<sup>227</sup>

Instead of explaining the place of the objects within their original communities or their significance to American Indians, the designers of the Indian Arts Museum planned to “concentrate on the objects as works of art.”<sup>228</sup>

Based on descriptions of the museum when it opened in the spring of 1972, the combined narratives of the NPS, the MAI, and Imaginetics materialized throughout the museum. As such, the museum was a materialization of various discourses: the Indian Arts Museum was designed to *suggest* a sense of American Indian culture rather than to tell a specific ethnographic story. The article “Not ‘a textbook on a wall’” explains the ambiance of the museum when it first opened in the spring of 1972:

This is definitely not an old ‘textbook on the wall’ type of museum,’ notes Chuck McCurdy, chief naturalist at Grand Teton National Park. . . Unique in the West, the museum uses the latest in audiovisual techniques to create a mood. Through the application of word and graphic image, the museum effectively suggests the environment of the Plains Indians, rather than trying to describe in detail the multi-faceted existence of the Plains cultures.<sup>229</sup>

In an article for the magazine *Teton* in 1972, Katherine Baley similarly detailed the atmosphere that the Museum evoked:

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<sup>227</sup> Bob Nichols, memorandum to Charles McCurdy, May 8, 1972.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> “Not ‘a textbook on the wall’,” n.d., Folder: Vernon Publications, KVC 7.10, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

The Colter Bay Museum . . . creates a dramatic and exciting presentation. . . [T]he museum emphasizes the nature of Indian culture, rather than attempting an ethnological approach. The Interior is a stimulating open area, accented by floor-to-ceiling photographs of Indians reproduced on textured cedar and on shaded Plexiglas. Slides of early life and culture . . . flash constantly, while Indian music provides a pulsating atmospheric background.<sup>230</sup>

Surrounded by somber images of American Indians without identification, “Indian music”<sup>231</sup> in the background, large cases of artifacts from diverse tribes, and sweeping views of the Tetons out the large windows, the Indian Arts Museum presented a conflated picture of American Indian material culture based on the narratives and discourses that had surrounded the artifacts for many decades.

The intent to display the artifacts as works of art was a dominant narrative that defined the Indian Arts Museum. The very name – the Indian Arts Museum – is a noticeable marker of this narrative. While the placards and labels that existed in the Museum are now unfortunately lost, the written historical record contains a few indicators of the text on those early plaques. As per the NPS narrative for the museum, many of the plaques pointed to the beauty of the artifacts, but the narrative maintained that American Indians did not create the artifacts with the intent of creating “art.” For example, one label read, “Rarely, if ever, did the Indian artisan paint, carve, weave, or

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<sup>230</sup> Katherine Baley, “A Heritage Preserved: The David T. Vernon Collection of Indian Artifacts,” *Teton Magazine*, Summer/Fall 1972, Copy in folder: Vernon Publications, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

construct any object solely for its esthetic value.”<sup>232</sup> The discourse emanating from the museum therefore implied that American Indians did not create art, but this museum, due to the work of collectors such as David T. Vernon, celebrates the artistic talents of American Indians. This narrative was a continuation of the narrative of David T. Vernon, as Vernon claimed that American Indians “had no word for art.”<sup>233</sup> Interestingly, Vernon was disgruntled that the museum was rooted in art rather than ethnology, but he recognized the narrative of the museum. When touring the exhibits in 1972, Vernon stated, “You’re not trying to teach them ethnology, you’re just trying to tell them the beauty of the Indian things.”<sup>234</sup>

The Superintendent of Nez Perce National Historical Park, Jack R. Williams, pointed out this contradiction in the narrative when he visited the Indian Arts Museum in July of 1972. Referring to the plaque stating that American Indians did not create objects for their “esthetic value,”<sup>235</sup> Williams wrote in a memorandum to the Director of the NPS, “You are student enough of American Indians to recognize the falseness and demeaning effect this statement has on projects. It, in the minds of many beside myself, negates the intent of the whole exhibit.”<sup>236</sup> The design of the museum as an art museum that suggested the collective environment of American Indians thus came under fire very

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<sup>232</sup> Jack Williams, memorandum to Director, NPS, July 12, 1972, Folder: GRTE VC 1970-1972 Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>233</sup> Christopher (Kit) Vernon, interview by the National Park Service, August 2005, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY, 13.

<sup>234</sup> David T. Vernon, interview by Charles McCurdy (NPS), July 1, 1972, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY, 45.

<sup>235</sup> Jack Williams, memorandum to Director, NPS, July 12, 1972.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

quickly after the museum opened. Nonetheless, the overall design of the museum was an important aspect of the narrative placed on the artifacts by the NPS and Imaginetics. This narrative and the reactions to the museum by visitors (including journalists) are significant because they contribute to the web of narratives surrounding the museum and the artifacts in the Vernon collection. Each voice was embedded in the cultural and social discourses of the era, and each voice impacted how the artifacts were displayed, interpreted, and preserved at this time and in the years to come.

Early in 1972, with the museum built and the exhibits in place, the NPS began planning for the dedication of the museum. The planning for the dedication program illustrates another aspect of the NPS's discourse concerning the Vernon collection and the Indian Arts Museum. The planning reveals that the NPS was aware of the tensions emanating from the political and cultural discourses of the time (particularly concerning American Indian civil rights and sovereignty), and the NPS wanted to avoid conflict and bad publicity for the museum. In a memorandum from Gary Everhardt to "Director, Midwest Region" of the NPS, Everhardt wrote, "We have been in contact with leaders on the Wind River Reservation. They have alerted the people to the dedication and they have become extremely interested in participating in the dedication. We think it would be highly appropriate for the dedication to be as much Indian as possible."<sup>237</sup> Furthermore, he suggested that the program be as follows:

Flag Ceremony by Arapaho and Shoshone members accompanied by a drum.

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<sup>237</sup> Gary Everhardt, memorandum to Director, Midwest Region, March 13, 1972, Folder: GRTE VC 1970-1972, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

Invocation in Indian tongue with English translation. This will be done by a Shoshone or Arapahoe “old man”. The two tribes will draw to see who gets the honor of giving the first prayer.

Welcoming statements probably by Superintendent or Governor.

Introduction of members of Congress.

Possibly a song which could be “America” sung by Wind River High School pupils.

Introduction of other distinguished guests.

Dedicatory Address – possibly the Director

Benediction by an Arapaho or Shoshone “old man”.

Retiring the flag – again with the drum accompaniment

With the drum still beating, the ceremonies end with the beginning of dances.<sup>238</sup>

As evidenced by this suggested program, Everhardt was trying to include American Indian voices in the dedication, but the effect is muted. Everhardt includes American Indians throughout the program, but the primary speaking responsibilities are not assigned to them nor is there any documentation that Everhardt asked the tribes how they would like to contribute to the dedication. In the same document, Everhardt writes:

To involve the Indians properly requires having a feast and the dance. Otherwise, it is pretty much a white man’s affair. . . The people who most feel Jackson Hole is theirs are the Shoshone and Bannock. They need to be worked into the program. . . We would like to stress again that the Arapaho and Shoshone at this point are very interested in participating and most likely will participate if they

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<sup>238</sup> Gary Everhardt, memorandum to Director, Midwest Region, March 13, 1972.



have a strong role in the dedication planning and ceremony. It's going to be tricky for us to involve them meaningfully and also include the people from the Fort Hall Reservation without offending sensibilities. This will surely happen to both groups if we attempt to firm up a program solely from our end and merely tell them where they can fit in.<sup>239</sup>

On the one hand, Everhardt's writing indicates a desire to include the Shoshone, Bannock, and Arapahoe tribes in a meaningful way in the dedication. On the other hand, he has already created barriers to the inclusion of these tribes by proposing a very Anglo program for the dedication (a flag ceremony with the U.S. flag, an opening and closing prayer, speeches by members of Congress, etc.). While the program for the dedication had not been finalized, Everhardt was proposing a dedication where American Indians were incorporated as symbolic bookends.

The records of what happened at the dedication and the reactions of people who attended the dedication (both Native and non-Native) provide a window into the social and cultural discourses of 1972. First of all, the actual program for the dedication looked only slightly different from what Everhardt had suggested. Just as the design statements of Imaginetics and the MAI were a part of their narratives (and they became a part of the NPS's narrative once they agreed to them), this program for the dedication is a materialization of the discourse of the NPS at this time. With Everhardt as the Master of Ceremonies, the program of events was as follows:

Flag song – Members of the Arapaho and Shoshone Indian Tribes

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<sup>239</sup> Gary Everhardt, memorandum to Director, Midwest Region, March 13, 1972.

Invocation – Prayer in Indian tongue [with the note: Prayers will be offered by  
members of the Arapaho and the Shoshone Tribes.]

Welcome to Grand Teton National Park – Master of ceremonies

Introduction of guests – Master of ceremonies

Introduction of dedicatory speakers – Robert Robertson, executive director,  
National council on Indian Opportunity, Office of the Vice  
President

Dedicatory address – Edmund B. Thornton, Chairman, National Parks Centennial  
Commission

Benediction – Prayer in Indian tongue [with the same note as Invocation]

Flag song – Members of the Shoshone and Arapaho Indian Tribes<sup>240</sup>

As with the proposed schedule for the dedication, the actual program featured American Indian speakers at the beginning and the end of the program. Significantly, even with the dedication so close, Everhardt did not know which tribe would give the Invocation and Benediction, and he therefore could not have known who within each tribe would speak. This lack of specificity could have been due to slow communications with the tribes, but taken more broadly, it speaks to the symbolic nature that the Shoshone and Arapahoe tribes were to play in the NPS's narrative at the dedication. It did not seem to matter who gave the Invocation and Benediction as long as it was done in "Indian tongue." This amalgamation of specific tribes into one homogenous group of "Indians" by the NPS is a

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<sup>240</sup> Colter Bay Indian Arts Museum Dedication, Folder: JHPI Archives 45, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

narrative that resonated throughout the Indian Arts Museum and extended back to the design statements made by Imaginetics and the MAI.



Figure 7: *Indians on Jackson Lake* by Frank Collins, 1930s<sup>241</sup>

The pamphlet on which this program is printed contains other clues to how the NPS presented the museum to the public. Near the top of the pamphlet is a painting from the 1930s titled *Indians on Jackson Lake* by Herbert A. Collins (See Figure 5).<sup>242</sup> It is easy to see why the painting was chosen to be on the pamphlet—it depicts a group of American Indians living on the shores of Jackson Lake, the very site where the dedication was taking place. In the painting, two men are gathered around a dead animal (presumably an elk), and another group is tending a fire nearby. In the background, children play in the water and take refuge in the canopy of a tipi. While the painting may

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<sup>241</sup> Frank Collins, *Indians on Jackson Lake*, ca. 1930, National Park Service, accessed March 30, 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/grte/learn/historyculture/ind.htm>.

<sup>242</sup> This painting is available on Grand Teton National Park's webpage titled "American Indians": <http://www.nps.gov/grte/learn/historyculture/ind.htm> (accessed March 11, 2016). The painting is also featured on the NPS interpretive plaque at Oxbow Bend, near Moran, WY, in Grand Teton National Park (see "11,000 Summers in the Tetons," accessed March 11, 2016, <http://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=87601>).

seem to be a benign depiction of a tribe that may have visited the area, the painting presents a very stereotypical image of American Indians- almost all of the people depicted are wearing feathers, sticking upright, on the back of their head, and most of the men are shirtless, revealing toned, muscular bodies. The painting aligns with what Karen Coody Cooper describes as politically motivated artworks that “served to perpetuate stereotypes about Indian “types” (as savages, as lusty seducers, as pitiful dregs of humanity, as exotically mystical, or as the disappearing last of a breed).”<sup>243</sup> That the men planning the dedication would choose this painting to adorn the pamphlet reveals the image of American Indians that they were promoting – American Indians as a “prehistoric” people, a group removed from technological, social, and political changes. In addition, the title of the painting clearly links Grand Teton National Park with the generalized term “Indians.” As previously detailed, some tribes lived and hunted in Jackson Hole in the summers, but as the Vernon collection predominantly contained artifacts from the Plains Indian tribes (for example, the Sioux, who did not live or hunt in Jackson Hole), it was a falsehood to say that the Vernon Collection fully illuminated the arts of the tribes who once lived on the shores of Jackson Lake.

