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Katherine Morris Boeckman

December 2018

A PARADIGM SHIFT IN AFRICAN CULTURAL EXHIBITS AT THE NATIONAL
MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the
Kathrine G. McGovern College of the Arts
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts

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Abstract

As the National Museum, the Smithsonian Institution echoes American identity and promotes U.S. values. In a 1999 article, *From Dioramas to Dialogics: A Century of Exhibiting African at the Smithsonian*, anthropology curator, Mary Jo Arnoldi stated that the 1967 *Cultures of Africa* exhibit in the National Museum of Natural History was outdated the day it opened. I examine how curators' reluctance to abandon 19th century evolution theories for this 1967 exhibition, may have reflected one side of a cultural discourse over race that has been ongoing for most of the century. African hall displays that came before and after the 1967 installation are analyzed with coeval developments in African exhibitions outside the Smithsonian. Changes in American mainstream thought about race may be indicated in a paradigm shift in museum narratives, for the 1997 *African Voices* exhibition, as Africans are finally allowed to tell their own story.

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Introduction

In her article, *From Diorama to Dialogic: A Century of Exhibiting Africa at the Smithsonian*, anthropology curator, Mary Jo Arnoldi, is critical of the Natural History museum's Cultures of Africa exhibition, that opened in 1967. She said, "Like its predecessor, the anthropological framework of this new Africa hall was already outdated by the time it opened... its displays did not engage newer anthropological theories current in the 1960s."¹ The installation of this exhibition was the Smithsonian's attempt to modernize displays in the hall of Africa, which had not been changed since 1922. But even though almost a century had passed since cultural evolution theories of Klemm and Darwin began to be questioned, displays in the natural history museum still portrayed Africans as subjects of study, frozen in an "ethnographic present."² Up through 1992, the NMNH did not give an accurate depiction of African cultures nor did museum narratives serve those whose heritage it represented— African Americans.

The Cultures of Africa exhibition had a twenty-five-year exhibition life, until a negative letter-writing campaign by the black activist group, Tu Wa Moja, brought about its closing, in 1992. Critics in this African Study Group could not understand why—the Smithsonian-- a 'known center for historical and cultural education' could perpetuate such a backward narrative.³ While their assessment is understandable, one might wonder--why a pushback twenty-five years *after* the exhibition was installed?

While Arnoldi's article may imply that the Smithsonian is an anachronistic institution, that is often out of sync with public thought, and rarely changes it exhibits, this paper explores how, throughout the 20th century, the National Museum of Natural

History may have represented one side in an American social debate over race. In order to validate this assertion, it is necessary to compare the Cultures of Africa exhibition with what came before it, and what came after it, both inside and outside the National Museum system.

Chapter one will examine how, the Ward Collection, installed at the NMNH in 1922, differed from what was going on outside the National Museum System. A decade before, the 1913 New York Armory Show prompted avant-garde gallerists such as Coady, Stieglitz, and de Zayas to investigate modernist influences—one of which was African art. These gallerists may have influenced a “taxonomic shift” in the U.S., where what was once thought of as artifact could now be shown as art.⁴ This shift moved through art and natural history museums over the next few decades and changed the way African material culture was exhibited throughout the United States.

Brooklyn Institution curator, Stewart Culin was the first to embrace the taxonomic shift-- in a museum setting-- for the show: Primitive Negro Art, Chiefly from the Belgian Congo, in 1922.⁵ In Pennsylvania, around this time, Albert Barnes was amassing a notable collection of African figurative sculpture, masks, and functional objects which he positioned alongside European modernist art. In addition to placing African work in a world art historical context. Barnes used his collection to teach art appreciation and to serve as heritage examples for the black community. Barnes intended to use African art for the betterment of black Americans; black cultural leaders, such as Alain Locke and Charles Johnson, who drove the New Negro Movement (1917-1928), embraced the Barnes Collection for this very reason.⁶ A decade later, James Johnson Sweeney, completely decontextualized African objects, and presented them for their aesthetic

appeal, without making Western and non-Western comparisons for his show: African Negro Art (1935), at MoMA.⁷

Robert Goldwater helped Sweeney for the African Negro Art show, and in 1937, he wrote the first dissertation that dealt with African art: *Primitivism in Modern Painting* (1937), for New York University Institute of Fine Art.⁸ This paper, which was later published as a book, generated interest in African art history and by the late 1950s African study programs began to emerge. In 1957, Roy Sieber earned the first PhD in African Art History, from Iowa State University. By the 1960s, study programs also emerged in schools such as Indiana University, and UCLA. The decolonization of parts of the African continent in this decade (1960s) allowed scholars to travel to study in the field. What little was known about Africa and its many peoples was going to change.

Ongoing social upheaval outside the museum did not seem to influence modernization efforts at the Smithsonian after mid-century. Chapter 2 analyzes how a 19th century mindset still prevailed at the NMNH for its 1967 replacement for the Ward Collection, the *Cultures of Africa*. From a revisionist standpoint, this seems almost unfathomable, considering the social climate of the day. While Arnoldi credits museum literature for mentioning for both traditional and contemporary African practices in this exhibition, she says these efforts were overridden by displays that told a different story.⁹ Here, like in the past, African peoples were still differentiated by geography and by ethnicity. Dioramas presented Africans engaged in masking rituals or as scantily clad figures posed mid-activity, with samples of early technology. Explanatory wall text for these exhibits still reflected the authoritarian museum voice. The lack of change here is puzzling, especially since new approaches to African material culture had been

established in other museums of art and natural history since the 1920s. Here, it seems, Arnoldi's characterization of the Cultures of Africa exhibition as a "...contemporary variation of the primitivism paradigm of the earlier ethnology displays" seems justified.¹⁰

In 1967, countercurrents arose in the National Museum system, offering a different viewpoint in the discourse over race. Smithsonian Secretary, S. Dillon Ripley spearheaded two progressive outreach programs that were vastly different from what was presented in the NMNH. The first, was a community-specific venue --the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, situated in the black residential area. This venue aimed its programming towards minority visitors. His second project was the American Folklife Festival, a multi-cultural event, where many societies were featured, and their material culture was contextualized in living displays. This event is a short-term Summer festival which is held on the National Mall, still today. For both the ANM and the Folklife Festival, stakeholders help craft their own narratives. Practices that began in 1967 have been built upon and they have transformed how African culture is shown today at the NMNH.

Outside the Smithsonian, Warren Robbins opened his home and his fledgling African collection to the public, in 1964. In some ways similar to Barnes, Robbins had a social agenda when formed the Center for Cross Cultural Communication and raised funds to build the first museum dedicated solely to African art. The betterment of race relations was Robbins' primary goal for his museum. In 1979, the MAA became part of the National Museum system. In 1987, it moved to join other Smithsonian museums on the National Mall.

In the 1970s, Africanists, like Roy Sieber, began to take corrective measures in how African art was exhibited in shows like *African Textiles and Decorative Arts* (1972). Art objects began to be recontextualized and curators focused on a less monolithic approach to Africa. Michael Kan was working in a similar vein at the Brooklyn museum, designing several African exhibits over a two-decade period beginning in the 1960s. These changes seem to indicate that curators were trending towards narratives that reflected a deeper understanding of African cultures.¹¹

In 1984, William Rubin ignored contextualizing trends going on elsewhere, and juxtaposed Western and non-Western art in *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, at MoMA. Rubin's exhibition was not unlike what Coady, Stieglitz, and de Zayas had done--both in concept and in imperialistic attitude. Chapter 3 explores how this show backfired, indicating that Western and non-Western comparisons would no longer be tolerated if the public sensed any asymmetry that favored the West. While Rubin stated his goal was to recapture the spirit in which modernists created, his exhibition was considered too Eurocentric. Critic Thomas McEvilley declared the show a rehashing of Classical Modernism and called for the contextualization of non-Western objects so that non-Western cultures could be better understood.¹² The reaction to "Primitivism" was pivotal, as it seemed to indicate that a paradigm shift in mainstream American opinions about race may have occurred.

For the African cultural displays at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, black Americans had the most at stake, as it was their heritage which was being maligned. In the late 1980s, Tu Wa Moja African Study Group instigated a negative letter-writing campaign that accused Smithsonian displays of lacking direction, having

mono-dimensional presentations of society and individuals, racist terminology, stereotyping, and overall misinterpretation of Africans.¹³ The group's protests were quite effective, as the exhibition was removed in 1992.

A new exhibition, African Voices, opened at the NMNH, in 1997. This exhibit showed a new mindset and it was designed by a two-part team of curators and community stakeholders in a collaborative effort that allowed Africans to tell their own stories. Approached in this way, and the continent, and its many peoples are presented in a positive light. Only the most effective conventions, such as photo murals and dioramas are continued in this exhibition, and the museum takes a layered approach that appeals to many people on many levels. The museum used interactive components that engage the visitor, and it does not shy away from difficult subject matter that has affected the black community, such as slavery.¹⁴

In the end, I believe that the Ward Collection, the Cultures of Africa, and African Voices, have all reflected mainstream ideology, concerning race, that were reflective of their respective times. Therefore, I propose that the African cultural displays at the Natural History Museum have, throughout the 20th century, acted as a yardstick of mainstream attitudes. Outside this mainstream, however, there was another side of this conversation about race, that was supported by the efforts of Culin, Barnes, Sweeney, Ripley, Robbins, Sieber, Kan, and in 1997, the team at the NMNH, which included Arnoldi. It is, in part, through these curators' actions, that museum narratives- today- put take a more positive approach to exhibiting African art.

I do agree with the Arnoldi, that the Cultures of Africa used outdated theory on the day it opened. However, because this exhibition was shown for twenty-five years

before it was shuttered, I believe it was more of a progressive failure— and that it likely grew increasingly offensive to the public, as time went by and opinions changed. I argue that “Primitivism’s” backlash marked a paradigm shift that had occurred in American mainstream thought and that this shift has changed the way African material culture and art is now displayed in the NMNH. Since 1997, 19th century cultural evolution theories have been overturned in the National Museum, and African Voices continues to present contemporary American mainstream attitudes about race. This investigation is important for future curators, as there are lessons to be learned from past mistakes made by others. By acknowledging that changes in society will likely happen during the life of an exhibition, curators can construct a more fluid approach, that allows for corrective measures to be made as they are needed. The Voices of Africa is a good example of how collaborative efforts are most the effective way to design a narrative that can appeals to a widest audience as is possible. This might be the best a museum can hope to offer.