The dedication for the Indian Arts Museum took place on June 29, 1972 at the amphitheater of Colter Bay, and it was attended by members of the Shoshone, Bannock, and Arapahoe tribes, David T. Vernon and his family, Laurance S. Rockefeller and representatives from the JHPI, Gary Everhardt (the Superintendent of Grand Teton National Park), employees of the NPS, and many others. Contrary to the planned program, the newspaper reports of what actually happened at the dedication depict a more

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<sup>243</sup> Karen Coody Cooper, *Spirited Encounters*, 5.

complicated event than Everhardt had planned. According to an article in the *Jackson Hole Guide* from July 6, 1972, Sam Nipwater, a Shoshone elder who had taken the stage to give the Invocation, stated:

I'll say this just in a few words before I go ahead with my prayer. This country—where we are today—(it) has been told to me by my own people. . . Bannock-Shoshones of Idaho and Shoshones of Wyoming, and so this country is for those people, not any other people. They used to live here and there, winter down here in this country. And so I'm here. I'm going to say our prayer—that's all.<sup>244</sup>

There is no record of how Everhardt, Rockefeller, Vernon, or others reacted to Nipwater's statement, but it seems fair to say that the NPS at least was not expecting the dedication to begin in this way.

Also contrary to the planned program of events, Rockefeller spoke at the dedication, but it is not clear when he spoke in the program of events. Nonetheless, Rockefeller's remarks form another part of his and the JHPI's narrative concerning the Vernon collection. Briefly, Rockefeller's remarks focus on the actions of Vernon, the JHPI, and the NPS, and they do not acknowledge the American Indian communities from which the artifacts were taken. Embedded as he was in the cultural discourse of the time, Rockefeller's remarks ignore the questions that were surfacing about the artifacts' origins. Rockefeller's remarks also illuminate part of the decision to make the museum an arts museum. Rockefeller stated, "it occurred to us that there are in this nation fine exhibits of anthropological materials from the many cultures of the American Indian that

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<sup>244</sup> "Says Shoshone elder at dedication 'This land is our land,' *Jackson Hole Guide*, July 6, 1972, Copy in folder: Vernon publications, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

tell the stories of their early history and fascinating lives. Yet, there was no facility available to the public that would clearly show the great diversity of artistic talents that are represented by this collection of American Indian art.”<sup>245</sup> After detailing Vernon’s and the JHPI’s involvement in the museum, Rockefeller jumps over the involvement of the MAI straight to the NPS. Rockefeller stated that Vernon’s collection contained 1400 items when it was shipped away from Vernon’s home, neatly erasing the reality wherein thousands of artifacts were sold or exchanged while in the care of the JHPI and the MAI.

Notably, rather than acknowledging the contributions of American Indians, Rockefeller began his remarks by praising David T. Vernon for “his great sensitivity to artistic merit” that he exhibited while collecting the artifacts.<sup>246</sup> In the rest of Rockefeller’s remarks, he did not recognize American Indians at all.<sup>247</sup> However, Edmund B. Thornton, the chairman of the National Park Centennial Commission, did speak of American Indian contributions, and his remarks reveal the tension that was evident in Everhardt’s planning memoranda for the dedication. An article in the *Jackson Hole Guide* quotes from the dedicatory remarks of Thornton. After thanking and congratulating Vernon, Rockefeller, and the NPS for collecting, preserving, and displaying the artifacts, Thornton stated:

But if there’s anyone to whom this day really belongs, it is (to) the Indian people.

Over several centuries they have endured a wide variety of deliberate and

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<sup>245</sup> Laurance S. Rockefeller, “Remarks of Mr. Laurance S. Rockefeller, Dedication of the Colter Bay Indian Arts Museum,” June 29, 1972, Folder: JHPI Archives 48 and KVC 2.17, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>246</sup> “Says Shoshone elder at dedication ‘This land is our land,’ *Jackson Hole Guide*, July 6, 1972.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

inadvertent depredations on their whole way of life. Yet—despite this cruel buffeting—they survived.

They survive as a proud people, often humbled by overwhelming odds—but never giving up, never denying their heritage and never ceasing to struggle to be free people in control of their own destinies.

At long last we who are now responsible for the stewardship of the land that was once theirs, have come to the realization that our society can and should be further enriched by the many contributions of the first Americans.

But this can only happen if these people are free to live their own lives according to their own desires.<sup>248</sup>

These statements contain much fodder for discourse analysis. At first brush, Thornton's remarks are notable because they acknowledge the struggles and continued existence of American Indians, some of whom were sitting before him in the audience. Digging deeper, however, Thornton's remarks reveal a more insidious and deprecating narrative that was a common part of the cultural discourse at the time. For example, in the sentence beginning "Over several centuries," Thornton's words make it seem as if these "depredations" in the past were natural and were not caused by any one group in particular, when in fact they were caused by Euro-American settlers.<sup>249</sup> His words not only do not acknowledge the horrors of colonialism and genocide that white settlers and the U.S. government wrought on American Indian communities, but his words erase the past.

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<sup>248</sup> "Says Shoshone elder at dedication 'This land is our land,' *Jackson Hole Guide*, July 6, 1972.

<sup>249</sup> See Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 8.

The reactions to the dedication indicate the diverse narratives of the people who visited the Indian Arts Museum. In the article “It was their day, Dedication of the Indian Arts Museum,” Lorraine Edmo (Shoshone) wrote for KID-TV in Idaho Falls, Idaho, “the museum and its dedication was viewed differently in the eyes of non-Indians and Indians in attendance.”<sup>250</sup> She goes on to explain how the display of the collection, especially regarding “religious artifacts,” and the collecting practices of David T. Vernon were questioned by “some Indian people.” “Regarding the dedication itself,” she wrote:

it was disheartening to see that even on “thier [sic] day,” Native Americans were given the same consideration as they were during frontier times, when their land was taken. . . It is ironic that on this one day, and this one day only, the Native Americans were allowed in Grand Teton National Park free. Whereas, starting this week, visitors from foreign countries are given free passes to enter the National Parks. It is especially ironic when you consider that the Shoshone, the Bannock and the Arapahoe used to frequent Grand Teton and Yellowstone and termed these lands their hunting grounds and homeland. . . It’s unlikely that these Indian people will frequent the Park as much as other visitors. Thursday, June 20, was “their day” . . . free . . . and they will remember the charge attached to entering their former homelands.

The remarks by the editor following Edmo’s article also illustrate the unease felt by some visitors at the dedication. Importantly, the editor’s remarks indicate that he or she is not Native, thereby illustrating an important thread in the narratives surrounding the

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<sup>250</sup> Lorraine Edmo, “IT WAS THEIR DAY Dedication of the Indian Arts Museum,” Folder: KVC 7.2, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.



dedication: approval or disapproval of the new museum did not necessarily depend on racial or tribal identity. The editor wrote:

On the day set aside to honor them, the Indians cooked for us. . . The Indians entertained us. . . we watched them put up their tipis on the shores of Jackson Lake . . . we made them pose (over and over again) for our cameras . . . we saw them don their dance regalia. . . heard their drums beats. . . watched their dancers dance. . . It seems incredible that these people, returning to their homelands to help observe a day dedicated to them, were still just another sideshow for the entertainment of us tourists in their land. . . We do not feel that the “circus” air was worthy of the occasion, or the people who made it possible. . .<sup>251</sup>

Edmo and the editor speak to the imbalance of power that was on display at the dedication even as the dedication was supposed to be honoring American Indians. Additionally, these remarks demonstrate the voyeurism inherent in the dedication and the Indian Arts Museum. The museum’s narrative celebrated American Indian material culture, writ large, and congratulated Vernon and Rockefeller for their supposed foresight.

Once the Indian Arts Museum opened in 1972, the museum underwent periodic changes that coincided with, and for the most part, were caused by events and movements outside of the museum such as the AIM. As it opened that June day, the Indian Arts Museum was already a source of controversy. For example, in the article “Indian Museum Dedication Today at Colter Bay,” the author writes, “Naturalists question its

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<sup>251</sup> “Museum dedication met with mixed emotions,” Folder: KVC 7.5, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

place in the park. Collectors questions the display of items out of context, and some Indian people have criticized the display of personal religious items.”<sup>252</sup> Indeed, questions about the origin of the artifacts in the Indian Arts Museum swirled around the Tetons even on the day of the dedication. Chief park naturalist, Charles (Chuck) McCurdy interviewed David T. Vernon on July 1, 1972 as they toured the museum. The transcription of the interview (transcribed by Jardee Transcription of Tucson, Arizona) reveals Vernon’s reaction to accusations that some of the artifacts may have been unethically taken from graves, though part of the conversation is missing:

McCurdy: This is also—some of the young Indians working here thought maybe these breast plates were dug up.

Vernon: No.

McCurdy: I don’t know why they got that idea, unless they just thought they looked like they’d been buried.

Vernon: Well, they’re old and they’ve been maybe in the rain once or twice or something. Unless skins are smoke tanned, they don’t stand up very well in the rain. (tape turned off and on) ... taken anything from any graves. (tape turned off and on)

McCurdy: [unclear]

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<sup>252</sup> “Indian museum dedication today at Colter Bay,” Folder: KVC 7.3 in Vernon Publications, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

Vernon: [unclear] at least one backrest here. That middle one's Crow. The other one is Sioux. I think there's another one back over here.<sup>253</sup>

As Vernon always maintained that none of the artifacts were obtained unethically, I surmise that Vernon stated that nothing had been taken from any graves, but the gap in the recording is a real loss in the record of Vernon's narrative.

The claims that some of Vernon's artifacts had been obtained unethically did not end with Vernon's assertion to the contrary, however. In the article "Unique Indian Museum Catches Native Spirit," author Neil Morgan writes that Jo Ann DuCharme, an American Indian student interpreter at the museum, thinks that the medicine bags in the exhibit had been stolen.<sup>254</sup> As soon as September of 1972, however, the National Park Service took steps to decide how, or if, to display the medicine bundles in the Medicine Room. In a memorandum to Boyd Evison, the outgoing superintendent of Grand Teton National Park, and Gary Everhardt, the incoming superintendent, McCurdy wrote that Mr. [Sidney] Willow, an "old man" from the Wind River tribe, visited the museum at the NPS's request and thought that the display of the medicine bundles was acceptable. McCurdy then wrote that he wants to settle the issue for once and all.<sup>255</sup>

The precise details of exactly what happened in those months of 1972 are unclear. What is clear is that when the museum first opened in the spring of 1972, the "Medicine

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<sup>253</sup> David T. Vernon, interview by Charles McCurdy (NPS), July 1, 1972, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY, 19-20.

<sup>254</sup> Neil Morgan, "Unique Indian Museum Catches Native Spirit," *The San Diego Union*, September 17, 1972, Folder: KVC 7.1 in Vernon Publications, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>255</sup> Charles McCurdy, memorandum to Boyd and Gary (Everhardt), September 14, 1972, Folder: GRTE VC 1970-1972, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

Room” contained displays of medicine bundles with all of their contents laid out for view. According to Clyde Hall (Shoshone), the American Indians who viewed the museum before the dedication were concerned about the display of the inner contents of the medicine bundles. Clyde Hall voiced these concerns to McCurdy, and on the night before the dedication, McCurdy placed the contents of the medicine bundles back inside the bundles. Lorraine Edmo (Shoshone) wrote of the situation: “full medicine bags used in sacred religious ceremonies were displayed open to full view. Native Americans are, by nature, superstitious, and did not appreciate the exhibit of religious articles in this manner. The bags were subsequently closed at the request of Indian personnel working in the museum.”<sup>256</sup> Thus on the day of the dedication and afterwards, the medicine bundles were on display in the Medicine Room, but they were not open. The Indian Arts Museum (and the Medicine Room within it) is an example of a cultural landscape, which Richard H. Schein defines as “a material moment in a recurring flow of information/ideals/actions/power.”<sup>257</sup> The Medicine Room in particular was a space of conflicting discourses and sifting power relations.

In the early months of 1973, the NPS took steps to try to avoid having their displays be the recipient of the mounting protests by American Indians associated with the AIM. The narrative of the NPS in the mid-1970s indicates that the NPS wanted to avoid conflict with American Indian protestors, but they did not recognize the validity of their demands. As the museum represented a materialized discourse, the NPS shaped the narrative of the museum and the narratives of the JHPI, the MAI, and American Indian groups shaped the NPS’s narrative. The NPS’s narrative regarding the museum was both

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<sup>256</sup> Edmo, “IT WAS THEIR DAY Dedication of the Indian Arts Museum.”

<sup>257</sup> Schein, “The Place of Landscape,” 676.

an “object and subject.”<sup>258</sup> An internal NPS memorandum from “Director” to “All Field Directors” dated January 3, 1973, states:

There is growing concern about the activities of certain dissident Indian groups that are determined to recover Indian cultural artifacts and skeletal remains from museum collections. . . The purpose of this memorandum is to alert you to the serious threat posed to NPS installations by this activity, and to ask that you prepare action plans for coping with it as best as possible throughout your area of responsibility. . . One measure already being taken by some museum curators is withdrawal from exhibit of all skeletal material, or objects closely identified with burials. This we advise, to remove provocation from the public view for the time being.<sup>259</sup>

The last sentence in this memorandum indicates the attitude of the NPS—change the museum displays “for the time being” to avoid controversy. Another memorandum from “Director, Midwest Region, to Superintendents, Midwest Region,” dated January 18, 1973, “alerts all park areas to the threat posed to NPS installations by Indian groups seeking to recover Indian cultural artifacts and skeletal remains from museum collections. This memorandum also requests all park areas to prepare action plans to cope with this threat.”<sup>260</sup> The language used by the NPS here—in both memoranda, the NPS warns of “threats”—indicates the attitude of the NPS to these protests. The word “threats” suggests

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<sup>258</sup> Schein, “The Place of Landscape,” 676.

<sup>259</sup> Assistant Director, memorandum to All Field Directors, January 3, 1973, Folder: GRTE VC 1973-1979, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>260</sup> Director, Midwest Region, memorandum to Superintendents, Midwest Region, January 18, 1973, Folder: GRTE VC 1973-1979, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

that the NPS did not consider these claims concerning the provenance and ownership of these items legitimate and worthwhile. The memorandum continues by requesting that each “Midwest Region Superintendent” take the following actions:

- (1) Immediately remove from public exhibition all Indian skeletal material and objects closely identified with burials.
- (2) Furnish this office with your current plans, including timetable for implementation on how skeletal remains and burial objects can be protected in your area of responsibility.<sup>261</sup>

The NPS was reacting to the protests, and beginning a course of actions (removing human remains and burial items from display) that would culminate in 1990 with the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).

The response by Grand Teton National Park to these memoranda indicates the narrative that they disseminated concerning the issue of ownership and management of the artifacts in the Indian Arts Museum. The letters sent between Everhardt and NPS officials indicate that Everhardt was aware that the displays at the Indian Arts Museum were contentious, but he was reluctant to make changes. On February 23, 1973, Everhardt wrote to “Director, Midwest Region” that he and his staff were perplexed as to how to comply with the memorandum of January 18. He wrote:

We are particularly concerned because the collection of Indian material is not ours. It belongs to Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc. We think one other category of sensitive material should be listed. This would be objects of a sacred nature.

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<sup>261</sup> Director, Midwest Region, memorandum to Superintendents, Midwest Region, January 18, 1973.

Young Indians generally suspect these as having been come by through exhumation or through shady dealings. An estimated 50% of the over 800 objects on display in the Colter Bay Indian Arts Museum have a sacred or a burial connotation.

The instructions in your memorandum are perhaps workable in collections in which skeletal or burial material is incidental. The situation at Colter Bay is something else. In fact, one whole section, the Medicine Room, would have to be closed up completely. So many objects in the remainder of the museum are sensitive and if removed, the museum really should be closed, for it would otherwise look strange.

How do we explain closing the museum or even removal of a large percentage of the objects to the young Indians we are specifically recruiting to work there, to specialists, and to general visitors who anticipate seeing it, and to Mr. Laurance Rockefeller?

What alternatives do we have? Or, what special adjustments can our Division of Museums, Harpers Ferry Center, make before next season to make the museum look fully in operation and not half empty?<sup>262</sup>

Once again, Everhardt's discourse reveals his priorities – he wants to know how to keep the Indian Arts Museum open and how not to offend Rockefeller and the JHPI.

Since the David T. Vernon Collection at this time was merely on loan to the NPS by the Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc. (JHPI), the staff at Grand Teton National Park was

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<sup>262</sup> Gary Everhardt, letter to Director, Midwest Region, February 23, 1973, Folder: GRTE VC 1973-1979, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

caught in a bind between the directives of the NPS and the JHPI. The staff at Grand Teton National Park kept the JHPI apprised of the happenings at the Indian Arts Museum, and on March 19, 1973, Frederick Carresia, the acting superintendent of Grand Teton National Park, wrote to Gene Setzer, the Executive Vice President of the JHPI, about the problems circling the Indian Arts Museum. Caresia wrote:

. . . young Indians who have viewed the museum have repeatedly expressed beliefs that some of the materials were removed from burials. There is no evidence of this, and Mr. Vernon himself refuted it, but the suspicion persists. Even with the medicine bags closed, they are there and there are also other sacred objects, such as the buffalo skull used in the Sun Dance, the painted elkhide depicting a Shoshone Sun Dance, pipes that are sometimes regarded that an Indian would not willingly part with, a Seneca mask, and small medicine objects in the Medicine Room. Objects formerly owned by esteemed leaders are targets of theft and there is on display a blanket thought to be formerly owned by Sitting Bull and a pipe bag believed to be previously owned by American Horse. All told, perhaps 50% of the collection on display could be considered sensitive to possible theft.<sup>263</sup>

Caresia's letter indicates that the staff at Grand Teton National Park, despite concerns voiced by American Indians, maintain that none of the objects were "removed from burials," and the Park is aware that the collection contains many sacred or ceremonial items in addition to the medicine bundles.

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<sup>263</sup> Frederick W. Caresia, letter to Gene Setzer, March 19, 1973, Folder: GRTE VC 1973-1979, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.



It is not clear what actions, if any, the staff at Grand Teton National Park took in response to the NPS's memoranda concerning the "threats" to the NPS museums. The medicine bundles and all other sensitive material remained on display for the coming years until 1977 or 1978 when Clyde Hall and other American Indians removed the medicine bundles from display with the NPS's approval.<sup>264</sup> The fact that the staff at the Indian Arts Museum did not remove the medicine bundles from display until this time is a telling materialization of the NPS discourse of the early 1970s.

The early years of the Indian Arts Museum are important because they set the tone for much of the rest of the museum's history and because they demonstrate the interwoven narratives that alternately chafed against or reinforced each other. The impact of the huge reduction in the size of the collection was all but forgotten once the collection was loaned to the NPS by the JHPI. The cultural resources staff at Grand Teton National Park was caught between the directives of the JHPI and the NPS in the planning and management of the Indian Arts Museum. The narrative shown by the actions of the staff at Grand Teton National Park demonstrated a desire to include American Indians in the dedication of the Indian Arts Museum, and it continued to develop through the removal of the medicine bundles from public display in 1973. While the memoranda do not show that the NPS was directly responding to the concerns of American Indians, the removal of the medicine bundles was nonetheless a step towards appropriate management of sensitive materials, and it happened as a reaction to the protests of American Indians at the time. The political and social discourses that emanated from the protests by American Indians throughout the country dramatically shaped the beginning of the Indian Arts

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<sup>264</sup> Clyde Hall, interview with the author, March 25, 2016.

Museum. At stake was the representation of American Indian culture to the American public in a national park that was and is a part of the homeland of many tribes. This quiet, unassuming museum on the shores of Jackson Lake existed at the intersection of the future and the past of American Indian material culture displays. Depending on the viewer, the Indian Arts Museum represented the arts of American Indians or the legacies of colonialism and American Indian genocide. While it was planned to be an exhibit of American Indian art, the museum was a contested ground at the intersection of conflicting and shifting narratives.

## Chapter Eight: *Indian Pride on the Move*

After the dedication of the Indian Arts Museum in 1972, the history of the artifacts in the Vernon collection became more stable. Between 1965 and 1972, the artifacts had been managed and interpreted by four different groups: Vernon, the JHPI, the MAI, and the NPS. Beginning in 1972, the NPS managed the collection and its interpretation,<sup>265</sup> and the public discourse concerning American Indian rights increasingly impacted the narrative of the NPS. A prime example of the NPS's evolving narrative concerning the display of American Indian artifacts materialized in the travelling display of artifacts from the Vernon Collection titled *Indian Pride on the Move (Indian Pride)* that toured the United States in 1976 and 1977. *Indian Pride* coincided with the NPS's bicentennial celebrations of the American Revolution, and the decisions made by the NPS concerning the objectives, route, and form of the exhibit reflect the social and political discourses of the 1970s. *Indian Pride* indicated a movement toward more accessible and inclusive museum displays for the NPS, but at the same time, *Indian Pride* was moored in the conventional museum display that pervaded the Indian Arts Museum at Colter Bay.

The concerns of American Indian protestors became steadily more visible on the national stage in the first decade of the display of the Vernon Collection by the NPS. Building upon the protests of the American Indian Movement (AIM), detailed more extensively in the previous chapter, American Indian leaders increasingly turned to the U.S. court system to secure their civil rights. After a series of laws in the nineteenth and

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<sup>265</sup> The Vernon Collection was on loan to the NPS from the JHPI until 1976, but I have found no evidence that the JHPI endeavored to shape the NPS's policies concerning the collection after they loaned it.

early-twentieth centuries that aimed to forcefully assimilate American Indians and eliminate tribal lands and sovereignty (for example, the Civilization Fund Act (1819), the Indian Removal Act (1830), and the Dawes Act (1887)),<sup>266</sup> the courts and Congress began to support American Indian sovereignty and rights through measures such as the Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968 (see Chapter Six for more information). In the 1970s, American Indian protestors instigated the passage of the Indian Self Determination and Education Act in 1975, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act in 1978, and in the same year, the Indian Child Welfare Act.<sup>267</sup> These pieces of legislation are evidence that the concerns of American Indians influenced the national dialogue, and taken as a whole, they represented significant steps toward ensuring sovereignty and political, economic, and civil rights for American Indians and tribes.

Surrounded by these changing political and cultural discourses in the United States, the Indian Arts Museum debuted at a time when the public display of American Indian culture was being transformed by Natives and non-Natives alike. *Indian Pride* is an example of how this display was shaped by diverse voices. When the Indian Arts Museum opened in 1972, it displayed approximately half of the 1,400 items in the whole collection. The items that were not on display were being held at the museum headquarters of the NPS in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. The NPS chose 110 of these artifacts for *Indian Pride*, and the birth of the idea for the exhibit is a source of dispute. The NPS press releases and pamphlets about *Indian Pride* state that Grand Teton

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<sup>266</sup> Patricia Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest* (New York : W. W. Norton & Co., 1987), 194-200.

<sup>267</sup> Keiter, *To Conserve Unimpaired*, 125.

National Park Superintendent Gary Everhardt originally conceived the exhibit in 1973,<sup>268</sup> but the earliest record I have found for the exhibit is the Agenda and Minutes for the JHPI Annual Meeting in September of 1971. During this meeting, the JHPI approved the use of materials from the Vernon Collection that were in Harpers Ferry for an “extension program.”<sup>269</sup> The precise date for the beginning of the idea of *Indian Pride* is of little importance except for the fact that it indicates whose narrative was imposed on the exhibit first. While we have no indication of the JHPI’s goals for the proposed exhibit, the fact that they proposed it before the Indian Arts Museum even opened indicates the desire of the JHPI to display the artifacts to the public rather than store them in a warehouse. Additionally, the proposal of an “extension program”<sup>270</sup> indicated that they were open to more inventive displays than might have been achieved in a traditional museum. The fact that the NPS later maintained that the idea for the travelling exhibit had originated with Everhardt may have been due to a lack of information, or it could have been due to the internal politics of the NPS. Everhardt had been the Superintendent of Grand Teton National Park until 1975 when he was appointed as director of the NPS. He served as director for two years, between 1975 and 1977. When the publications for *Indian Pride* were being written, it may have been convenient to give Everhardt the credit for *Indian Pride* in order to paint him and the NPS in a positive light. As I explain in this chapter, the NPS depicted *Indian Pride* as a great success, and they may have been eager to take credit. However, the written historical records that I have found do not reference

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<sup>268</sup> Susan Edelstein, “NPS takes ‘Indian Pride’ to the people,” December 1976, accessed March 23, 2016, <http://npshistory.com/newsletters/courier/newsletter-v11n14.pdf>

<sup>269</sup> Agenda and minutes for JHPI Annual Meeting, September 9-10, 1971, Folder: JHPI Archives 43, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

the source of the statement that Everhardt conceived of the idea for the travelling exhibit, and the reason for the discrepancy in the record may never be known. What this discrepancy represents is the fact that the narrative for *Indian Pride* was marked by different narratives, and those narratives, by design or by accident, did not always represent the written historical record.