Chapter 1: Orthodoxy or a Taxonomic Shift

Debates in museography have a long shelf life. Installations that have gone unnoticed for years or even decades may suddenly come in for critique. In her monograph, *From Diorama to Dialogic: A Century of Exhibiting Africa at the Smithsonian*, anthropology curator, Mary Jo Arnoldi, is critical of the Natural History museum's Cultures of Africa exhibition, that opened in 1967. "Like its predecessor," she explained, "the anthropological framework of this new Africa hall was already outdated by the time it opened... its displays did not engage newer anthropological theories current in the 1960s."¹ This exhibition was the Smithsonian's attempt to modernize displays in the hall of Africa, which had not been changed since 1922. Even though almost a century had passed since Boas had challenged cultural evolution theories, and newer theories that focused on universalism had since surfaced, Smithsonian Natural History Museum exhibits still perpetuated the 19th century ideologies of Klemm and Darwin. While it may have been anachronistic when it was introduced, the Cultures of Africa exhibition had a twenty-five-year life. A negative letter-writing campaign by the black American activist group, Tu Wa Moja finally brought about its closing, in 1992. Critics in this African Study Group could not understand why—the Smithsonian-- a "known center for historical and cultural education" could perpetuate such a backward narrative.² While their assessment is understandable, a question remains... Why a pushback twenty-five years *after* the exhibition was installed?

While Arnoldi's article may seem to indicate that the Smithsonian is a stodgy institution that rarely changes its exhibits, and is often out of sync with public thought, I

propose that the Natural History Museum may have reflected one side of 20th century American cultural discourse over race that played out in the Nation's museums for much of the century. This discourse was not firmly settled over the course of most of the 20th century and must be understood in this long historical context. This chapter will address how, in the early decades, the Smithsonian maintained a Western-focused paradigm in its 1922 installation of the Ward Collection. By maintaining a 19th century approach, the Smithsonian only supported the beliefs of a hegemonic majority—not the segment of the population whose heritage these cultural displays represented. Outside the National Museum system, the Brooklyn Institute, the Barnes Collection, and MoMA took different approaches to the exhibition of African material culture which allowed for more positive interpretations of African ingenuity. By positioning artifact as art, form became the focus, and creativity was paramount. The Brooklyn Institute and the Barnes collection, together with other African American institutions, were able to provide positive heritage examples for black citizens who were then focused upon constructing a more positive identity. This chapter establishes a baseline for practices, both inside the National Museum system and outside, that will offer points of comparison for the Cultures of Africa (1967) exhibition, installed in the NMNH almost half a century later.

An Orthodox Path Followed by the Smithsonian

For much of the twentieth century, the exhibition of African material culture followed two divergent paths. The first was one of orthodoxy, which was taken by Smithsonian curators who perpetuated an established paradigm that had originated the previous century, where a cultural evolutionary scheme foregrounded race.³ Here, the

hegemonic Euro-American majority prevailed, and African cultures were judged according to Western standards. This 19th century practice was perpetuated in 1910, when the National Collection was divided, and cultural exhibits were relocated to a new building that acted as the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) .⁴ While the building was new, the mindset reflected in museum narratives was not. Displays in the new museum dealt with a wide assortment of subject matters including: flora and fauna, colonial Euro-American art and functional objects, and non-Western cultures within Africa, Asia, and the Native Americas.⁵ Figure 1.1 shows how the Smithsonian contextualized material culture of non-Western cultures in large vitrines that showcased figures representing these foreign peoples, dressed in native attire. These cultures appeared caged, as subjects of study-- immobilized in an “ethnographic present”.⁶ This approach to cultural exhibitions is described by Price as the interference of the “...flow of historical time....[that] collapses individuals and whole generations into a composite figure to represent his fellows past and present.”⁷ When shown in this way, individuals in non-Western cultures are essentialized and it is implied that they never progressed. Westerners, on the other hand, also represented in Figure 1.1, reflect a series of evolutionary change in society. Hierarchically positioned figurative sculpture of Western men reflects a progression of clothing styles that seemed to document the passage of time. All the while, these Westerners loom over lesser peoples, frozen, in glass boxes beneath them.

The 1910 African cultural displays in the ethnology exhibit at the NMNH continued to interpret Africa through Klemm’s Western lens, as non-Euro-Americans

Figure 1.1: Exhibit Halls in the New U.S. National Museum, March 1910. Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 79, Box 9, Folder: 6.



were treated as inferior subjects of study. Cultural evolution theories were reflected in a hierarchical display of seven miniature figures that represented African racial types that were ranked, geographically, from north to south. Figure 1.2 shows a small-scale model of a Wolof Man (labeled as a Sudanese Negro) in native dress, with cultural objects situated at his feet, to the right. Other groups represented in this same fashion, included: a Berber Couple (which the museum labels as white) a Hamitic Somali Man, a Sudanese Negro Bambara man, a Chagga man, and a Zulu man of Bantu origin.⁸

Miniature dioramas contained dwelling groups where native peoples were posed, mid-activity, near an abode. Here, curators intended to highlight home arts, industry, and housing.⁹ One such example is the Zulu diorama in Figure 1.3, where five Zulu adults and a child are engaged in activities outside their domicile. Objects that served the Zulu in daily life are contextualized in this genre scene. Adjacent display cases held additional taxonomically arranged objects made by these peoples, categorized by art and industry.

Figure. 1.2: Wolof Man. Smithsonian ethnology exhibit, circa 1915. Published in Mary Jo Arnoldi's "From the Diorama to the Dialogic: A Century of Exhibiting Africa at the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History," in *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 39 (1999): 708.



In the early decades of the 20th century, these displays were thought of as innovative. Arnoldi explains that "Early Smithsonian life groups were intended to link the prevailing ideas by Smithsonian anthropologists about environmentalism with theories of race and evolution."¹⁰ Hinsley agrees with Arnoldi's assessment, saying that life-groups promoted, rather than "questioned the superiority of Victorian American culture."¹¹ Although Darwinian-inspired theories were coming under fire at this time, Smithsonian curators clung to these orthodox beliefs. To drive home the Institution's message, an authoritarian museum voice told the visitor how to think about these cultures

in labels like the following:

Dwelling Group of the Zulu, South Africa: The Zulu are representative of the populous and powerful Bantu family. They live in a semi-arid country and subsist on maize, wild fruits, domestic animals and game. They inhabit well-planned villages under the rule of a chief. Their villages are circular and surrounded by a fence. The houses have dome shaped frames thatched with grass. The family occupations are carried on outside the houses. Storehouses, small houses for animals and other purposes are scattered among the dwellings. The Zulu make pottery, baskets, wooden vessels, brew beer and work iron into weapons and agricultural implements.¹²

Figure 1.3: Life Groups on Display: Zulu diorama, Smithsonian ethnology exhibit, circa 1915. Published in Mary Jo Arnoldi's, "From the Diorama to the Dialogic: A Century of Exhibiting Africa at the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History," in *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 39 (1999):708.



In the *Enduring Power of Primitivism*, Sally Price describes how museum labels utilize a museum voice--spoken in the third person, as seen above- which implies scientific authority.¹³ Typical of the 19th century anthropological approach, the Zulu (figure 1.3) are presented here as study specimens, for hierarchical comparison to Western culture. The museum lays out environmental features of housing, food stuffs, material culture production, and social structure. Here, it is as if the Zulu are under a microscope, as inferior subjects of study. Narratives such as this seem to justify colonization, as these natives appear uncivilized and ahistorical.¹⁴

Overall, museum narratives in the Natural History Museum exhibits trumpeted how Euro-American mastery of technology made Westerners superior to non-Westerners who were thought of as unevolved.¹⁵ This approach would go on to dominate Smithsonian ideology for much of the 20th century.

A Fork in the Road for Exhibition

While the Smithsonian seemed to operate in a vacuum, a second path for African material culture exhibition developed, paved by U.S. museums and galleries who were impacted by the 1914 Armory Show and the introduction of European modernist influences. According to Rosenberg , "...Americans received Modern Art and African art as a single import, derived from French and Belgian colonies, distilled in Paris and presented on these shores by a few taste-making dealers and collectors".¹⁶ European modernists' preference for abstraction and appreciation for non-Western art forms are credited with a cascade of future developments that affected how African material culture would be shown and consumed in the U.S. Yaelle Biro identified 1910-1920 as a period

in which tastes for African art were developing, especially in New York.¹⁷ Under the guidance of Parisian art dealers such as Paul Guillaume (1891-1934), African art collections were being amassed by Americans like Joseph Brummer, Charles Vignier, John Quinn, Louise and Walter Arensberg, and Agnes and Eugene Meyers.¹⁸

New York Galleries Champion Non-Western Art

Forward-thinking New York gallerists like Robert J. Coady (1881-1921), Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946) and Marius de Zayas (1880-1961) became torch-bearers for the European avant-garde and provided “modernist settings” for African work.¹⁹ Coady opened his Washington Square Gallery, in 1914. This gallerist was the first to deconstruct modernist influences when he positioned an abstract head made by a Fang master next to stylized work by artists Henri Rousseau and Juan Gris.²⁰ In a 1914 article in the *Morning Telegraph*, art critic Alfred Kreyenborg wrote, “The next most striking feature of Washington Square Gallery are a number of queer faced, queer bodied, black figured representatives of that magnificently simple art- if art is the term you would lower it to- Congo sculpture...One is most tempted to cry, ‘Why, here are the fathers of Gauguin and Matisse, and Picasso....Thirty or forty years from now you will be able to read about African sculpture in our magazine, but at present you will have to rest satisfied with the original article and no one to instruct you in your admiration.’”²¹ Kreyenborg embraces the African art in Coady’s gallery and he sees its affinity to important European modernist art. He does, however, admit that the viewer will have to trust his gut, as not much is known about African art at that point in time.