Much like the planning for the dedication of the Indian Arts Museum, the analysis of the planning for *Indian Pride* illuminates the shifting and sometimes conflicting narratives of the NPS concerning the display of ethnographic objects. The JHPI had renewed its loan of the Vernon Collection to the NPS for another five years in 1973,<sup>271</sup> and in 1974, with the Indian Arts Museum open for its second full season, the NPS began planning in earnest for *Indian Pride*.<sup>272</sup> The planning evokes the tension that was evident in the dedication of the Indian Arts Museum. On one hand was the celebration of the beauty of the artifacts and a veneration of David T. Vernon, and on the other hand was the desire to make the exhibit less of a “white man’s affair”<sup>273</sup> by including American Indians in the presentation and interpretation of the artifacts. The NPS wanted to present itself and its history in a positive light, and it wanted to incorporate some of the social

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<sup>271</sup> Gene Setzer, letter to Roland H. Walker, Director NPS, June 21, 1973, Folder: GRTE VC 1973-1979, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>272</sup> Joel Bernstein, letter to Charles McCurdy, February 4, 1974, Folder: IPOTM, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY, and Gary Everhardt, memorandum to Regional Director, Rocky Mountain, February 26, 1974, Folder: IPOTM, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>273</sup> Gary Everhardt, memorandum to Director, Midwest Region, March 13, 1972, Folder: GRTE VC 1970-1972, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

and political discourses of the day that demanded more inclusive, egalitarian, and diversified interpretations of American history.

Concurrently, the planning for the exhibit was embedded in the NPS planning for the bicentennial celebrations of the American Revolution. While *Indian Pride* was not officially a part of the bicentennial celebrations, it travelled the country while these events were happening and was impacted by the celebratory narratives propagated by the NPS. In her thesis “In Service of Society: Conflicts of Curatorship in 1976 Bicentennial Museum Exhibitions,” Colleen C. Griffiths concludes that “Curators designed bicentennial exhibits that overwhelmingly placed emphasis on commonalities between Americans that renewed their faith in their country and its political institutions.”<sup>274</sup> Reeling from the political and social climate related to the Watergate scandal, the end of the Vietnam war, and the civil rights protests of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Griffiths claims that “central constructions of national identity in bicentennial exhibitions promoted national mythologies and ignored the contradictions, dissent, and violence in the American past. Overwhelmingly, visitors responded positively to the exhibits’ messages, which confirmed that like the federal government, they sought reassurance in a mythic past.”<sup>275</sup> As I explain in this chapter, many visitors responded positively to *Indian Pride*, but due to the limitations in the written historical record, we do not have a record of the negative reactions to the exhibit (if they existed). Nevertheless, *Indian Pride*, with

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<sup>274</sup> Colleen C. Griffiths, “In Service of Society: Conflicts of Curatorship in 1976 Bicentennial Museum Exhibitions” (master’s thesis, University of North Carolina, Wilmington, 2010), 13.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

its conflation of American Indian material culture and its avoidance of controversy echoed and confirmed this “mythic past.”<sup>276</sup>

In a 1974 memorandum titled “Selling Points on the Proposed Indian Arts Traveling Exhibit, ‘Indian Pride on the Move’,” Charles McCurdy, the chief naturalist at Grand Teton National Park, outlined his arguments for the upcoming exhibit to Gary Everhardt, the Superintendent of Grand Teton. In his statements, McCurdy neatly highlights the evolving narrative of the NPS within the space of the cultural and political discourses of the 1970s. McCurdy’s words indicate how *Indian Pride* was a materialization of this changing discourse. McCurdy wrote:

[I]n our concern for the quality of the urban environment and for the disenfranchised of the inner city, it is easy to overlook the fact that there are equally deprived people in the rural regions of this country and especially of the west. . . . People living in the wide open spaces of the west are culturally deprived and probably the most culturally deprived is the Indian who, for a variety of reasons, seems to be locked on his reservation. The traveling exhibit would not only show some of the finest achievements of man expressing himself through the art (not only of craft work but the art of the dance and of the spoken word), but they would be seeing some of the finest examples of art expression by their own predecessors.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Griffiths, “In Service of Society: Conflicts of Curatorship in 1976 Bicentennial Museum Exhibitions,” 13.

<sup>277</sup> Charles McCurdy, letter to Superintendent (Everhardt), September 9, 1974, Folder: IPOTM, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.



McCurdy's arguments show how the NPS sought to democratize their services and serve everyone, not just the elite or those with easy access to museums and cultural resources. Additionally, McCurdy recognizes that art is more diverse than that which was usually displayed in museums (and was on display in the Indian Arts Museum). Specifically, McCurdy recognizes "the spoken word"<sup>278</sup> as art, indicating the growing recognition of American Indian oral traditions at this time.<sup>279</sup> However, even as McCurdy's words indicated new elements of the narrative of the NPS, his words are also rooted in the unchanged narrative of the Indian Arts Museum at Colter Bay, namely the limited portrayal of the artifacts as works of art rather than as important links between American Indians and their past, present, and future.

McCurdy's memorandum is doubly valuable because he illuminates the NPS's discourse about American Indian involvement in the planning for the bicentennial.

McCurdy writes:

What Director [of the NPS] Hartzog had to say about the lack of Indian involvement in the Bicentennial is certainly true from our little bit of experience here. It is my understanding that Indian people, such as the Wind River people, definitely do feel left out – feel that the Indian has not been recognized in the Bicentennial. Whether this is of his own doing or whether it's simply the result of political action, I can't say. You only have to look at Wyoming's effort in the

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<sup>278</sup> Charles McCurdy, letter to Superintendent (Everhardt), September 9, 1974.

<sup>279</sup> John Miles Foley, "Forward," *Native American Oral Traditions, Collaboration and Interpretation*, ed. Larry Evers and Barre Toelken, accessed March 23, 2016, [http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=usupress\\_pubs](http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=usupress_pubs), vii.

Bicentennial (development of a park at Independence Rock) to see that the Bicentennial is basically a white mans' edification.<sup>280</sup>

Echoing Everhardt's desire to include American Indians in the dedication of the Indian Arts Museum, McCurdy's statements show that the inclusion of American Indians was a part of the NPS's overall discourse at this time. Regarding the planning for *Indian Pride*, McCurdy's words show that the NPS did not want *Indian Pride* to be simply a white man's interpretation of American Indian artifacts, a desire that was absent approximately five years prior when the NPS planned the Indian Arts Museum.

The final piece of McCurdy's memorandum that is notable is his statement of the purposes of *Indian Pride*. McCurdy wrote, "the main purpose for the traveling exhibit is to instill an appreciation for part of our cultural heritage – one that has been overlooked for a long time. But if, at the same time, it can win friends for the Park Service, that too would be great."<sup>281</sup> The NPS's narrative was two-pronged and caught in the social and political discourses of the day. Though *Indian Pride* was not a part of the official NPS celebrations of the Bicentennial, its narrative sought to broadly celebrate this part of "our cultural heritage"<sup>282</sup> and to present the NPS in a positive light. In other words, *Indian Pride* was a materialization of the internal and external discourse of the NPS.

In July of 1976, *Indian Pride* was ready for its maiden voyage. The exhibit was housed in a "used forty foot trailer and International Harvester tractor bought by the Park Service from Kodak."<sup>283</sup> The green and white trailer, a repurposed mobile film lab, had

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<sup>280</sup> Charles McCurdy, letter to Superintendent (Everhardt), September 9, 1974.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Joel Bernstein and Glenda Clay Bradshaw, *Indian Pride on the Move: Final Report* (Missoula: University of Montana, 1977), 2.

sixteen-foot expandable sides, and in 1976, the exhibit employed seven crewmembers, five of whom were American Indians. The exhibit was designed and staffed in conjunction with the University of Montana, and 110 artifacts from the Vernon Collection in Harpers Ferry were on display behind plexiglass cases without any interpretive labels. *Indian Pride* operated in 1976 and 1977, but my most abundant source for information, the document titled *Indian Pride on the Move: Final Report*, was published in January of 1977 and it concerns the 1976 tour. “Final Report” does not include information about the staffing, displays, or itineraries for the 1977 season. Nonetheless, some documentation exists for 1977, and the 1976 and 1977 documents indicate that the goals of *Indian Pride* were consistent for both years. According to Joel Bernstein, the Project Director, and Brenda Clay Bradshaw, the Associate Project Director for *Indian Pride*:

The concept of the “Indian Pride on the Move” program was an entirely new one for the National Park Service. One of its major goals was to bring one aspect of the National Park Service to the people. . . “Indian Pride on the Move” also intended to foster an appreciation of the esthetic qualities of Native American art and to bring people greater awareness and enjoyment of Indian culture. The Vernon Collection was interpreted as art with supportive cultural and historical information. It was not a vehicle for promotion of political messages not directly related to the artistic qualities of the exhibit.<sup>284</sup>

This last point is notable because it is a veiled reference to the NPS’s agenda of consensus building that Griffiths pointed to in her thesis. Though Bernstein and

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<sup>284</sup> Bernstein and Bradshaw, *Indian Pride*, 2.

Bradshaw do not indicate this goal directly, their words emphasize that the NPS did not want *Indian Pride* to be controversial or to be an explicit response to the protests of American Indians.

Prior to the dedication of *Indian Pride*, five people were hired as interpreters and two were hired with the title “Truck Driver/Interpreter.”<sup>285</sup> Though I have found no written record that the NPS selectively hired American Indians, this was evidently a goal because all of the designated interpreters who were hired identified themselves as American Indian. According to Bernstein and Bradshaw, “Over fifty people, approximately thirty percent of whom were identifiably American Indian, applied for the jobs.”<sup>286</sup> The staff members for 1976 were Rosella Red Wolf Covington (Crow), R. Corky Covington (Colville), Betty White (Salish), Germaine White (Salish), Jeanette Wolfley (Shoshone-Bannock/Navajo), Mark Gadsby (Anglo), and Peter Yegen (Anglo).<sup>287</sup> The fact that the NPS hired five interpreters who identified themselves as American Indian is significant because it indicates that the NPS wanted *Indian Pride* to be a new type of museum exhibit. This new style of exhibit would push against what Angela Cavender Wilson defines as “non-Indian perceptions of American Indian history.”<sup>288</sup> “Since its inception,” Wilson writes, “the area of American Indian history has been dominated by non-Indian historians who use non-Indian sources to create non-Indian interpretations about American Indians and their pasts.”<sup>289</sup> The Indian Arts

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<sup>285</sup> Bernstein and Bradshaw, *Indian Pride*, 14.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>288</sup> Angela Cavender Wilson, “Power of the Spoken Word, Native Oral Traditions in American Indian History” in *Rethinking American Indian History*, ed. Donald L. Fixico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 101.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*

Museum, with its employment of American Indian interpreters, was a first step toward the NPS's move toward including American Indians in the interpretive process, and the hiring of five American Indian interpreters for *Indian Pride* continued this new direction for the NPS.

The dedication for *Indian Pride* occurred on July 12, 1976 at National Capital Parks in Washington D.C.<sup>290</sup> Present at the dedication were the crew members of the exhibit, Mr. and Mrs. Laurance S. Rockefeller, Gary Everhardt (at that time the director of the NPS), Mrs. Vernon and her two sons (David T. Vernon had passed away in 1973). During his speech at the dedication, Rockefeller publically announced the JHPI's plans to donate the Vernon Collection to the NPS.<sup>291</sup> The first stop after the dedication was the Mound City Group National Monument in Ohio where *Indian Pride* was stationed for two days and the staff recorded that approximately 400 people visited the exhibit. *Indian Pride* travelled from July to December 1976, and it stopped at Indian reservations, national parks, national monuments, and towns in Ohio, Indiana, Nebraska, Wyoming, Montana, Washington, Idaho, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas.<sup>292</sup> The crew members took turns driving ahead of the tour to do advance preparation, giving tours of the exhibit, showing slides and films, and giving presentations in the community. The crew estimated that in 1976 over 25,000 people visited *Indian Pride* on Indian reservations, and overall, "40,000 people visited Indian Pride during its tour and approximately 7500 attended evening programs at the rig and out-reach programs

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<sup>290</sup> Bernstein and Bradshaw, *Indian Pride*, 33.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>292</sup> Department of the Interior News release, June 30, 1976, Folder: IPOTM, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

presented to school classes and assemblies, prisons, clubs, and civic and tribal organizations, etc. An average of 430 people attended each day.”<sup>293</sup>



Figure 8: Dedication of *Indian Pride on the Move*, July 12, 1976<sup>294</sup>

In addition to detailing the specifics of what happened in 1976, Bernstein and Bradshaw highlight seven commendatory letters that the NPS received in response to *Indian Pride*. The ethnic background of five of the authors of the letters is unclear, but one letter is from Wendell Chino (“President of the Mescalero Apache Tribe”) and another is from Richard A. Halfmoon (“chairman of the Nez Perce Tribal Executive

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<sup>293</sup> Bernstein and Bradshaw, *Indian Pride*, 49.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, n.p.

Committee”).<sup>295</sup> In an article in the *Lewiston Morning Tribune*, Halfmoon stated of *Indian Pride*:

It is an excellent display of artifacts and shows the expert work of the early natives of our country. Classes are being taught to revive and retain this important part of the Indian culture and I hope the itinerary of Indian Pride on the Move, which includes reservations and small towns where Indians reside, may inspire our young people to learn the creative art work of their culture.<sup>296</sup>

The other letters that the authors quote are similarly upbeat, but we must be careful not to assume that these letters represent the whole. Bernstein and Bradshaw were deeply invested in *Indian Pride*, and they highlighted the success of *Indian Pride* while minimizing the problems. Indeed, at the end of their report, Bernstein and Bradshaw conclude, “‘Indian Pride on the Move’ was a success. . . It is the hope of the contractor that [the exhibit] be continued. There are still problems to work out, . . . but the key to its success is the commitment and dedication of the crew and the enthusiasm of visitors.”<sup>297</sup>

The contractors were Bernstein and Bradshaw, and they were trying to prompt the NPS to support *Indian Pride* for another year (or more). Bernstein and Bradshaw’s report represents another set of narratives that shaped the artifacts of the Vernon Collection.

The NPS’s narrative concerning *Indian Pride* is evident in the press releases sent out to communities in advance of the tour and in the descriptions of the exhibits. The article “Indian Pride on Move” that appeared in the *Char-Koosta*, the “newspaper of the Salish, Pend D’Oreilles and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation” in Montana is

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<sup>295</sup> Bernstein and Bradshaw, *Indian Pride*, 49-50.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

almost a direct copy of the “Introduction” text in the Appendix of *Indian Pride on the Move Final Report*. The article states that the exhibit “will be an entertaining and educational exhibit” and “one of the major goals in planning this exhibition will be to bring the National Parks to the people.”<sup>298</sup> Additionally, “the exhibition will go primarily to small rural communities and Indian reservations . . . and will bring a major cultural event to people who would otherwise be unable or unlikely to visit the Parks.”<sup>299</sup> The article diverges from the official text by stating that the exhibit will be in St. Ignatius City Park between August 14 and 17, and “local area members, Germaine & Betty White, . . . will be available at the exhibition to assist people who may have questions concerning the Native Arts on display.”<sup>300</sup>

Analogous with the Indian Arts Museum at Colter Bay, *Indian Pride* was designed to exist without interpretive labels or displays. Instead, Susan P. Edelstein wrote in the December 1976 NPS newsletter:

Indian Pride is an experience more than an exhibit. The huge green and white tractor trailer attracts curiosity as Indian dance music beckons from its speaker systems. Inside are no labels, no self-guided tour booklets. Rather, one must take the time to FEEL the aura of the articles, which speak of creativity, patience, craftsmanship, and beauty, and to talk with the staff members.”<sup>301</sup>

The atmosphere of the exhibit was meant to evoke a feeling of the artifacts, much like the Indian Arts Museum. Edelstein interviewed the staff members of *Indian Pride* for her

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<sup>298</sup> “Indian Pride on the Move” *Char-Koosta*, August 1976, accessed March 23, 2016, <http://dtl.lib.umd.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/charkoosta/id/6728/rec/1>.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid

<sup>301</sup> Susan Edelstein, “NPS takes ‘Indian Pride’ to the people,” December 1976, accessed March 23, 2016, <http://npshistory.com/newsletters/courier/newsletter-v11n14.pdf>.



article, and she reported on their general morale when she visited them in San Carlos, Arizona, in December of 1976. Edelstein recounted some of the frustrations of the staff:

‘I could write a book,’ sighs Rosella Covington, the field supervisor. The book would tell about struggles with hectic schedules, balky and bulky equipment, and exhibits that required innovation each time they were set up. But it would also tell about Navajo children who seemed surprised to realize that they were one Indian nation among many, and an old Colville woman at Nespelem who broke into a broad grin and started naming friends who appeared in the old photos on the reverse projection screen.<sup>302</sup>

As Edelstein was writing for the NPS, her words must be taken within context. While it is not evident that Edelstein had any ulterior interest in the continuation of *Indian Pride*, she represented the narrative of the NPS – that *Indian Pride* was an innovative, inclusive display bringing American Indian artifacts and the NPS to the people.

Perhaps more impactful than the narrative of the NPS was the narrative that each crewmember brought to the exhibit. As the exhibit featured no written interpretation, the presentation of the exhibit was the responsibility of the staff. I found no written documentation of the general script for the museum (perhaps because one did not exist), but the success of the exhibit is widely documented to be the result of the crewmembers’ dedication to the artifacts. The staff evidently also created interpretive materials to enhance the exhibit. According to Bernstein and Bradshaw:

Special “effects” used in interpretation on Indian Pride included craft demonstrations of bead and quill working, use of the National Geographic Society

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<sup>302</sup> Edelstein, “NPS takes ‘Indian Pride’ to the people.”

map of Indian tribal regions, and a special “touch and feel” board developed by the interpreters . . . to let people experience the actual textures and qualities of the materials such as buckskin, beads, quills, etc., which are normally only seen through glass.<sup>303</sup>

These “special effects” are worth examining because they indicate how the display and interpretation of American Indian artifacts (and other artifacts more generally) were changing in the 1970s. The craft demonstrations performed by the staff members is reminiscent of the craft demonstrations taking place in the Indian Arts Museum in Grand Teton National Park. The “touch and feel” board is noteworthy because nothing like it existed at the Indian Arts Museum, and it represented a tactile way to interact with the exhibit. It was yet another way of democratizing the exhibit, of making it more accessible to people, especially children. The “touch and feel” board foreshadows the exhibit in the Colter Bay Visitors Center of the David T. Vernon Collection that exists in 2016. A few of the artifacts from the collection are currently on display behind glass, but of equal size is a display where visitors can touch and learn about pieces of hides, quills, trade goods, antlers and horns, wood, and pigment. This interactive display is a descendant of the “touch and feel” display created by the crewmembers of *Indian Pride* to make the exhibit more tangible.

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<sup>303</sup> Bernstein and Bradshaw, *Indian Pride*, 39.



Figure 9: Betty White and the "Touch and Feel" Board<sup>304</sup>

The successes of the crewmembers is a dominant part of the narrative of *Indian Pride* by the NPS, but the damage done to the artifacts in 1976 is not. Nowhere in Edelstein's article for the NPS newsletter does she mention the state of the artifacts, and neither do Bernstein and Bradshaw. What exists are two memoranda from Fonda Ghiardi-Thomsen of the Division of Museum Services, NPS, in October of 1976 and in December of 1977. Taken together, they provide an alternate narrative of what happened to the artifacts while *Indian Pride* toured. In the October memorandum, Ghiardi addresses the issue of sensitive artifacts, a common concern at the Indian Arts Museum, and the reaction of the NPS indicates the movement toward recognition and validation of those concerns. Ghiardi-Thomsen wrote, "Seven items had been found sensitive to some native peoples. These items were removed and new objects were mounted in their

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<sup>304</sup> Bernstein and Bradshaw, *Indian Pride*, 40.

place.”<sup>305</sup> The fact that the NPS permitted the staff to remove the sensitive objects from display indicates how the NPS’s narrative concerning American Indian artifacts was changing in response to the cultural and political discourse of the time. Ghiardi-Thomsen’s October memorandum also outlines the environmental conditions of *Indian Pride*: “Due to extremely humid conditions, the tomahawk pipe bowls are rusting. . . . Some items such as the bear claw necklace, some leggings and bags were sliding off their mounts. . . . The burglar alarm is now working effectively. . . . water has been leaking in and wetting the carpet, along with other environmental problems.”<sup>306</sup> Based on these problems, the artifacts in *Indian Pride* were subject to immense insecurity and environmental degradation while on exhibit. In the January 1977 memorandum, Ghiardi-Thomsen wrote, “Overall the objects were in fair condition” when the trailer was unloaded in December, but a few objects should not go back on exhibit, and a few needed new mounts.<sup>307</sup> Ghiardi-Thomsen stated that a Yakima dress and a “bow case & quiver” were not to be exhibited again, and she explained the more general damage:

The more fragile materials such as the Yakima dress showed the most damage.

There are now extremely hard areas in the once soft hide. These pieces were selected overall for their resistance to the harsh conditions the show would entail, but the conditions were more extreme than we imagined. Had they been oil paintings we probably would not have a flake of paint left on the canvas. . .

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<sup>305</sup> Bernstein and Bradshaw, *Indian Pride*, 69.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

Environmental stability must be considered if we are going to avoid consumptive use of these irreplaceable artifacts.<sup>308</sup>

Ghiardi-Thomsen's statements represent a curator's point of view concerning *Indian Pride*, and her recommendations formed a part of the overall discourse of the NPS.

In 1977, *Indian Pride* travelled only to reservations. According to T. Hewitt and Diane Nicholson, in a memorandum to Associate Regional Director, Operations, Midwest Region, "the goal this year, by only visiting reservations, was to show the Indian that the National Park Service was willing to try to serve the Indians' needs with programs such as this. In effect, its role was public relations and it seems to have worked well. Visitor response had been very good in the places they have already been, and will probably continue to be so."<sup>309</sup> *Indian Pride* travelled to communities in North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, and Utah during the summer of 1977, and in September of that year, the artifacts that had been on exhibit with *Indian Pride* were placed into storage at the Colter Bay Visitors Center in Grand Teton National Park.<sup>310</sup> The exhibit was discontinued after 1977 because funding was no longer available for it.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Bernstein and Bradshaw, *Indian Pride*, 62.

<sup>309</sup> T. Hewitt and Diane Nicholson, memorandum to Chief of Interpretation, July 11, 1977, Folder: IPOTM, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>310</sup> Regional Curator, Rocky Mountain Region (Ed Jahns), memorandum to Indian Liaison and Assistance Specialist, Rocky Mountain Region, September 9, 1977, Folder: IPOTM, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>311</sup> Regional Director, Midwest Region, memorandum to Assistant to the Director, Washington Office, October 13, 1977, Folder: IPOTM, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

This “museummobile,”<sup>312</sup> as it was categorized by Nathan Stollow in *Conservations and Exhibitions*, represents an experiment by the NPS and the JHPI that connects with the cultural and political discourses of this time. *Indian Pride* can be seen as a democratizing of the Indian Arts Museum at a time when American Indian civil and political rights were being affirmed in the U.S. legal system and the roles of minorities and women were beginning to be emphasized in American history. The fact that *Indian Pride* travelled specifically to Native communities and was staffed primarily by American Indians indicates that the National Park Service was trying to bridge the gap between Native communities and the display of American Indian artifacts.

*Indian Pride* was not without its faults, however. The physical deterioration of many artifacts indicates that the NPS was unaware of the environmental fluctuations a travelling exhibit would endure. Concurrently, the exhibit could be seen as patronizing in the manner that it presumed to educate American Indians about their own art. Furthermore, as the Vernon Collection contained artifacts from over one hundred tribes, *Indian Pride* brought artifacts from a variety of tribes to specific reservations under the misleading and erroneous umbrella of “Indian Art.” Finally, it is ironic that one of the stated goals of *Indian Pride* was to bring the NPS to the people when American Indians had been forcefully removed from their ancestral lands in order to make way for many of the parks operated by the NPS.<sup>313</sup> While *Indian Pride* represented a movement toward a more inclusive display and interpretation of the American Indian objects, the exhibit

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<sup>312</sup> Nathan Stollow, *Conservations and Exhibitions, Packing, Transport, Storage and Environmental Considerations* (London: Butterworth & Co., 1987), 176.