The same year Coady opened Washington Square Gallery, Stieglitz followed with the Little Galleries of the Photo Secession. Edward Steichen curated *Statuary in Wood by African Savages: The Root of Modern Art* (1914), a show dedicated solely to African art, for Stieglitz's Gallery 291. (Figure 1.4) Stieglitz commented, "There is a wonderful show on now by negro savages [...] It is possibly the most important show we have ever had."²² For this show, wooden masks and figurative sculpture from Ivory Coast and Gabon were wall-mounted or isolated on pedestals. A large pedestal in the middle of the room supported a large wasp nest that Jack Flam calls as a "symbol of residual primitivism" traced back to an "earlier state of human consciousness."²³ Stieglitz embraced and promoted art of the "negro savage", as he recognized its potential for expression. Objects in the show were backgrounded by orange and yellow paper-covered walls -- an approach chosen by Steichen to inspire the notion of "jungle dreams."²⁴ In 1916, Stieglitz further promoted this work when he reproduced some of the exhibition photos from *Statuary in Wood by African Savages* in his periodical, *Camera Work*. (Figure 1.4)

De Zayas and the Modern Gallery

De Zayas introduced The Modern Gallery (1915-1919) in October of 1915. This entity, according to Biro, served as the "commercial branch" of Stieglitz's Gallery 291.²⁵ Prior to opening the gallery, de Zayas acted as a liaison between Parisian dealers and New York gallerists, and collectors. He was known as a connoisseur of Modern and African art, and he often wrote essays supporting his theories in periodicals such as *Camera Work*. The opening announcement for de Zayas' Modern Gallery, advertised

what patrons could see in this new gallery “...paintings of the most advanced character of the modern art movement, negro sculptures, pre-conquest Mexican art, and

Figure 1.4: Installation view of “Statuary in Wood by African Savages: The Root of Modern Art”, Gallery 291, New York, (1914). Photograph, Alfred Stieglitz. Published in: Yaelle Biro, “African Art, New York, and the Avant-Garde” in *Tribal Art* magazine, (2012):12.



photography “.²⁶ De Zayas was instrumental in helping Americans interested in African art, such as the Arensbergs, Quinn, and the Meyers amass their collections. African art continued to be promoted by these collectors as they held daily salons in their apartment for members of the international avant-garde.²⁷ A 1919 shot of the Arensberg’s New York apartment, in Figure 1.5, hints at de Zayas own approach when exhibiting Western and non-Western work in The Modern Gallery. In this photo, an African Fang reliquary sculpture, mounted on a marble cylinder, is positioned on right corner of a chest that

backs up to a feature wall. Brancusi's *Prodigal Son* (1915) is positioned on the opposite end. The distance between the two sculptures is punctuated by two smaller, figurative sculptures and two small framed paintings, that alternate on that same surface. A medium-scaled modernist painting is vertically hung above the chest, creating one of the visual peaks in the arrangement of two-dimensional works hung on the sitting room walls. To the left of the chest four paintings are hung one above the other, creating an even higher peak. The manner in which works are skied on the walls, reaching alternating visual heights, creates a zig-zag visual effect that pulls the viewer's eyes across the room. In a monograph for Sheeler's portfolio *African Negro Wood Sculpture*, De Zayas said, "The Negro artist has been to us a revelator and an innovator. Negro sculpture has been a stepping stone for a fecund evolution in art. It brought us a new form of expression and a new expression of form, finding a point of support in our sensibility."²⁸ Here, de Zayas seems to credit African art for influencing modern European artists. Biro noted that de Zayas' inaugural exhibition was "inspired by evolutionist anthropology," and "its underlying goal was to demonstrate 'scientifically' the role of the 'primitive' as a source of inspiration for innovative creation."²⁹ While New York gallerists did recognize the importance of non-Western work, Biro argues that they still harbored the notion that Africans were inferior. The relationship between African material culture and Euro-American gallerists, at this time, was a complicated one. While these men recognized the ingenuity of African-made objects, their Western contemporary mindset did not recognize non-Westerners as equals. This was the same hegemonic ideology that was reflected in National Museum narratives, where race was an issue.

The Taxonomic Shift

Less than a decade after the experimental exhibitions in New York galleries, innovative museums such as the Brooklyn Institute, the Barnes' Collection, and MoMA began de-contextualizing non-Western objects and exhibiting what was once thought of as artifact as art. In her book *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations* at the Museum of Modern Art, Mary Anne Staniszewski identifies this phenomenon as a “taxonomic shift”, which she says was embraced by art and natural history museums over the next two decades.³⁰ The origin of the taxonomic shift is not credited to America or to Europe. In addition to the practices of New York gallerists by 1914, the promotion of artifact as art has also been traced to the Folkwang Museum in Essen, Germany, that same year.³¹ By the 1920s, European galleries also juxtaposed European modernist art and work by non-Western peoples.³²

Figure 1.5: Interior of the Arensberg Apartment, New York (1919), Charles Sheeler. Casein silver print: 35.56 cm x 45.72cm; Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, 1950 (1950-134-989). Photo @ Philadelphia Museum of Art. Published in Yaelle Biro, “African Art, New York, and the Avant-Garde:” *Tribal Art* magazine (2012):14.



While, from a retrospective standpoint, it is easy to see how the Armory Show is considered to be one of the century's most influential exhibitions, it was Coady, Stieglitz, and de Zayas who understood the importance of European influences in real time, and it was they who promoted it in their galleries. The deconstruction of modernist influences by these gallerists had long reaching effects, impacting future exhibitions of African art, traceable up to the 1980s. While a trail leads back to them, and art historians point in their direction, no one directly credits these men for introducing the taxonomic shift in the U.S. Because these gallerists showed what were once seen as artifact as art, they should be credited with the generation of a taxonomic shift, *in the United States*, in the second decade of the 20th century.

The Brooklyn Museum- A Mixed Bag

Brooklyn Institute curator, Stewart Culin, was one of the earliest U.S. exhibition designers to embrace the taxonomic shift in a museum setting for his show, Primitive Negro Art, Chiefly from the Belgian Congo (April 11, 1923 through May 20, 1923).³³ Unlike exhibitions at the Smithsonian, Culin did not arrange objects by ethnic division or geography.³⁴ In the exhibition catalogue for this show, seen in Figure 1.6, Culin states, "The entire collection, whatever may have been its original uses, is shown under the classification of art, as representing a creative impulse, and not for the purpose of illustrating the customs of the African peoples."³⁵ Culin was aware of the connection between African sculpture and the art of the European modernists and he was innovative, as he encouraged African objects to be appreciated for their aesthetic qualities, allowing for African creativity to be acknowledged.³⁶

In addition to recognizing the importance of African work to modernists, and to future developments in American art, Culin also recognized its importance to the African American community, as a source of heritage. According to Siegmann, the Brooklyn

Figure 1.6: Cover, "Primitive Negro Art, Brooklyn Museum, 1923." Color transparency, 4x5in. Brooklyn Museum. Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives.



Institute, “served as a source of inspiration for artists and writers and, more generally, black Americans looking to Africa as a source of cultural pride”.³⁷ The timing and location of this exhibit was important, as it intersected the Harlem Renaissance (1918-1937)— a period of flowering of black arts, centered in New York. After “Primitive Negro Art” closed, objects from the exhibition were lent to the New York Public Library in Harlem. Culin also loaned objects to Chicago’s National Negro Business League, the

Colored Committee of the YMCA, and the Memorial Art Gallery in Rochester New York so that they could be seen by the African American community.³⁸

By utilizing a combination of two exhibition formats, Culin made a hybridized show that acted as part natural history display, part art museum. Illustration Figure 1.7 demonstrates how wall-hung frames showcase multiples of typologically arranged objects according to hierarchy of scale- from largest at the bottom, to smallest at the top. These objects are presented as artifacts—as multiple remnants of a culture that served a particular use; however, here, the emphasis is on form, rather than functionality.³⁹

Freestanding pedestals in front of these cases support individual figurative sculptures and other material culture that seem to defy function and fit more closely with the Western definition of art. Figure 1.8 shows a shell-crusted leather headdress next to a fetish and a stylized image of a child, each individually mounted on their own pedestal. The sculptures have been backgrounded by displays of textiles and weapons that have been mounted in frames on the wall. According to Price, Culin's approach was quite new, as "...art in Primitive societies has generally been thought to represent communal ideas conveyed through communally developed modes of expression."⁴⁰ By presenting separate works on pedestals, Culin allowed an individual's creativity to shine through instead of merely crediting a canon that had been passed down between generations. Figure 1.9 shows how some parts of the exhibit were staged like department store windows, which Culin considered to be "the aesthetic center of our urban communities".⁴¹ Culin was well-acquainted with department store magnate, John Wannamaker, who was known for similar creative displays.⁴² Here, African textiles are draped over a museum-made Congo-style bench. A Mende helmet mask positioned on the seat, on the right, acts as a

Figure 1.7: Typological arrangement of African objects: “Primitive Negro Art, Chiefly from the Belgian Congo,” April 11, 1923 through May 20, 1923. Photograph. Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives, 1923.



Figure 1.8: View of African gallery: headdress of leather and shells, fetish image of woman, carved wooden figure of child.” Primitive Negro Art, Chiefly from the Belgian Congo, April 11, 1923 through May 20, 1923.” Photograph. Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives, 1923.



counterbalance to the graphic pattern of the fabric. Behind the bench, a single figurative sculpture is positioned on a pedestal. Vertically oriented bands of weapons have been grouped in frames that have been hung on the wall which background this grouping with a rhythmic pattern.

Figure 1.9: Installation view of “Primitive Negro Art”; chair with large blanket draped over front with wall mounted objects in background. Photograph. Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives: Culin Archival Collection, 1923.



For the Primitive Negro Art catalogue, a typological approach was used, where 1,454 objects were divided according to function.⁴³ As seen in Figure 1.10, items were numbered. The description in the catalogue identified these objects as spoons and listed the medium.⁴⁴ Eight photographs illustrate the 57- page catalogue, however categories that are represented include: “Sculpture, Fetishes, Masks and Divinatory Apparatus, Ceremonial Staves and Scepters, Tools, Mats, Basketry, Textiles, Metal Work, Pottery,

and Games”.⁴⁵ While Culin’s use of typology might appear anachronistic, he is one of the first curators to highlight non-ritual functional objects in a museum setting.⁴⁶

Figure 1.10: Spoons. “Primitive Negro Art”, 1924. Photograph. Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives: Open Collection Research, 1924.



Culin’s display of artifact as art – the taxonomic shift --was highly influential as other museums began to follow this trend over the next two decades. Today, the Brooklyn Museum webpage applauds the curator for “set[ting] the parameters for cultural representation in museums through his collecting decisions and innovative installations.”⁴⁷ To the Brooklyn Museum, Culin is recognized as a man ahead of his time.⁴⁸ While this curator did seem to lead the way in the new approach to African material culture, he was dealing with a taxonomic shift that had no previous models on a museum scale. While well-intended, his all-inclusive approach did not allow the museum visitor to focus on specific works of art, as pedestaled sculpture had to compete with vitrines of redundant functional objects that were visually distracting. Over the following decades, curators would begin to hone this approach to presenting African material

culture as art. As will be seen in MoMA's African Negro Art exhibition, a decade later, fewer objects would be featured, and the ones that were shown, were spaced for greater aesthetic appreciation.

Albert Barnes Promotes African Art

As the art world began to embrace artifact as art, African objects in museum collections provided heritage links to the African continent and black Americans began to redefine their identity for the sake of agency. It was for this very reason that chemist, philanthropist Albert C. Barnes (1872-1951), amassed a private collection of African art which he featured in the Barnes Foundation, in Lower Merion, Pennsylvania, in 1925. To Barnes, his African collection was a path to social reform, for the sake of education and racial equality.