<sup>313</sup> See Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*.

existed on the backs of centuries of displacement, poverty, disease, forced assimilation, and the legacies of colonialism wrought by the United States and its citizens.

## Chapter Nine: Rethinking the Indian Arts Museum

“In the display marked ‘The British Threat’ there is reference to ‘French-Canadian half-breeds.’ This latter may be an attempt to convey how people talked then but it does not come off. Instead, it is simply a racial slur against people of part Indian ancestry. It is offensive to anyone who is concerned with the eradication of racial prejudice.” - Dr. Richard. L. Epstein<sup>314</sup>

This complaint by Epstein, who identified himself as a professor of mathematics at Iowa State University, was lodged against the Indian Arts Museum in May of 1980. Epstein’s complaint is important for two reasons. The first reason is that Epstein lodged his complaint around the time when the NPS was considering redesigning the displays of the Indian Arts Museum. The second is that Epstein’s complaint highlights the impact of the cultural and political discourses of the 1970s, including the effect of the protests by American Indians, on visitor experience at the museum. As Epstein’s complaint indicates, after approximately a decade on display, the artifacts in the Vernon Collection continued to be a source of controversy for the NPS. Moreover, the artifacts continued to be shaped by overlapping, conflicting, and diverging narratives. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Indian Arts Museum was reevaluated, and the NPS’s narrative revealed a more sophisticated and nuanced interpretation of the artifacts and their roles in American Indian culture. Significantly, based on the situation at the Indian Arts Museum, the NPS developed a strategy for dealing with complaints about museum displays that resonated through the rest of the NPS’s museums. In 1990, the protests of American Indians concerning the display of skeletal remains, objects of cultural patrimony, and burial items in institutions receiving federal support culminated in the passage of the Native American

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<sup>314</sup> Richard. L. Epstein, Complaint, May 1980, Folder: GRTE VC 1980-1982, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.



Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). The passage of NAGPRA inaugurated another period in the history of the Indian Arts Museum. Following NAGPRA, the next significant event regarding the Indian Arts Museum was its closure in 2011. After nearly forty years on display, the NPS sent the artifacts that comprise the Vernon Collection to the Western Archaeological and Conservation Center (WACC) in Tucson, Arizona, and the Indian Arts Museum was closed. This final era of the history of the Vernon Collection shows how the narratives of American Indians, the NPS, the JHPI, and even the MAI continued to shape the collection in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s.

Protests by American Indians gained significant traction in the 1970s and 1980s. As outlined in the previous chapter, acts such as the Indian Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act of 1975 had begun a new wave of acts ensuring tribal sovereignty and power for American Indians and tribes. The inroads in the legal system continued with the Indian Mineral Development Act of 1982 that “gives tribes the flexibility to enter into joint-venture agreements with mineral developers in order to maximize the tribes’ financial return from their mineral resources.”<sup>315</sup> Additionally, the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988 “authorizes Indian tribes to engage in gaming, such as bingo and casino gambling, to raise money and promote economic development.”<sup>316</sup> These acts formed an important part of the cultural and political discourse in which the Indian Arts Museum was operating in these years. As I demonstrate in this chapter, complaints against the museum were recorded and taken more seriously beginning in the late 1970s. Concerning the inappropriate display of

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<sup>315</sup> Stephen L. Peyar, *The Rights of American Indians and Their Tribes* (New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc., 1997), 11.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

American Indian artifacts, the most significant piece of American legislation is NAGPRA, but it was not enacted until 1990. Before we examine NAGPRA's impact on the museum, it is helpful first to elucidate how the staff at the Indian Arts Museum dealt with concerns about the museum's displays in the late 1970s and 1980s.

The extent that the narrative of the NPS had changed over the course of the 1970s is evident in the internal Grand Teton National Park document titled, "Interpretive Goals for Indian Art Museum." Though it is not addressed to anyone, the 1978 document was presumably written for the interpreters at the museum by Ellis Richard, the curator.

Richard writes:

These interpretive goals for the Indian Art Museum are really a statement of philosophy from a non-Indian interested in and sympathetic to Native American culture. Both the Chief Naturalist and I share a real feeling that Native Americans should play an active part in the operation of this museum both in the care of the objects and their interpretation to visitors.<sup>317</sup>

Richard's statement echoes the decisions by the NPS to employ American Indian interpreters at the Indian Arts Museum and for *Indian Pride on the Move*, and this statement confirms the practice as a priority for the NPS. Richard's letter also reveals some of the internal discussions and concerns that the interpreters must have voiced to Richard. Richard writes:

Aside from "the goals" here listed, each interpreter working with these exhibits will have to reach a personal decision regarding the nature of what is told and

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<sup>317</sup> Ellis Richard, "Interpretive Goals for Indian Art Museum," June 20, 1978, Folder: GRTE VC 1973-1979, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

what is kept to oneself. I can understand the hesitancy in revealing too much that seems too personal. Nothing sacred needs to be revealed. But the visitor, ideally, should be impressed with the fact that Native American culture and art specifically is as dynamic and sophisticated (if not more so) than their own.<sup>318</sup>

Judging by these statements, the interpreters (or at least some of them) were uncomfortable sharing sensitive cultural information with visitors at the museum. Since we do not currently have written records of the interpreters' concerns, we must presume that aspects of the display of artifacts in the museum continued to be problematic. Though Richard expresses a cultural awareness that was not overtly present in previous years, his solution to the problem reveals the ongoing NPS narrative regarding the concerns of American Indians. Namely, Richard seems to take the interpreters' concerns seriously, but his solution is to quiet the interpreters. He directs the interpreters to give tours of the museum even while they felt that some objects should not be discussed with (or likely be on display to) the general public. Richard's statement is embedded in the cultural and social discourses of the late 1970s; it straddles the divide between cultural sensitivity and ignorance.

Richard proposes five goals for the interpreters at the Indian Arts Museum, and all of them emphasize the dynamic nature and ongoing importance of the artifacts in the Vernon Collection. The first goal is representative of the five:

My primary objects in terms of the museum would be to confront the visitor with the living and dynamic presence of Native American culture (through art). That the art cannot be separated from the traditions and culture requires some contact

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<sup>318</sup> Richard, "Interpretive Goals for Indian Art Museum," June 20, 1978.

with the full culture of the Native American. The visitor should have a sense of being exposed to the full range of culture through sight and sound. The final impact should probably be that Native American culture is diverse, complicated, not a single culture, rational and living.<sup>319</sup>

For the first time in the written records that I have found, the NPS's narrative concerning the Vernon Collection does not conflate the artifacts to represent all of American Indian culture. The artifacts were recognized as being from different tribes and from different cultures. Additionally, the phrase "confront the visitor with the living and dynamic presence of Native American culture" directly refutes the myth of the vanishing Indian. Since Vernon had collected the artifacts in the early twentieth century, the artifacts had been etched with the narrative that American Indians were disappearing, and this statement by Richard marks a significant turn in the narrative of the NPS. Finally, Richard's statement indicates some of the acknowledged limits of the Indian Arts Museum. Through "sight and sound,"<sup>320</sup> he writes, the Indian Arts Museum was meant to expose the visitor to American Indian culture. Richard seems to imply that exposure does not constitute understanding, but given the constraints of the museum setting, it was the best they could do.

The next indication of the narrative of the NPS comes from a series of letters sent between the NPS and the MAI from 1979 to 1981. This element of the narrative of the NPS does not concern the display and interpretation of the artifacts; instead, it concerns the ownership of artifacts. The exchange is significant because it indicates how the narratives of the NPS and the MAI had changed since the MAI curated the Vernon

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<sup>319</sup> Richard, "Interpretive Goals for Indian Art Museum," June 20, 1978.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

Collection in the 1960s under contract with the JHPI. By 1979, the MAI had undergone a court-ordered inventory, and nearly every one of its former staff, including Dr. Frederick J. Dockstader, had either resigned or been forced to resign pursuant to the scandal that rocked the museum in the mid-1970s.<sup>321</sup> In November of 1979, Richard of Grand Teton National Park sent a letter to the Registrar of the MAI requesting information about the Vernon Collection and forty-three items that “were originally part of your collection.”<sup>322</sup> This indicates that the NPS knew that some of the artifacts in the Vernon Collection as it existed in 1979 had come from the MAI. Nearly a year later, in October of 1980, Roland Force, the director of the MAI, wrote to Richard that only forty of the forty-three items had been deaccessioned from the MAI collection. Force wrote that two out of the three items were a part of a pair, and the three items “were sent by mistake.”<sup>323</sup> I highlight this feud because the MAI was exerting its claim to the three artifacts and asking for them to be removed from the NPS’s collections. It is not identical to the concerns of American Indians concerning the inappropriate display of artifacts, but it represents a challenge to the NPS’s ownership and display of these artifacts, and the resolution of this feud demonstrates new elements of the NPS’s and the MAI’s narratives.

In response to Force’s request, the NPS responded with a firm “no.” On October 31, 1980, Jack Stark, the superintendent of Grand Teton National Park, wrote that they will not return the three items back to the MAI because, he stated:

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<sup>321</sup> Grace Glueck “Court Orders an Inventory of Indian Museum Objects,” *The New York Times*, September 6, 1975.

<sup>322</sup> Ellis Richard, letter to Registrar, MAI, November 29, 1979, Folder: GRTE VC 1973-1979, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>323</sup> Roland Force, letter to Ellis Richard, October 1, 1980, Folder: GRTE VC 1980-1989, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

The Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc., donated the Collection to Grand Teton National Park with the agreement that we would retain the Collection here in the park. It's our opinion that all objects that once belonged to the Heye Foundation were exchanged for objects in the original Vernon Collection. Additionally, two of the three objects in question are on display at the Colter Bay Indian Art Museum. Removing them would partially disrupt the Collection. We can't, therefore, honor your request at this time.<sup>324</sup>

Roland Force evidently wrote back to Stark and re-requested the return of the three artifacts, but that letter is not in the Grand Teton National Park Archives. Stark wrote to Force in February of 1981:

We seem to have disturbed some sleeping dogs with our efforts to locate information on the David Vernon collection . . . I tried to state in my last letter that we are not at liberty to dispose of any part of the collection as we might see fit. We accepted the Vernon collection from the Jackson Hole Preserve, Incorporated with the understanding that we would not split up any part of it for loans, gifts or transfers to any other museum. We are still under those obligations and are prevented from returning any objects at this time.

Our position has always been that the collection was donated to the National Park Service from its legal owner, the Jackson Hole Preserve, Incorporated, Laurance Rockefeller, President. It is our position in the matter that

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<sup>324</sup> Jack Stark, letter to Roland Force, October 31, 1980, Folder: JHPI Archives 74, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

we have no authority to question the history of ownership or composition of the collection.<sup>325</sup>

We have no record of the response (if any) of Force to Stark, but the MAI's request to regain possession of the three artifacts indicates that the practices of the MAI and the MAI's narrative toward American Indian artifacts had changed considerably since the days of Dockstader's directorship. The collections of the MAI were no longer under the control of one man, and Dockstader's "erratic record-keeping in attempting to keep track of the museum's estimated 4.5 million pieces"<sup>326</sup> was a legacy they were trying to amend.

Concurrently, Stark's statements are important because they indicate that the narrative of the NPS concerning the artifacts in the Vernon Collection was nuanced. The rejection of the MAI's request shows that the NPS did not want to disrupt the display of the Vernon Collection, a desire that was echoed by Ellis Richard's advice to the interpreters to simply not talk about the sacred elements of the artifacts on display. However, it is important to remember that the NPS had allowed the closure and removal of medicine bundles from public display earlier in the 1970s based on the concerns of many American Indians. Clearly, the NPS was willing to change the displays, but they were selective as to the reasons and for whom they changed them.

This refusal of the NPS to disturb its displays changed dramatically in the coming years as the displays in the Indian Arts Museum were reevaluated in the early 1980s. As with the beginning of *Indian Pride on the Move*, however, it is not clear where the idea

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<sup>325</sup> Jack Stark, letter to Roland force, February 12, 1981, Folder: JHPI Archives 76, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>326</sup> "Dealer's Papers Sought in Indian Museum Case," *The New York Times*, February 28, 1975.

for reevaluating the displays of the Indian Arts Museum originated. For example, in October of 1980, the JHPI approved \$3,100 as “project expense in support of a National Park Service study of the Colter Bay Museum of Indian Art.”<sup>327</sup> The impetus for the study is not stated in the document. Nonetheless, the funding is a sign that the discourse of the JHPI was still being materialized in the Indian Arts Museum. The funding by the JHPI resulted in the “Task Force Report on Colter Bay Museum” in March of 1981 that was completed by four men: “Marc Sagan, Team Leader, Manager, Harpers Ferry Center; Richard Virgo, Exhibit Designer, Smithsonian Institution; Edward Jahns, Regional Curator, Rocky Mountain Region; [and] Ellis Richard, Curator, Grand Teton National Park.”<sup>328</sup> The author of the report is not stated, but the author writes, “This study, funded by Laurance Rockefeller, was undertaken in order to recommend improvements to the museum complex. My role was to inspect conditions and insure that proper consideration was given to the treatment and care of the many museum quality objects at this museum.”<sup>329</sup> The overall recommendations in the report center on lighting problems, temperature control, accessibility, maintenance, and security. It appears that the sensitive items on display in the museum were not moved, changed, or even evaluated at this time.

The Indian Arts Museum and the narrative of the NPS received a jolt in September of 1981. According to an internal memorandum from John Daugherty, the

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<sup>327</sup> JHPI meeting minutes, October 1980, Folder: JHPI Archives 73, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>328</sup> Task Force Report on Colter Bay Museum March 1981, Folder: 1981 Task Force Report on Colter Bay Museum, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.



historian of Grand Teton National Park, to Edward Jahns, the curator, dated October 1 of that year, a man named Lester Jake visited the Indian Arts Museum and voiced concerns about the inappropriate display of many items. This time, the NPS took note. Jahns writes:

On that evening, I was working the desk at the Colter Bay Visitor Center, when Mr. Jake came in and borrowed the catalogue to tour the museum. He returned and asked if we ever “cleaned” the collection. I told him that the collection received standard curatorial care by professional curators. I experienced a cultural misunderstanding. Mr. Jake was referring to “cleaning” through Native American religious ceremonies.

Mr. Jake introduced himself as a medicine man and a member of a Pacific Northwest tribe on the Klamath River. He felt that some of the objects were improperly displayed and that he felt some of the objects were emanating bad harmony. I asked for some specific examples. Mr. Jake said that 1) some of the Pacific Northwest basket hats should rest in a certain manner. 2) Although emphasizing that he could not speak for the Plains Indians, he believed the pipes should not be connected because their power is intact. 3) Some of the medicine bags are very personal and as religious objects should not be displayed.<sup>330</sup>

In the absence of Jake’s own words, Daugherty’s letter reveals aspects of the museum at this time that are not present in the documents written by the NPS. Based on Jake’s

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<sup>330</sup> John Daugherty, letter to Edward Jahns, October 1, 1981, Folder: GRTE VC 1980-1989, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

concerns, the Indian Arts Museum displayed pipes that were connected, and it still displayed some medicine bundles.

The matter of the medicine bundles is perplexing because according to Clyde Hall, all of the medicine bundles had been removed from display in 1977 or 1978 under the curatorship of Ellis Richard.<sup>331</sup> Indeed, a 1982 memorandum from “Curator, Grand Teton,” to “Regional Director, Rocky Mountain Region,” states that after Clyde Hall and “some other Indians” removed the medicine bundles from display:

[they] then conducted ritual cleansing ceremonies to purify the building and each other. Where the medicine bundles had been, a variety of fetishes, dolls, small decorative items, and reproductive medicine items were displayed. Mr. Hall stressed that for several years there has not been one sensitive object on display at the Museum. Many items currently on display may appear to have belonged to a medicine man, but they did not; they are only artistic similarities.<sup>332</sup>

Based on this document and Clyde Hall’s statements, the medicine bundles that Jake saw were not authentic, but the question remains as to why the NPS continued to display even “reproductive medicine items”<sup>333</sup> in a museum devoted to American Indian arts. Jake’s concerns, the NPS’s reaction to Jake’s concerns, and the complaint lodged by Epstein (see the beginning of this chapter) illustrate some of the ongoing problems at the Indian Arts Museum in the early 1980s. Based on Epstein’s complaint, at least one of the

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<sup>331</sup> Clyde Hall, interview with author, March 26, 2016.

<sup>332</sup> Curator, Grand Teton, memorandum to Regional Director, Rocky Mountain Region, Attention: Edward D. Jahns, Regional Curator, March 11, 1982, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

interpretive labels contained, as he emphasized, a “racial slur,”<sup>334</sup> and the museum continued to display items that at least *appeared* to be sensitive to American Indian tribes.

In 1981, the NPS took steps to evaluate the Indian Arts Museum further. In October of that year, the JHPI approved up to \$45,000 for curatorial work and “additional items of renovation and improvement” at the “Colter Bay Indian Museum.”<sup>335</sup> Once again, even though the Vernon Collection was wholly owned by the NPS at this time, the JHPI asserted its narrative in the ongoing management of the museum, but it is not known at this time the precise intent of the JHPI’s involvement. That October, the NPS began evaluating the museum displays and seeking outside support, specifically from American Indians, concerning sensitive objects. On October 4, 1981, Daugherty wrote that Emma Iron Plume (Oglala-Sioux), a Cultural Resource Specialist at the Rocky Mountain Regional Office (RMRO) of the NPS:

visited the museum last Thursday with three “traditionals” from the Wind River Reservation. She recommended that several elders knowledgeable of “medicine” and traditional religion visit the museum and have input into the proposed rehab. . . . Because of my involvement in the issue, I have some strong feelings about it. We have to be sensitive about NA culture and encourage input from them. Since reading the files, we again have a problem in determining the authority and credibility of the elders. The files indicate that there is no consensus among the

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<sup>334</sup> Richard L. Epstein, Complaint, May 1980, Folder: GRTE VC 1980-1982, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>335</sup> JHPI meeting minutes, October 1981, Folder: JHPI Archives 77, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

Indians about the exhibits. I trust Emma Iron Plume, having worked with her for several years and believe she can locate some elders with substantial credibility. Since the museum will be rehabbed, now is the time for more input. If we get input and change the displays, it should be documented thoroughly for future reference. If a smoking ceremony or “cleansing” seems necessary, let’s do it. (We should attach some conditions to this, however.)<sup>336</sup>

This memorandum indicates elements of the NPS’s narrative concerning the Indian Arts Museum at this time. First, Daugherty demonstrates once again the cultural outreach that the NPS had begun to embrace in the museum a few years prior by emphasizing his desire to “encourage input”<sup>337</sup> from American Indians. Next, Daugherty points out the confusion of the NPS since many American Indians did not agree on what was inappropriate or not (the concerns of Lester Jake compared with Clyde Hall’s are an example). This confusion was partially a result of the tribal origins of the diverse artifacts. What was appropriate display in one tribe was not necessarily appropriate in another.

On October 30, 1981, Emma Iron Plume wrote a memorandum to Edward Jahns, the Regional Curator of the Rocky Mountain Region, and her remarks indicate the cultural awareness that had begun to be materialized in the Indian Arts Museum. She wrote:

While not every Indian visitor (Colter Bay Museum) has ever felt or even indicated to park staff that there was something “wrong” in the museum, there are

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<sup>336</sup> John Daugherty, notes to Bill and Pat, October 4, 1981, Folder: GRTE VC 1980-1982, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

many who did. Current examples being Daugherty's conversation with Lester Jake and my conversation with the Arapahoes who toured the museum with me. . .

There are powerful pieces on display. I am in no position to speak for the pieces but urge you to assist me in working with management to seek the help of medicine men. We (NPS) have never had our museums "worked on" but it has happened in other museums.

Indian relationships with the Service have always dealt with government to government issues. We would be going into the spiritual realm, which requires sensitivity and a low-profile on our part.<sup>338</sup>

Iron Plume's remarks are important because they show the extent of the evolution of the NPS's narrative from the time that the Indian Arts Museum was opened to 1981 and the impact of the cultural and political discourses of the previous years. Where once the NPS advised its museums of the "threats"<sup>339</sup> to exhibits by American Indian protestors, now the NPS (specifically, a female American Indian cultural resource specialist) advised the staff at the Indian Arts Museum that the evaluation of the displays required "sensitivity and a low-profile"<sup>340</sup> for the NPS.

In November of 1981, the concerns of the staff at Grand Teton National Park and Iron Plume (which were predicated by the concerns of many American Indians) were

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<sup>338</sup> Emma Iron Plume, memorandum to Ed Jahns, October 30, 1981, Folder: GRTE VC 1980-1982, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>339</sup> Director, Midwest Region, memorandum to Superintendents, Midwest Region, January 18, 1973, Folder: GRTE VC 1973-1979, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>340</sup> Emma Iron Plume, memorandum to Ed Jahns, October 30, 1981.

brought out of the realm of Grand Teton National Park to the Rocky Mountain Regional Office (RMRO) of the NPS. On November 3, 1981, the Regional Curator, RMRO, wrote to the Associate Regional Director, Park Operations, RMRO:

The display of certain Native American religious objects at Colter Bay Museum in Grand Teton National Park has been brought to my attention as being improper. . . Several objects are ceremonial and contain connotations of a sacred nature. These require special care as they have “power” and must be treated with more sensitivity than is currently being used. . .

I am concerned with the safekeeping of all museum objects, regardless of their applications or connotations. In addition to correct museum techniques, the proper display of objects should consider the religious concerns of all peoples. If there are differences and they cannot be reconciled, then the objects should be withdrawn and other, non-controversial objects used in their places.<sup>341</sup>

Here we find yet another turn in the narrative of the NPS, one that is embedded in the cultural and political discourses that emanated from the protests concerning the inappropriate display of American Indian objects. For the first time in the written record I have found, the NPS asserts that consensus may not be possible, and where consensus cannot be reached, the problematic displays should be changed.

This memorandum also contains three recommendations from Iron Plume. While the recommendations are vague, they are the start for the more detailed recommendations that followed. The recommendations are:

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<sup>341</sup> Regional Curator, memorandum to Associate Regional Director, November 3, 1981, Folder: GRTE VC 1980-1982, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park Moose, WY.

1. The Service should determine if these concerns are great enough, to warrant changing the exhibits.
2. Specific objects that are causing concern should be identified.
3. Corrective measures should be taken where appropriate.<sup>342</sup>

These recommendations, while imprecise, indicate the NPS's increasingly flexible and nuanced narrative. Importantly, Iron Plume's recommendations are based on the idea that exhibits could and should be changed when appropriate, an idea that was not apparent in previous years.

As a result of these consultations and inquiries, Edward Jahns wrote to the Chief Curator at the Harpers Ferry Center. His memorandum shows that he recognizes the relevance of the ongoing concerns at the Indian Arts Museum to the rest of the NPS. Jahns writes, "In my efforts to resolve recent exhibit questions at the Colter Bay Museum, GRTE, I have found myself fighting brush fires. Initially my concern was to find the answers to local problems, then go on. However, I believe we are faced with a universal issue here, one that has Service-wide applicability."<sup>343</sup> Thus Jahns establishes the "Service-wide applicability" of the issues at Colter Bay and recognizes the concerns of American Indians as legitimate matters deserving of action. In order to resolve these questions, Jahns proposes a three-pronged approach:

1. The Service (GRTE initially) will develop policy and procedures for investigating Native American complaints concerning objects on display.

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<sup>342</sup> Regional Curator, memorandum to Associate Regional Director, November 3, 1981.

<sup>343</sup> Ed Jahns, Memorandum to Chief Curator, HFC, December 1, 1981, Folder: GRTE VC 1980-1982, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

2. When necessary, the Service will consult the governing body of the appropriate Tribe and obtain their advice.
3. The Service will evaluate this advice and take suitable action to resolve the issue.<sup>344</sup>

Additionally, Jahns continues, “I sincerely believe that the Service has a heavy responsibility toward the proper display of all museum objects. And most importantly that we should have an action plan of universal application and not merely respond to individual complaints in a more or less haphazard manner.”<sup>345</sup> The Indian Arts Museum was therefore a centerpiece of the NPS’s evolving discourse concerning the display and interpretation of American Indian artifacts.