Barnes shared similar interests with Culin and they both operated in the same circles. Both wrote for *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* and both worked with leaders of the New Negro Movement—Johnson and Locke, to bolster African American identity. While they had similar intentions, Barnes was critical of Culin's handling of African work at the Brooklyn Institute, which he referred to as a “conglomerate exhibition”.⁴⁹ He also denounced objects in the museum's collection for lacking a pedigree.

Barnes studied African objects and read all available texts on the subject, and he was influenced by the philosophies of naturalist philosopher, George Santayana (1863-1952), the psychological studies of William James (1842-1910) and the progressive educational theories of John Dewey (1863-1952).⁵⁰ Much of the focus of these theorists

lay in form-- in the visual elements and the principles of design, which was the focus of Barnes' own intentions.⁵¹

The Philadelphia Public Ledger touted the Barnes Collection as the museum with the "Most Comprehensive (African Art Collection) in the World".⁵² Between 1922 and 1923, Barnes amassed over one hundred naturalistic figurative sculptures, masks, and functional objects, mainly from West and Central Africa-- each of which, was chosen solely for its aesthetic properties.⁵³ Barnes collected the finest works available, and he, like Culin, understood the importance of modernist appreciation of African art. A Malian Bamana Female Figure that had once been owned by modernist artist Vlaminck, and a Fang head from Gabon that had once belonged to Derain were both part of Barnes' African collection. He displayed facial studies done by Picasso alongside African sculpture, for the sake of comparison, more than half a decade before Rubin did at *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern* exhibition, at MoMA, 1984.⁵⁴

His African works at the Foundation were situated alongside a larger collection of American and European drawings, old master and modernist paintings, decorative arts, and furniture--mostly in three rooms—20, 21, and 22.⁵⁵ There were also two additional sculptural works that were situated on a balcony that overlooked an atrium on the lower floor. Modern works in the museum's collection were situated between Egyptian and Classical Greek work at one end, and African sculpture at the other end.⁵⁶ Barnes' collection was so eclectic, one Philadelphia Inquirer headline described it as "America's \$6,000,000 Shrine to All the Craziest Art."⁵⁷ As reflected in this headline, Barnes'

collecting and exhibition habits were not understood by all of the art-viewing public, nor were they necessarily valued.

Barnes arranged his collection according to formal qualities and displayed African objects as art, so that the public could understand theories behind each movement, as he understood them. He was largely supplied with objects from Francophone African colonies which were sourced by Parisian dealer, Paul Guillaume, which included masks and figures which were made of ivory, bone, or wood. These works represented the “Senufo, Punu, Pende, Lega, Lagoon, Guro, Fang, Dan, Baule, and Bamana” cultures.⁵⁸ Barnes’ placement of African objects next to European modernist works, as seen in Figure 1.11, was intended to help the viewer see the affinities between non-Western and Western makers. While he intended the viewer to note similarities in the abstracted forms, such as a shared predilection for attenuated features, elaborate hairdos, and almond shaped eyes, he also “sought to demonstrate the continuity of artistic tradition and universal impulse for creative expression.”⁵⁹ This collector wanted the viewer to identify a universalist spirit in art-making, where similar aesthetic solutions were used by people, worldwide. Barnes is considered to be a tastemaker as his preference for abstract African figures, with clean lines, and smooth surfaces, are the same criteria which was codified as the ideal African canon more than a decade later.⁶⁰ His focus was different than that of Culin, who embraced all functional objects, as he focused largely on masks and figurative sculpture. Exhibition wise, Room 22, shown in figure 1.11, is largely symmetrically arranged, which Clarke argues is “representative of Barnes presentation strategy.”⁶¹ Here, heights of objects mounted to the wall—paintings, sculpture, industrial and decorative arts pull the viewer’s eye in a zigzag pattern across

the buff-colored gallery. A wooden African figure and a three-legged stool holding a decorative pot, situated on the floor to the left, make the visual balance of the room less formal. The centermost triangular grouping of objects on the wall is the tallest and it is flanked by two other groupings that have slightly less height. Barnes punctuated the center of the south wall with a horizontal glass display case that is less than half the height of the wall. This display case contains two rows of African masks and figurative sculpture; there are eighteen in total—eleven on the top row, seven on the bottom. These objects vary in hue from dark mahogany brown to golden ivory, and each differs in style. All of the figures are frontally oriented in the case and they are arranged in a pattern of alternating heights. “Within the unifying harmony,” says, Clarke, the differing heights, masses, textures, and contours of the masks and figures provide the necessary contrast”.⁶² The same up and down movement created on the wall has been duplicated in the display case. All but a Senufo Seated Female Figure, have been mounted on wooden chamfered block pedestals which were commissioned from Japanese craftsman, Kichizo Inagaki (1876-1951).⁶³ Gallery walls did not have identifying tags, but some functional items bore small metal tags that provided the name of the culture, some with dates.⁶⁴ A stylized Merina Carved (Bas) Relief Bed Panel, a status piece from Madagascar, only slightly wider than the case and less than a foot in height, is hung on the wall above the display case. Three vessels are situated on top of the display case-- one at each end, and one in the middle. This arrangement interrupts the view of this carved wooden plank. Clarke explains that a Dutch flagon, placed on the top of the display case was intentionally positioned to mirror the same shape of the Fang reliquary sculpture in the case beneath it.⁶⁵ From here upward, the width of objects mounted to the wall get

progressively narrower, creating a stair-step effect. A carved Christian triptych is centered above the African work and it is flanked with two small wooden figurative crucifixion carvings. A painting, *Interior with Seated Figure* (1921), by Henri Matisse, is vertically oriented above the relief carving. A silver metal door knock occupies the apex of this triangular grouping.

Figure 1. 11: South Wall, Room 22. Barnes Foundation. Published in Judith F. Dolkart, Martha Lucy, and Derek Gillman, *The Barnes Foundation: Masterworks*. Skira Rizzoli. In association with the Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia.



To the right of this central arrangement, a triangular grouping is anchored by the largest element-- Modigliani's *Portrait of Jeanne Hebuterne* (1918), which is vertically oriented. Mid-way up the arrangement, Modigliani's painting is flanked by a small framed watercolor by Picasso-- *Two Nudes and Old Woman Holding Keys* (1905) --on the left, and a metal Kota relief mounted on wood, on the right. Picasso's *Head of a Man* (1907) is stacked above the water color. A Bamana Ndomo Mask hangs above the Kota

reliquary remnant. Demuth's small scale *In Vaudeville: Acrobatic Male Dancer in Top Hat* (1920) crowns this arrangement. A silver door-pull to its left, above the Picasso work, helps visually balance the arrangement. To the left of the vitrine, the organization of wall-hung objects is almost identical to the grouping on the right. Another Modigliani painting, *Woman in White* (1919) is flanked on the left with a Kota reliquary element-- a Bamana Ndomo Mask was placed above it. On the right, a small Picasso painting—*Wine Glass and Fruit*, is positioned below his *Head of a Woman* (1907). A silver door-pull crowns this vertical row. Charles Demuth's *Two Acrobats in Red Tights* is positioned at the apex of this triangular arrangement. To the left of the African wall relief, a long-handled ladle hangs near the corner of the wall. This object helps bracket the wall, which is interrupted by a doorway to the far right of the room. The *Seated Dogon Couple* in Figure 1.12 (not shown in gallery photo) was situated in the middle of the gallery, where visitors could appreciate the pair from all sides. This work represents one of the masterpieces within Barnes' collection.

While Barnes did not likely intend to infer that African work was hierarchically ranked below Western work, his placement of African art might be read as such, as there is a natural upward progression of forms and a European object occupies the apex of each grouping. It is also notable that most of the African work in room 22 is shown in a similar manner to African figurative sculpture displayed in the Smithsonian Ward Collection exhibition—in a vitrine, typologically grouped. Like the New York gallerists before him, Barnes co-mingled modernist paintings with African figurative sculpture and masks.

However, the breadth of work on his art historical timeline was more in keeping with what was shown at the 1913 Armory Show. Barnes may have intended to show

Figure 1.12: Barnes Foundation Master, Inagaki. Seated Couple, Late 19th–early 20th century. Wood, Overall (with integral base): 27 3/8 x 11 x 10 1/2 in., A197. Published in Judith F., Dolkart, Martha Lucy and Derek Gillman. *The Barnes Foundation: Masterworks*. Skira Rizzoli.



similarities between stylized figurative sculpture that was utilized by both Western and non-Western peoples for the sake of religious ritual. While the Christian work is somewhat stylized, it has not been abstracted to the extent of the African work. The mixing of religious with daily functional objects might point out that, while their uses were quite different, they were both functional objects. The paintings, on the other hand, were art for art's sake.

Barnes likened the rhythm of visual elements in African figurative sculpture to the musical beats of the African spiritual and he saw African culture as being in tune with the environment.⁶⁶ He recognized that in order for art to be great, it had to have a successful design and he was most attracted to the expressivity and symmetrical nature of African

work. To demonstrate this notion, he juxtaposed works he considered to be successful next to those who he felt were lacking. Comparisons here, were made between the inferior Pende and Lega styles, as compared to other regional styles.⁶⁷

While it has been established that Barnes saw his collection as didactic, I argue, his exhibition style was so busy, it overwhelmed the viewer's ability to truly appreciate individual works from an aesthetic standpoint. The arrangement approach taken by Barnes is reminiscent of one reflected in an image of Walter and Louise Arensberg's apartment in 1919, as seen in Figure 1.5, albeit somewhat more symmetrical. While similarities might have been detectable between works of different cultures and periods, the skying of objects on the wall and the lack of space between works did these objects a disservice.⁶⁸ It would not be until Sweeney presented African Negro Art at MoMA, in 1935, that a new aesthetic would surface. Sweeney's exhibit would prove to be more austere than what has been documented in the New York galleries, and he would not make comparisons with primitive references, like the wasp nest, from the natural environment. Sweeney would dedicate his entire show to African art, but he would mention the European modernists, on the cover of the show's catalogue, and also in his introductory text.

In addition to having African works inside the museum, Barnes commissioned Enfield Tile and Pottery to create a mosaic to decorate the doorway, which also had low relief figures in Senufo, Fang, Bembe, and Bamana styles.⁶⁹ The entrance to the gallery also had a Baule crocodile and mask mosaic, influenced by an interior Baule door that was part of his collection. This vertical composition shows a highly stylized two-headed

two-tailed crocodile, with a horned mask balanced on each of their noses. Two birds decorate the horns on the mask, facing inward.

The 134-page book “Primitive Negro Sculpture” (1926) was written by Guillaume, and Thomas Munro, was guided and added to by Barnes, and it served as the collection’s catalogue. Within the book’s text, these authors distinguished art from artifact, identified four major regional styles, and illustrated the collection with 54 black and white photographs. They also described what they believed was an ideal African canon. While Barnes did differentiate functional objects from art, he was attracted to the pleasing organic shapes and surface ornamentation of craft forms, and he did not mind co-mingling the two.⁷⁰ Primitive Negro Sculpture went on to become a recognized source for scholars and it was reprinted in 1968.⁷¹

Because Barnes was well-aware of the plight of African Americans, he provided scholarships for financially disadvantaged African American students to study at the Barnes Foundation.⁷² By demonstrating how African art had a rightful position on the World’s art historical timeline, he legitimized what had previously been considered to be a remnant of culture as art. This was especially important for bolstering African American identity and agency at this time.

Black Identity Provided by Heritage Models

Although a detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis, it may be helpful here to recall that it was not only Barnes and other art collectors/dealers who were involved in the valorization of African masks and other objects as art. The African American community actively engaged in this discourse as well. After WWI, the return

of troops from war was a positive influence on the zeitgeist in black areas of the urbanized north, and African Americans were optimistic in their abilities to change the future.⁷³ The New Negro Movement (founded 1916-1917) was born out of the desire to bolster renewed racial pride, so that African Americans could become better integrated in society and to create more economic opportunity.⁷⁴ The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which had been established a decade earlier, helped design legislative platforms that were intended to influence politics for the benefit of African Americans. Black cultural leaders, such as Alain Locke and Charles Johnson, who drove the New Negro Movement, saw the Barnes Collection as a means through which black identity might be reformulated.⁷⁵ By the next decade, interest in African art was on the rise, paralleling the rise of African American cultural self-expression, during the Harlem Renaissance (1917-1928). According to Berzock and Clarke, the display of African art, “foster[ed] a sense of cultural pride in African” and became a “catalyst for social and cultural reform.”⁷⁶

By the end of the decade, the Art Institute of Chicago displayed African works alongside up and coming Black American artists in the show *Negro in Art Week* (1927), sponsored by the Chicago Women’s Club. This exhibition was intended to promote race relations, and the exhibition included modern art made by living African American artists, alongside Harlem Museum’s Blondiau Collection of African Art from the Belgian Congo. Some of the African American artists who were exhibited include: Meta Warrick Fuller, William A. Harper, Charles C Dawson, and Henry O. Tanner.⁷⁷ For one week, a multi-event celebration took place that featured Black culture through an art exhibit, dinners, concerts and lectures. Here, African American artists, musicians, and writers

were under the spotlight, highlighting black achievements. These activities paralleled aspirations of The New Negro promoted by Harlem Renaissance engineer and writer, Alain Locke in his book by the same name. Locke sought to elevate blacks by promoting universalism which he believed was shared between the races. He did however insist that African American art forms support the cause, by visually reflecting African cultural heritage.⁷⁸

The Harmon Foundation, founded in the 1930s, was yet another institution that fostered African American artistic development and promoted contemporary African art. This Foundation put on exhibitions and bestowed awards, in an attempt to “keep the momentum of excitement around Negro American culture from the Harlem Renaissance and turn it into a narrative of social progress....”⁷⁹ Mary Beattie Brady oversaw the Foundation and held these exhibitions in the International House in Manhattan. The establishment was a residence hall that provided housing for people of all nationalities, and their exhibits were intended to “promote cross-cultural understanding –for world peace.”⁸⁰ When the Harmon Foundation folded, considerably later in 1967, most of their collection of contemporary African and African American Art was absorbed by Hampton University.

Missed Opportunity at the Smithsonian – the Ward Collection

While Culin was blazing new trails with non-Western art exhibition at the Brooklyn Institute, and Barnes was positioning African art on the world’s art historical timeline, the Smithsonian seemed to demonstrate its immunity to outside influences, with the installation of Herbert Ward’s African ethnology collection in 1922. Instead of

revamping the African cultural exhibits to reflect a more contemporary mindset, curators seemed to have merely rearranged artifacts. “This new display,” Arnoldi said, “...represented a shift in the style of ethnology exhibits but not in their interpretative intent.”⁸¹ While the museum’s displays looked different, they still imparted the same message of a foreign culture under a microscope. When describing the Ward Collection installation, the Smithsonian website explained, “The Congo objects and the zoological specimens [that made up Ward’s collection] were organized in cases by type or function in line with the anthropological thinking of the day.”⁸² According to Arnoldi, this maintenance of outdated anthropological theories was a questionable practice.⁸³ If the institution had shifted its theoretical allegiance towards Boas’ cultural relativity theories, which had been proposed in the late 1800s, museum curators may have been able to present a more contemporary mindset in their African cultural exhibits. While 20th century society was in the throes of modernization, Smithsonian curators chose to perpetuate the same Euro-American hierarchical narrative that they had embraced since the museum opened in 1855—Western hegemony.

Almost a decade after the taxonomic shift had begun in other American museums, the Smithsonian still maintained its old ways. Mimicking Ward’s Paris studio, groupings of similar objects represented an anthropological approach, where African material culture was typologically ordered and arranged in decorative patterns on the walls of the gallery. (Figure 1.13) Curtains obscured the windows of the museum, in an effort to emulate the mystery of the jungle, and big game heads were also hung on the walls.⁸⁴ The donor’s collection of African-made objects was shown in tandem with his own creations,

but not done for the sake of drawing affinities, like what had been done in New York galleries almost a decade before.

Figure 1.13: View of the “Ward Collection” exhibit, National Museum Building (now Natural History Museum) circa 1922. Photograph. Published in Mary Jo Arnoldi’s “From the Diorama to the Dialogic: A Century of Exhibiting Africa at the Smithsonian’s Museum of Natural History”, *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* (1999):709.



One display, Weapons of Central Africa, had a life-size bronze figure of a warrior, dressed in a headdress and loincloth wielding an upraised spear in one hand and a shield in the other. (Figure 1.14) Behind the figure, a vertical strip of throwing knives are arranged horizontally across the top of a paneled section of the wall. Beneath the knives, is an arrangement of spears, identified by ethnic groups on the left. To the right, knives and swords are positioned on a map of Africa which has also been labeled by ethnicity. One block of text discusses how shape defines who made the weapon and that they were composed of smelted iron. Another label, addresses uses of weapons and reads:

Large elaborately shaped knives were used to behead sacrificial victims. For ceremonial occasions, including tribal dances, they were carried by leaders as symbols of authority. Short knives were for general use.⁸⁵

The text contained within Figure 1.16: explains how these objects were not only used as weaponry for warring purposes, but also for hunting and fishing. Some were even traded as currency. While this display is intended to be didactic, the notion of Africans as savages is promoted. The use of the past tense in “Short knives were for general use”, almost implies that Africans are now extinct.

Fig. 1.14: “Weapons of Central Africa”: Ward Collection, circa 1922. Black-and-white negatives, 1966. National Museum of Natural History (U.S.), Photographic Collection, 1959-1971, Smithsonian Institution Archives, 1966.



Unlike Culin's presentation of non-Western objects as art at the Brooklyn Institute, African-made figurative sculpture in this exhibition was grouped together in a showcase, as seen in Figure 1.15. One museum label read:

The African native displays much skill in carving wood. He does not hesitate to boldly attempt the fashion of the human form in his fetiches and this barbaric sculpture achieves what to him are satisfying works of art and which convey their interest to civilized man.⁸⁶

Not only was African culture seen as inferior to that of the West, but it was inferred that their "barbaric" attempts to create a human form were only significant for their bolstering of Western progress. These exhibits seemed to exist for the express purpose of illustrating a progression in art-making, from the most rudimentary to the most accomplished. "The maker of an African sword and Praxiteles were one in the effort to express themselves in terms of art," said Walter Hough, "The steps from the aboriginal craftsman to sculptures of Mr. Ward are plain to those who study the development of art."⁸⁷ Ward's work was seen as far advanced, and it was only his naturalistic bronze figures of Africans engaged in activity, that were featured on pedestals in the center of the gallery. The naturalism conveyed by Ward was convincing, as the artist did aim to present an ethnographic truth. (Figure 1.16) However, while these works did portray physical characteristics of Africans, one could argue that they did more than merely document culture—they were a response to it. In one work, Ward created a topless woman, napping on the shape that represents the African continent. The Smithsonian commented, "Ward was clearly a man

of his time and his 1902 bronze, *Sleeping Africa* (Figure 1.17), seems to support the popular theory that the development of African culture had been physically and culturally retarded.”⁸⁷ Ward seems to say, that while Africa, with all its natural resources waits to be exploited, the unknowing and unsophisticated native is in need of Westernization. As it was shown here, Ward’s sculpture fulfilled an editorial role, that promoted an outdated narrative, where Westerners reigned supreme. While the Smithsonian acknowledges the backwardness of this exhibit today, the Ward collection was maintained with few changes until 1961.⁸⁸

Museum Patronage in the Early 20th Century

As the National Museum, the Smithsonian was tasked with representing the people of this country. However, what is reflected in the 1922 update of the African cultural exhibit was a perpetuation of Western hegemony that maintains a racist dialogue that was supported by cultural evolution theories that had dominated this institution for over half a century. While African American periodicals, such as the *Rising Son* (Kansas City Missouri) , carried special interest stories about the Smithsonian, such as the detrimental effects of patrons touching museum exhibits, I found no period articles by or for African Americans that recounted a visit to Smithsonian museums, in the early decades of the 20th century.⁸⁹ It stands to reason that African Americans would have been most offended by early 20th century exhibits, as it was their heritage that was on display. However, Walker states that African Americans were not visiting Smithsonian museums by mid-century.⁹⁰

Part of the reason for African American non-patronage may have stemmed from President Woodrow Wilson's call for Jim Crow laws at all Federal sites.⁹¹ Smithsonian Secretary Charles Doolittle Walcott (1850-1927) upheld the President's decree in the National Museums and the institution enforced separate dining facilities and bathrooms.⁹² While this suggests that African Americans might not have felt welcome at the Smithsonian, it does not mean that they merely took this unequal treatment in stride. journalist for The Colored American (Washington , D.C.) commented, “ ...there is no way for them [African Americans] to secure the higher education, as a matter of right by fair and equal participation in the educational institutions supported by the taxes of all the people....colored people are rigidly excluded from the public foundations of learning and thrust off into so-called colored state institutions.”⁹³ While African Americans paid taxes to support national public institutions, such as the Smithsonian, they recognized that they did not receive the educational benefits to which they were entitled. African Americans

Figure 1.15: Case with carved figures. “Herbert Ward: The Artist, His sculptures, and His African Art Collection” (c. 1922). Photographic print. Smithsonian's National Museum (now the National Museum of Natural History). Smithsonian Institution Archives.