Jahns’s memorandum was evidently well received because two weeks after he sent it, the Chief of Interpretation at the RMRO sent a memorandum to Regional Director of the RMRO that echoed and reinforced Jahn’s concerns. This memorandum shows once again how the narrative of the NPS had evolved due to the cultural and political discourses of the time. The Chief of Interpretation wrote:

The recent complaints regarding certain objects displayed at the Colter Bay Museum at Grand Teton National Park have shown that the Service lacks a clear-cut policy dealing with the issues. We have been responding to complaints in a less than thorough fashion. These have been handled without benefit of clear guidelines or directions.

In order to improve present procedures and to insure uniform response to complaints, we have drafted the enclosed policy statement. This would be

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<sup>344</sup> Ed Jahns, Memorandum to Chief Curator, HFC, December 1, 1981.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.



developed as a pilot project at Grand Teton National Park. After working out any problems, it would become policy Regionwide. This could then be accepted Servicewide, if desired.<sup>346</sup>

This report goes on to explain a seven-step process for dealing with complaints. Briefly, the steps are 1) evaluate museum exhibits and “develop a plan of action where necessary,” 2) “train employees in specific procedures for dealing with complaints,” 3) fully document complaints when received, 4) “The Superintendent and his staff will evaluate the complaint using the Regional Office, WASO, Harpers Ferry or private sector assistance if necessary,” 5) If action is necessary, “the Superintendent will contact the official governing body of the group represented by the Museum object/statement in question. For example; if a Native American religious object is improperly displayed then the contact will be the appropriate Tribal Council,” 6) “The complaint will be described . . . and the Service will request comments and recommendations,” 7) the NPS “will take appropriate action.”<sup>347</sup> It is not clear whether or not this proposed process for dealing with complaints was implemented at a higher level than Grand Teton National Park, but what these memoranda indicate is that prior to 1981, the NPS did not have a clear way of dealing with complaints. While the complaints at the Indian Arts Museum were certainly not the first heard by the NPS, they were the first that elicited a more organized response from the NPS. Finally, this response by the NPS indicates the far-reaching effects of the protests by American Indians.

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<sup>346</sup> Chief, Division of Interpretation, RMRO, memorandum to Regional Director, RMRO, December 15, 1981, Folder: GRTE VC 1980-1982, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

A little less than a decade later, Congress handled the issue of the display of sensitive items of American Indian origin through the passage of NAGPRA. NAGPRA is a complex piece of legislation, and briefly, the act created a process for all sacred objects, human remains, funerary objects, and objects of cultural patrimony to be repatriated to lineal descendants, culturally affiliated tribes, and Native Hawaiian organizations. Stephen L. Pevar, in *The Rights of American Indians and Their Tribes* provides an additional summary of the four requirements of NAGPRA:

First, it requires federal agencies and private museums receiving federal funds to inventory their collections of Indian human remains and any related funeral objects. The tribe of origin, if known, must then be notified. If the tribe requests it, these objects must be returned. Second, NAGPRA declares that Indian tribes are the owners of human remains and cultural items excavated or discovered on federal or tribal land. Third, NAGPRA makes it a federal crime to sell or trade Indian human remains and funeral items unless obtained in compliance with the act. Finally, NAGPRA requires that federal agencies and private museums receiving federal funds must make an itemized list of their other Indian artifacts, and if a tribe can prove a right of possession, the object must be returned to the tribe upon request.<sup>348</sup>

NAGPRA's effect has been wide ranging, and the significance is that many cultural artifacts and human remains, even where there is a clear record of sale, have been returned to the tribes from which they came.

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<sup>348</sup> Pevar, *The Rights of American Indians and Their Tribes*, 167.

The impact of NAGPRA on the Indian Arts Museum is difficult to assess. In the Grand Teton National Park Archives, I found no records of the Indian Arts Museum being redesigned due to NAGPRA. Not all of the artifacts in the Vernon Collection have ever been on display in the museum due to size constraints, however, so a reshaping of the museum displays may not have been necessary. The only record of the impact of NAGPRA is the document titled “9/30/2013 Vernon Collection Breakdown.” This document states that seven items had been repatriated up to that point to the “Tribes of origin” and 248 items had been identified as “NAGPRA related materials.”<sup>349</sup> All of the items deemed subject to NAGPRA are listed in the federal register where tribes and lineal descendants came reclaim them. Thus the federal narrative concerning sensitive objects overwrote the narrative of the NPS (and everyone else) related to those objects. While the NPS, the JHPI, the MAI, Vernon, and American Indians had shaped the Vernon Collection through time, the federal government imposed a new narrative through NAGPRA.

Without so much as a news release, the NPS closed the Indian Arts Museum in 2011. However, changes had been underway at the museum for a few years. In 2005, half of the Vernon Collection had been sent to WACC for “critical conservation treatment,”<sup>350</sup> and in 2011, with the closure of the museum, the rest of the artifacts were also sent away for conservation work. The *New York Times* article “Condition of Rare Indian Artifacts Reveals Deficiencies at National Park Museum” from October of 2011 provides an

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<sup>349</sup> “9/30/2013 Vernon Collection Breakdown,” Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

<sup>350</sup> “Renovated Colter Bay Visitor Center Opens Saturday, May 26,” accessed March 29, 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/grte/learn/news/news-release-12-37.htm>.

outsider's insight into what was happening at the Indian Arts Museum at the time. The author, Scott Streater, writes that the Indian Arts Museum was being closed due to insufficient environmental controls that were allowing the artifacts to deteriorate. Streater writes, "Among the nearly 40-year-old building's deficiencies is an outdated climate control system that has allowed excess humidity to cause buckskin moccasins and other items to become brittle and crack. In some areas of the museum, a barrage of sunlight has faded colorful beds and dyes in dresses, said Alice Hart, Grand Teton's museum curator."<sup>351</sup> Streater also reported that the "display cases were unsealed, allowing damp air to get inside, as well as insects and even rodents, which laid eggs or chewed some items."<sup>352</sup>

The closure of the Indian Arts Museum is significant because it indicates yet another turn in the narrative of the NPS. By closing the Indian Arts Museum entirely, the NPS signified that the preservation and future of the artifacts was more important than the present-day display of them. Additionally, according to Streater, the NPS wants to build a new museum to display the artifacts in the Vernon Collection rather than use the existing space in the Colter Bay Visitors Center.<sup>353</sup> This idea further signifies the NPS's narrative that the proper care for and display of the artifacts (including the proper environmental controls) is the biggest priority for the NPS. In 2012, thirty-five artifacts from the Vernon Collection that had never before been displayed were put on exhibit at the renovated Colter Bay Visitors Center, and in 2013, forty-six artifacts were put on

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<sup>351</sup> Scott Streater, "Condition of Rare Indian Artifacts Reveals Deficiencies at National Park Museum," accessed March 25, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/gwire/2011/10/13/13greenwire-condition-of-rare-indian-artifacts-reveals-def-59441.html?pagewanted=all>.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

display at the Craig Thomas Discovery and Visitor Center near the Grand Teton National Park headquarters in Moose, Wyoming.

From the late 1970s to the first decades of the 2000s, the web of narratives that shaped the Vernon Collection continued to be transformed by the evolving cultural and political discourses of those decades. Most significantly for this time period, the American Indian interpreters at the museum shaped how the artifacts were displayed to the public, and the concerns of Native and non-Native guests impacted how Grand Teton National Park and the NPS more generally dealt with complaints. In 1990, NAGPRA began to shape the Vernon Collection and impose a new narrative related to sacred and ceremonial artifacts. The closure of the Indian Arts Museum in 2011 and the limited display of the Vernon Collection in the following years represents the most recent assertion of the NPS's narrative: that the NPS has a duty to preserve the artifacts and display them with appropriate museum technology to help maintain them for future generations.

## **Chapter Ten: Conclusion**

Even with the Indian Arts Museum being closed, the display and interpretation of American Indian objects continues to be problematic in Jackson Hole. A walk through Jackson, Wyoming, reveals numerous shops with names such as Raindance Traders and Fighting Bear Antiques that sell authentic or reproductive American Indian goods. The private market is of course untouched by laws such as the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), and on the private market, American Indian goods, no matter how spiritually or culturally significant, continue to be bought and sold as commodities.

The terminal building at the Jackson Hole Airport is another place of problematic display. Behind the luggage carousel in the terminal, a large, framed painting occupies a wall, and below the painting, a glass display case houses seven pairs of intricately beaded moccasins (see Figure 10). These moccasins are owned by an antique store in Jackson. The painting shows a scene, presumably from an overland trail such as the Oregon Trail, where white women in bonnets and long cotton dresses are buying goods from two American Indian women. The women are gathered around a tipi, and Conestoga wagons wait in the background. Further in the background, a large, tall stone, presumably Chimney Rock in Nebraska, looms over the landscape. Opposite this painting and the moccasins, a large painted hide hangs on a wall without any identification or information. Taken together, the painting, moccasins, and hide show how much work needs to be done in order to ameliorate the wanton and incongruous display of American Indian culture.



Figure 10: Moccasins and painting on display at the Jackson Hole Airport<sup>354</sup>

The painting is out of place because it depicts a romanticized scene from the overland migrant trails of the nineteenth century, but none of those trails went through the territory around the Grand Tetons. The Oregon Trail crossed Southern Wyoming, and white settlers did not begin to homestead near the Tetons until the end of the nineteenth century. Additionally, the painting appears to depict Chimney Rock in Nebraska, an area hundreds of miles away from the Grand Tetons. The display of moccasins below the painting is relatively benign, but it serves to validate the painting above it and imply that the people who made the moccasins lived in or around Jackson Hole. As previously stated, numerous tribes travelled through

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<sup>354</sup> Author, picture taken February 9, 2016 in Jackson Hole Airport.

Jackson Hole on a seasonal basis and the moccasins *may* be from one of those tribes, but the painting and the display of moccasins implies an immediate connection with Jackson Hole.

The hide hanging on the opposite wall is even more nebulously connected to Jackson Hole. The hide evokes a sense of American Indian culture, but without an explanation of the importance of animal hides or who might have used such a hide in the Wyoming area, the effect is merely to use American Indians and their cultures as decoration.

I highlight this painting, the display of moccasins, and this hide because they demonstrate the problems that still exist today concerning the display of American Indian cultures, and they help to frame the evolution of the David T. Vernon Collection through time. When Vernon started collecting American Indian objects, he capitalized on more than a century of disease, displacement, poverty, war, forced assimilation, and in general the policies of colonialism that had been wrought by the United States and its citizens on American Indian communities. Spurred by the idea that American Indians artifacts would soon be hard to find because American Indian cultures were thought to be disappearing, Vernon collected from American Indians, other collectors, dealers, museums, and pawn shops. Vernon amassed a collection in order to preserve his vision of a timeless, romanticized past much like that depicted in the painting in the Jackson Hole Airport.

When Laurance S. Rockefeller and the Jackson Hole Preserve, Incorporated (JHPI), bought the collection from Vernon, they too intended to preserve it as a reminder of the idealized American past, but they treated the artifacts as



commodities. At the hands of the JHPI and the Museum of the American Indian, Vernon's collection was culled, exchanged, and sold until 1,428 items remained from the original 10,000 artifacts (approximately) that Vernon had collected.

Just as the painting, moccasins, and hide on the wall at the airport evoke a sense of American Indian culture, so too did the Indian Arts Museum when it opened in 1972. The museum featured almost no interpretation, and visitors were meant to appreciate the beauty of the artifacts and intuit aspects of American Indian culture. Problematically, the Indian Arts Museum contained artifacts from over one hundred different tribes, and only a few of those tribes ever traveled through the Grand Tetons. The Indian Arts Museum thus did little to tell the story of Grand Teton National Park, and it told a conflated story of American Indian cultures writ large.

The Indian Arts Museum was plagued with questions concerning the provenance of the artifacts from the time that it opened. Over time, the NPS staff took objects off of display at the bequest of American Indians, and the NPS responded to the concerns of the American Indian interpreters and visitors to the museum. The future of the David T. Vernon Collection represents an opportunity for the NPS to elicit input from American Indian communities and to design a museum that will tell a truthful story of American Indians in Grand Teton National Park. As Emma Iron Plume stated in 1981 when the museum was being redesigned, "How or where the pieces on display ever left the possession of the Indian owners will

always be an unanswered question. How the pieces are rightfully 'kept' and the manner in which they are displayed is a question that can be answered."<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Emma Iron Plume, memorandum to Edward Jahns, October 31, 1981, Folder: GRTE VC 1980-1982, Vernon Collection Association Documentation, Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Moose, WY.

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