Figure 1.16: Herbert Ward. *Defiance*, (1909). Bronze. Shown in “Herbert Ward: The Artist, His sculptures, and His African Art Collection” (c. 1922). Smithsonian’s National Museum (now the National Museum of Natural History). Smithsonian Institution Archives.



might have only frequented black institutions where they felt welcome, but they recognized the inequity posed by the Smithsonian. “Colored state institutions” mentioned by The Colored American journalist included Hampton University. This black university collected African art since the late 1800s, and it had long served as a heritage resource for black Americans in Hampton, Virginia. Much of this university’s African art had been bequeathed by Reverend Dr. William Henry Sheppard, who lived in the Belgian Congo from 1890 to 1910. Sheppard was known for accessing uncharted areas of the continent, inhabited by the Kuba peoples.⁹⁴ Clarke and Berzock say, “Hampton University, among the first institutions of higher learning for African Americans, strove to give students a positive and uplifting sense of their African ancestry and engaged Africans, including students and alumni, in the development and interpretation of the collection from the

1920s onward.”⁹⁵ At Hampton University, stakeholders could access heritage examples without concerning themselves with segregation restrictions or prejudice, and exhibitions in the university museum were likely more African-centered than what would have been found in the Smithsonian.

While there is no proof that black Americans objected to Smithsonian displays, at this time, there is evidence that they were concerned about how they were portrayed in society. Worry over the potential damage of the black community’s reputation was reflected in the 1915 pamphlet “Fighting a Vicious Film: Protest Against ‘The Birth of a Nation’, which spread through African American newspapers, nationwide.⁹⁶ The controversy here stems from D.W. Griffith’s movie which has long been considered to be one of the most racist films in history. NAACP leader, James Weldon Johnson said,

Figure 1.17: Herbert Ward, *Sleeping Africa* (1902). Bronze. Shown in “Herbert Ward: The Artist, His sculptures, and His African Art Collection” (c. 1922). Smithsonian’s National Museum (now the National Museum of Natural History). Smithsonian Institution Archives.



“The Clansman” did us much injury as a book, but most of its readers were those already prejudiced against us. It did us more injury as a play, but a great deal of what it attempted to tell could not be represented on the stage. Made into a moving picture play it can do us incalculable harm.”⁹⁷ Giving visual form to prejudice in a format that reached the masses was far more damaging than words could ever be. The NAACP, called for the film it to be banned, or at the very least, to have the most offensive scenes removed. Objections were ignored in the South, but the NAACP was successful in preventing the film from being shown in other cities including: Chicago, Denver, Kansas City, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis.⁹⁸ Gauging this proactive active response taken by the NAACP, it is possible, that if black Americans had an opportunity to change Smithsonian narratives, they may have indeed done so.

MoMA’s African Negro Art Exhibit

A decade after Ward’s collection was installed at the Smithsonian, the taxonomic shift was acknowledged in an *art* museum in MoMA’s 1935 show, African Negro Art. A canon had not yet been codified for African art at this time and the collection shown at MoMA ran the gamut of African material culture.⁹⁹ Because this exhibition came two decades after the Armory Show, and the taxonomic shift had long been underway, curators were growing more comfortable in their approaches to the display of African art. Unlike Culin’s show at the Brooklyn Institute, a decade before, curator James Johnson Sweeney took a more pared-down, aesthetic approach. For this endeavor, he was assisted by Parisian dealers, Louis Carre and Charles Ratton and scholar Robert Goldwater.¹⁰⁰ (Figure 1.18.)

In his monograph for the exhibition catalogue, Sweeney says:

Today the art of the Negro Africa has its place of respect among the esthetic traditions of the world. We recognize it in the mature plastic idiom of a people whose social, psychological, and religious outlook, as well as history and environment, differs widely from ours. We can never hope to plumb its expression fully. Nevertheless, it no longer represents for us the mere untutored fumbblings of the savage. Nor, on the other hand, do its picturesque or exotic characteristics blind us any longer to its essential plastic seriousness, moving dramatic qualities, eminent craftsmanship and sensibility to material, as well as to the relationship of material with form and expression.¹⁰¹

Here, Sweeney embraces the taxonomic shift, where artifact is shown as art—to be appreciated solely from an aesthetic standpoint. This allows African material culture to be appreciated for its aesthetic qualities, and African creativity is acknowledged. While Sweeney believes African creations deserve to be included on the world’s art historical timeline, he does, seem to doubt that African art will ever be fully understood. In his monograph, Sweeney goes on to lay out the geography and history of the continent, and what is known of African art at that time.

Six hundred some odd West African objects were “spatially privileged” in this exhibition--either isolated on pedestals or grouped in wall cases and backgrounded by stark white walls.¹⁰² (Figure 1.18) While Sweeney included some textiles and household

Figure 1.18: “African Negro Art” installation view, Museum of Modern Art, New York, March 18- May19, 1935. MoMA Archives.



objects, most of the work was sculptural--mainly carved out of wood or made of ivory or metal. This approach to exhibition was considerably different from displays at the Smithsonian, where African material culture was contextualized in dioramas with figures or laid out in decorative patterns on museum walls. This exhibit made Culin's exhibit for the Brooklyn Institute seem cluttered by comparison. Around 1,000 visitors saw this exhibit each day. While the exhibition “had a significant effect on structuring visitor perceptions of African objects as art,” Clarke and Berzock report that visitors were critical of Sweeney's austere approach to display.¹⁰³

Like Culin, Sweeney acknowledged that provenance and age of the objects were unknown, and he divulges that many of the works were curiosities brought back to Europe by soldiers, travelers, and traders. He cautioned that due to paucity of available forms, some African sculpture is made for trade purposes. He justifies their presence saying that they could reflect “antiquity of tradition”, where traditions that had long been passed down from artist to artist.¹⁰⁴ The curator warns, however, that some might have even been made by European forgers in Brussels, or Paris.¹⁰⁵

Sweeney minimized labeling for this show and he omitted contextual explanations as he thought it would detract from the art.¹⁰⁶ Here, the taxonomic shift is truly at work. This approach was not unusual, for an art museum, as “tombstone” labels are commonly used in this setting. Price validates Sweeney’s avoidance of didactic labels by saying when such explanations are offered by the museum, “[the] viewer is invited to form an understanding of the object on the basis of the explanatory text rather than to respond through a perceptual emotional absorption of its formal qualities.”¹⁰⁷ Without being told what to think, the object being viewed can be appreciated for its aesthetic qualities as a work of art. This approach differed from that taken by Smithsonian curators, who were focused on artifacts as remnants of culture. By de-contextualizing these objects, Sweeney allowed viewers to have a visual response to the work. Price notes that, “The isolation of an object from other objects and from verbose contextualization,” Price says, “carries a definite implication of values.”¹⁰⁸ Because Sweeney has isolated African objects, they had the potential to be considered as masterpieces and could be acknowledged for their ingenuity.

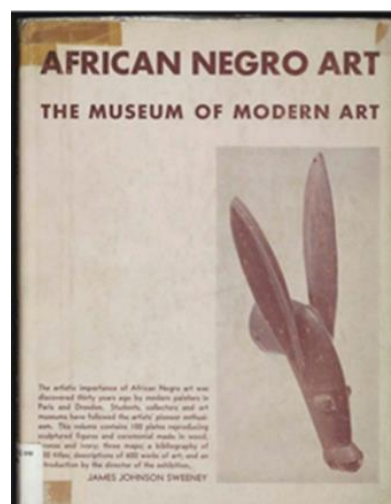
A Reference to Modernism

Even though the focus of Sweeney’s exhibition was African art, the importance of European Modernist work lingered, as the cover of the exhibition catalogue read:

The artistic importance of African Negro art was discovered thirty years ago by modern painters in Paris and Dresden. Students, collectors, and art museums have followed the artists’ pioneer enthusiasm¹⁰⁹

Inside the catalogue (Figure 1.19), Walker Evans provided around one hundred halftone photos in the catalogue, which are labeled only with titles and geographic origin and collection identification. Sweeney addresses the question of influence of African work on art of the Modernists: “Whether or not African Negro Art has made any fundamental contribution to the last thirty years is a broadly debatable point. In the early work of Picasso and his French contemporaries, as well as in that of the German “Brucke” group, frank pastiches are frequently to be found. But these, like the adoption of characteristically Negroid form-motifs by Modigliani and certain sculptors, appear today as having been more in the nature of attempts at interpretation or expressions of critical appreciation, than true assimilations.”¹¹⁰ Here, Sweeney draws affinities between the work of early European modernist work and African sculpture, interpreting Western work as possible reference to African styles rather out right adoption of them. He

Figure 1.19: *African Negro Art*, Catalogue, Museum of Modern Art, New York, MoMA Archives, 1935.



acknowledged that European artists did see African work in ethnographic museums and sometimes bought specimens in curio shops.

Sweeney traces the European trend towards abstraction back to 1905, a time when artists began to take a “new purely plastic approach” to their art.¹¹¹ This was the very year Fauvism was introduced at Autumn Salon (from 1903) --an important event where modern artists could present their visual experiments with form, outside the official salon. The curator mentions Cezanne’s extensive analyses of form, and notes that he was physically closer to European artists than those in Africa. While Cezanne had only been recognized by the Parisian avant-garde since the turn of the century, the 1907 retrospective (a year after his death) is often credited with influencing modern art—especially post-Impressionism, and Cubism.¹¹² Cezanne’s researches in the analysis of form,” said Sweeney, “... not only laid the foundation for subsequent developments in European arts but also played an important part in opening European eyes to the values of African art.”¹¹³ Sweeney credits European modernists for recognizing the ingenuity of African work, from a purely formal standpoint, as it had not previously been seen in this way by ethnologists and anthropologists. However, he reasoned that because Cezanne the African- modernist link could not definitively be proven.¹¹⁴

Even though he was not the first to put the taxonomic shift into practice, Berzock and Clarke credit Sweeney’s show for having wide reaching effects. Barr and Sweeney created a pared-down version of African Negro Art which traveled to the Cleveland Museum of Art and other art museums in the U.S., who they felt would uphold their exhibition standards.¹¹⁵ Purchases were made from the traveling show, boosting the African collections of those museums. Following the 1935 show, a market for African art

blossomed. European dealers were joined by a new set of New York gallerists who fulfilled the desires of American who were beginning to collect African art.¹¹⁶

Sweeney did his homework for this show and he provided those who might be interested with what art historical a context was known at that time in the exhibition catalogue. His visual approach demonstrated how curators were finally beginning to find a successful formula for exhibiting artifact as art. It was this type of exhibition style that most allowed the ingenuity of African art-makers to be recognized, without other cultural baggage— Western or non-Western.

Conclusion

Prior to mid-20th century, exhibitions of African material culture followed two distinctive paths in U.S. museums and galleries. Smithsonian curators ignored outside influences and non-Westerners continued to be approached as inferior subjects of study. In the Hall of Africa at the NMNH, Euro-American hegemony was supported by century-old cultural evolution theories which were manifested in African displays from the previous century. The 1922 installation of the Ward Collection demonstrated how museum curators continued to assess the world through a Western lens, as they continued to use African culture to prove that Euro-Americans deserved to occupy a privileged place on civilization's hierarchical ladder. This mindset was reflected museum conventions like culture groups and dioramas and taxonomic ordering of artifacts which were thought of as remnants of "primitive" peoples who were frozen in an ethnographic present. While this museum was a national entity that should have served all Americans, it did not welcome the community whose heritages it represented in its displays, nor did it

approach their cultural heritage with respect. Even with a new installation of the Cultures of African, in 1967, in a decade when race was hotly debated, the NMNH continued to support Euro-American hegemony, where not all people were considered equal.

The Armory Show impacted museum practices regarding African work and new influences were used to promote further development in art and understanding of other peoples. By embracing a taxonomic shift, African material culture was taken to a new level, where ingenuity could be appreciated. The approaches taken in African material culture exhibition at the Brooklyn Institute, the Barnes Collection, and at MoMA were considerably more democratic and forward-looking than the Smithsonian. Artifact was shown as art in all of these establishments, but each had a different goal. The Brooklyn Institute showed a range of material culture for aesthetic appreciation and courted black visitors. The Barnes Collection compared African figurative sculpture and masks to European modernists works and included African art on the world art historical timeline. Barnes wanted to educate visitors in art theory, but he also wanted to help African Americans embrace their heritage and achieve greater equality. Sweeney did not have a specific social agenda, but he did recognize the achievements of African art-makers. While he acknowledged their affinity to the European modernists, Sweeney dedicated his entire exhibition to African work and artists were recognized for their personal ingenuity. Unlike the narrative reflected at the Smithsonian, these institutions did not aim to dominate non-Western cultures. Instead, they embraced a more universalist spirit and promoted them. As this path of African material culture exhibition progressed over time, and the taxonomic shift spread, museum approaches thinned their exhibition materials, spacing them for maximum aesthetic appreciation. Curators sought historic

contextualization on art history's long timeline and they sought the names of those who were responsible for the work they showed.

The path followed by entities such as the Brooklyn Institute and the Barnes Collection was especially important for the black American community, as cultural exhibits featuring Africans served as heritage models in a time when these citizens were trying to formulate a new identity in a time when they lacked their fair share of civil rights, especially since they were not being supported by the National Museum.

When the Smithsonian was faced with the modernization of its exhibits in 1967, when it installed the Cultures of Africa exhibition, museum curators had an opportunity to adjust the Institution's narrative on race. Chapter 2 will explore the approach taken by curators at the Natural History Museum and how it compared to other venues that were showing African material culture at that time.

Chapter 2: Arnoldi's Time Machine

Prior to mid-century, African cultures presented at the NMNH had been mute. Assessed through Western eyes, Africans were captives in an ethnographic present, unallowed to express who they really were. Their progeny had been relocated to this country, unwillingly, more than a century ago. While they needed to assimilate, they had not been well received and they were still thought of as less-than-equal. As the Nation's Museum, attitudes reflected in the Smithsonian Hall of Africa mirrored mainstream ideology of the American population that had been carried over from the previous century, which like the museum's narrative, would be reluctant to change.

The 1960s was a socially contentious period where activism on behalf of race, gender, and political ideology was heightened. The same year 100,000 Americans protested the Vietnam War on the Washington Mall, the Smithsonian opened its new NMNH exhibition-- the Cultures of Africa (1967). Plans for modernizing Smithsonian exhibits had been underway for over a decade, and the appropriation of funds gave curators an opportunity to reinvent displays and rewrite outdated narratives that had been on view for almost half a century. From the 1920s on, art and natural history institutions outside the National Museum system, had begun to embrace a taxonomic shift-- what had once been displayed as artifact, could now be appreciated as art. In these institutions, African objects were decontextualized from their cultures and featured for their aesthetic qualities. At the Smithsonian, however, Cultures of Africa exhibition designers Jack Taylor, Jack Ewers, Herbert Friedman, and John Anglim perpetuated the same 19th century paradigm that characterized the installation of the Ward Collection in 1922.¹

Displays for this exhibition were new, but the mindset was not. Africans continued to be presented as subjects of study, positioned as culturally inferior to civilized Westerners.

What is especially perplexing about the approach taken by Smithsonian curators is how and why this happened at a time when issues pertaining to race were in the forefront of contemporary socio-political debate. Black heritage was reflected in these African cultural exhibits, which represented one of the most vocal segments of the American population, at this time—African Americans. This chapter takes an in-depth look at the 1967 Cultures of Africa exhibition—how it compared to past Smithsonian installations and how it may have been received by museum goers when it opened. I will explore the rationale behind the perpetuation of century-old cultural evolution theory at the NMNH and what this choice may have reflected about contemporary American attitudes about race. In order to understand how this exhibition may have fit with the public mindset at this time, I will look at coeval Smithsonian cultural projects undertaken by S. Dillon Ripley, for the American Folklife Festival and the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum. Other contemporaneous developments, in African art exhibition such as Warren Robbins' Museum of African Art, MoMA's African Textiles and Decorative Art (1972) and the Brooklyn Museums' African Art of the Dogon: The Lester Wunderman Collection will also be explored.

The Cultures of Africa

Social upheaval barely influenced modernization efforts at the Smithsonian, and in 1967 – a new exhibition--the Cultures of Africa opened in the Museum of Natural History. Twenty-five years after the Cultures of Africa was installed in Hall 7 at the

NMNH, anthropology curator Mary Jo Arnoldi assessed the exhibition in her monograph: *From the Diorama to the Dialogic: A Century of Exhibiting Africa at the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History*. From a revisionist standpoint, this exhibition must have seemed like a trip back in some time machine, as curators continued to use 19th century museological conventions to hierarchically organize African cultures in geo-ethnic groups.² Elsewhere, by this time, anthropology theories were shying away from positioning the West as the yardstick by which all other cultures would be measured. At the Smithsonian, however, the 19th century cultural evolution mindset was still embraced. Outdated theory and the use of long-established conventions brought Arnoldi to the conclusion that the *Cultures of Africa* was an anachronism, even on the day it opened.³ While the exhibition may have looked fresh—with new paint and changed arrangements—the museum's narrative was not. Africa was still being reflected through a Western lens.⁴

Some displays for the *Cultures of Africa* capitalized on established museological conventions like life groups, culture groups, or dioramas. Three life-size dioramas – “The Bushmen” (Figure 2.1), “The Lunda Initiation Dance” (Figure 2.3.) “The Herero and the Himba”, were three themes presented on a large scale, set within successive rings of regional African groupings. Dioramas had changed somewhat, since the last exhibition change in 1922, as these tableaux were no longer presented in the round. Culture groups were now positioned in front of a painted backdrop that replicated the naturalism captured in photos taken in the field.⁵

Reminiscent of Holmes' invention, the “family group”, “The Bushmen” diorama, seen in figure 2.1, depicts a domestic village scene, where scantily clad men, women and

children are engaged in daily activities. Male mannequins work with hunting gear and an adult female is making beads; a naked toddler dances into the background with his back to the viewer. The painted backdrop portrays a semi-circular arrangement of thatched huts, and in a central courtyard-like space, other villagers are engaged in a variety of activities. A juxtaposition of Figures 2.1 and 2.2 show how the Zulu Diorama (Figure 2.2.) that originated in the early decades of the century, is remarkably similar to the 1967 Bushmen tableau, as both present Africans in the midst of a daily activity, as subjects of study. While both tableaux offer a contextualized look at African material culture, the difference here lies in the Bushman Diorama's frontality and goal of increased naturalism. In contrast, the Zulu vitrine offers a 360-degree view, but lacks a natural context.

Figure 2.1: “The Bushman Diorama”. Shown in the “Cultures of Africa” permanent exhibit. Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian, circa 1969. Published in Mary Jo Arnold, “From the Diorama to the Dialogic: A Century of Exhibiting Africa at the Smithsonian’s Museum of Natural History”, *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* (1999):715.



Figure 2.2: “Zulu Diorama”. Cultures of Africa permanent exhibit. Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian, circa 1969. Published in Mary Jo Arnold’s, “From the Diorama to the Dialogic: A Century of Exhibiting Africa at the Smithsonian’s Museum of Natural History “, *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* (1999):708.



Figure 2.3: “The Lunda Initiation Dance” Diorama. Cultures of Africa permanent exhibit. Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian, circa 1969. Published in Mary Jo Arnoldi, “From the Diorama to the Dialogic: A Century of Exhibiting Africa at the Smithsonian’s Museum of Natural History “, *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* (1999):715.



The “Lunda Dance Initiation” diorama is a departure from the typical Smithsonian “family group”, as the focus is on a ritual instead of some domestic pursuit.⁶ In this tableau, five masked dancers and two initiates, dressed in exotic ceremonial dress are frozen—mid dance step--in front of a painted scene. The ritual extends into a pictorial landscape where village brethren are also shown taking part in this rite of passage. Arnoldi notes that museum labels near the display gave brief explanations of the act of masking and of age-grade rituals reflected in the diorama.⁷ For the “Hereo and Himba” diorama, Arnold describes how the visitor acted as voyeur, as mannequins were arranged inside the dark interior of an abode. In typical culture group fashion, the figures represented a range of ages. Some of the female characters were dressed in native dress and others were clothed in Victorian-style dress. According to Arnoldi, the museum struck out on two counts with this display. First, it perpetuated 19th century museological conventions, and second, the variations in dress went unexplained by museum text.⁸

Augmenting the three larger dioramas, two miniature versions were also included in the Cultures of Africa exhibition— “Northern Cameroon Iron Smelting” and “Zimbabwe 400 Years Ago”. The display that dealt with the Cameroonian iron smelters of the Mandara Mountains, presented small bronze male figures working metal—an activity, that no longer had much significance to Africans, due to supplies from outside markets.⁹ While the activity was no longer practiced, it was curator’s intentions to link products made by these people to a historically known regional industrial process.¹⁰ Material culture that reflected iron making in a nearby display, seen in Figure 2.4, included: rudimentary tools, weapons, pipes and personal objects. These items were labeled by function only, without further explanation. Like earlier Smithsonian

Figure 2.4: “Iron Artifacts from Northern Cameroon”. Black-and-white negatives. “Cultures of Africa” permanent exhibit. Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian, circa 1968. Photographic Collection, 1959-1971, Smithsonian Institution Archives.



exhibitions displays, such as this, African material culture is connected to figurative groupings, serving as additional proof of culture. Other displays categorized artifacts by leadership objects, currency, musical instruments, home industries, or markets, and the accompanying text briefly explained each object's function.¹¹

A positive step was taken in favor of Africa for the “Zimbabwe 400 Years Ago” exhibit. Here, curators acknowledged a more recent theory that credited Africans with building the 13th-15th century stone enclosures of Great Zimbabwe. This approach replaced an earlier theory, where Westerners believed these structures were too

sophisticated to have been built by Africans and credited their existence to Arabs or Phoenician builders.¹²

The New with Western Emphasis

One exhibit, African Arts: Old and New, was somewhat of a departure from Smithsonian displays of the past, as it attempted to present African culture as less of a continuum than other Hall 7 exhibits. For this display, curators arranged “authentic” traditional arts used by Africans for ritual and for daily functions next to similar objects made for the tourist trade. Traditional art forms are defined here as figures, masks, and other ritual objects used by specialists for magical or ceremonial purposes-- the forms embraced by Westerners as authentic. “New African Arts” are defined as either

Figure 2.5: “African Arts: Old and New”. “Cultures of Africa” permanent exhibit. Black-and-white negatives, Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian, circa 1968. Photographic Collection, 1959-1971, Smithsonian Institution Archives.



a “modified traditional form”, “commercial”, or “African modern”—a new art, using “traditional motifs and techniques to express original themes.”¹³ (Figure 2.5) Figurative wooden sculpture (both man and animal) bronze heads, masks, clay and woven vessels, are included in this exhibit. Differentiations are made between old and new and cross-cultural influences are noted. The museum text reads:

Many old traditional African arts and crafts are still practiced but the users and the ritual values of the objects produced often have changed fundamentally. As modernization progresses, some old arts are disappearing while new ones develop.¹⁴

Rather than focusing on how one particular African ritual form evolved, the key focus of this exhibit, reflected in Figure 2.5, is how traditional art forms are replicated for the tourist trade. This display tells how “new craft industries” have arisen to meet this demand. The viewer is told how traditional forms are watered down, and craftsmanship is cannot be guaranteed, as peoples who have not traditionally carved wood are now undertaking these tasks.¹⁵ This exhibit seems to imply that changes in African art only occur when it is demanded by the tourist trade—what others want and expect from Africa. The text in this display, alternated between black and grey type; circle and square graphics help emphasize individual objects. A map has also been included in this display to help the viewer make connections with areas of productivity. Unlike the Ward Collection installation that preceded it in 1922, this exhibit does not use African sculpture to show how far Westerners have progressed in their art-making abilities. And while it

does mention the influence of “primitive” art upon modernist work, any uptick in interest in African art is credited to the European modernists. While this exhibition is located in the Hall of Africa, the message here is still one of Western dominance over the emergent Other. This display implies, that without Western exposure, Africans and their art forms would remain unevolved and unknown.

Some Notable Changes in Text

When this exhibition is considered as a whole, Arnoldi largely credits changes in this exhibition to certain educational labels, where the functions and context of material culture were explained. In keeping with the new progressive educational approach, museum description labels were shorter and less instructional than they had been in the past. This change is attributed to 1960s debates over progressive versus traditional education models, which would eventually affect how support information, such as text, was presented throughout the country’s museums.¹⁶ Progressive learning sought less structured education, which was more experience-based and visual than the lecture-based traditional education. Philosopher Marshall McLuhan weighed in on behalf of the progressive approach, as he believed people should be given the “power of discovery”.¹⁷ He said, “...you have to take out the storyline... The Reader becomes to co-producer, co-creator.”¹⁸ Here, McLuhan criticized old museum approaches that steered the viewer through exhibits and told him what to think. The philosopher instead advocated a new approach where the viewer explores the exhibit, at will, and draws his own conclusions. This reduction in text is what was reflected in the display for Figure 2.4.

Arnoldi commended the exhibition brochure for differentiating traditional and modern African practices, and for distinguishing the urban from the rural. Wall label text, she points out, reverted to old ways.¹⁹ One label read:

There is, however, another Africa- where the visitor will find little to remind him of home. This is rural Africa, traditional Africa, most of Africa. Here, where outside influence is only beginning to penetrate, most Africans still follow their traditional cultures or ways of life, which are little known or understood by the rest of the world.²⁰

Passages like that seen above, according to Arnoldi, still channeled political economy or sixties cultural ecology theories.²¹ These theories implied that underdeveloped Africans required external capitalist influences to bring about change and they were satisfied with a “we can never ever truly know the ‘other’ “ mentality.²² The air of futility expressed here, gives up on understanding traditional African cultural practices, because they are so different from those in the West. Arnoldi characterizes the exhibit as “Africa outside of time”, as Africa is again presented as ahistoric.²³ Although labels, such as that above, were deliberately less didactic, they were still written in a third-person museum voice, that reinforced the scientific authority of the institution. Like exhibitions in the past, Arnoldi also complained that the museum continued to neglect an object’s relevance to indigenous peoples and they still did not address any sort of historical timeline.²⁴

Analytically speaking, curators for this exhibition seemed to be undergoing an internal struggle between an established archetype, that upheld 19th century cultural

evolution theory, and a new one, which allowed Africans to evolve. These challenges to old ways, I argue, were a reflection of contemporary American culture in the 1960s, where the Western-biased mindset was being challenged. Arnoldi credits curators for wanting to valorize traditional African cultures, yet she says that curators merely “reinvented a contemporary variation of the primitivism paradigm of the earlier ethnology displays.”²⁵ Orthodoxy, it seems, continued to prevail.

Ignorance vs. Education

While one could argue that Smithsonian curators ignored the socio-political climate outside the museum and seemed to uphold a Western hegemony in their exhibition design, another explanation for the NMNH’s anachronistic approach to African cultural displays is ignorance. African art history in the U.S. was only first addressed in the U.S. in 1937, when Robert Goldwater wrote his doctoral thesis on the topic of Primitivism and Modern Painting for New York University. Curators for museums that showed African material culture, prior to mid-century, like the Smithsonian, MoMA, and the Museum of Primitive Art, took a scholarly approach to collecting and displaying African art, but curators for these institutions— Taylor, Ewers, Friedman, and Anglim for the Smithsonian, Sweeney, Goldwater, and Rene d’Harnoncourt, who curated for MoMA, the Museum of Primitive Art (NY) and The Metropolitan Museum (NY), had never visited the continent.²⁶

1960 was deemed “The Year of Africa” when seventeen African colonies achieved independence from Europe.²⁷ By the end of the decade, fifteen more were free from European colonial rule.²⁸ These developments prompted anthropologists and art

historians, along with Peace Corps volunteers, to flock to the African continent to do fieldwork for the first time.²⁹ From this point forward, knowledge about Africa was more empirical. Scholars doing fieldwork witnessed Africans' interactions with material culture, how it served ritual function, and how it fulfilled a far more cause and effect role than any museum exhibit in the Western world could possibly intimate. At this point in time, African Art History was in its infancy in U.S. schools. The first American to receive a PhD in the subject was Roy Sieber, who graduated from the University of Iowa in 1957. Robert Farris Thompson followed a few years later, when he earned his PhD from Stanford in 1965.

Coeval with the opening of the Cultures of Africa at the NMNH, literature supporting the study of African art history emerged in the U.S. with the birth of UCLA's periodical, *African Arts*.³⁰ Early on, this magazine dealt with traditional African artistic expressions; later, its focus shifted to more contemporary work. That same year, Warren Robbins and Nancy Ingram Nooter published the first edition of *African Arts in American Collections* (1966). Warren and Nooter's eponymous book named collectors and presented over 200 black and white photos of "traditional" African art styles in a natural-history-style presentation, as taxonomic classifications, by geographic region and function. Robbins wrote the preface and much of the book's text, where he defined traditional African art and laid out African scholarship as it was known at the time.

Attitudes in the approach taken with African material culture began to change as field studies sought to correct earlier interpretations of art that had been made by people who had never visited the continent. According to Clarke and Berzock, "The deconstruction of Western hegemony and its established modes of presenting art and

culture led to the critical examination of museum practices and to questions about how museums construct meaning and value—particularly for non-Western objects.”³¹

Curators who had academic training were being sought, and it was this new generation of the academically-trained and field-tested Africanists that would bring about style and subject matter changes in many of the Nation’s museums.³²

African Americans Are Unresponsive to NMNH 1967 Exhibition

As established by Arnoldi, the Cultures of Africa was anachronistic, and its narrative was racist; yet, no complaints were found to be voiced against this exhibition by African American newspapers or by the NAACP at this time. In 1968, Capitol Hill Community Councilman, Keith Melder lamented to the American Association of Museum Professionals, “Historical Museums in this country have treated the Negro as though he did not exist. It is little wonder that many Negroes are indignant at such treatment.”³³ While the black community may have been offended, they did not seem to be voicing their complaints publicly. According to Walker, African Americans, “... never ventured to the imposing ceremonial spaces of the Mall or visited the Smithsonian’s museums there. Bound by fears of encountering racial bias and possessing a sense that the Smithsonian’s exhibitions did not have any relevance to their lives.”³⁴ Jim Crow racial segregation laws had only legally ended the year the Cultures of Africa opened (1967). Up to now, most African Americans sought heritage examples in black institutions such as Hampton University Art Museum, or in museums where they were embraced, such as the Brooklyn Institute, the Barnes Collection, or in city museums like those in Cincinnati and Cleveland.³⁵

Like the Ward Collection, I argue, the Cultures of Africa likely reflected mainstream American attitudes towards race-- where a white majority maintained their hegemonic position. It is possible that when this exhibition opened, it was not divergent enough from mainstream American ideology to elicit criticism from those who were actually visiting the Cultures of Africa exhibition—white Americans. I believe as time went by, white Americans would grow more sensitized to the plight of African Americans, and blacks would feel indignant enough to voice their displeasure. This would indicate that this exhibition would grow increasingly offensive as time passed.

Black Arts Movement Builds Agency

Outside the Smithsonian, the Black Arts Movement provided other avenues where African Americans engaged in culture-specific artistic activities. African American writers, musicians, visual artists, and activists came together to define a new Black Aesthetic which helped the community understand their own heritage. Smethurst characterizes the Black Arts Movement as the “cultural wing of the Black Power Movement”, which he explains is rooted in the Harlem Renaissance and its precedents.³⁶ This new Black Aesthetic had a nationalist and a separatist spirit and popular art forms often reflected themes of politics, interracial conflict, African American historical struggles, and quest for heritage. Frustrations experienced by the black community were expressed in this new aesthetic, in a confrontational manner, and in a distinctively black vernacular. Black Americans were also beginning to embrace Afrocentrism and changes were coming about in education that supported black progress. I argue this focus on a

new black identity would allow the black community to build agency that would allow them to eventually show their disgust with the Cultures of Africa exhibition.

NMNH Scrambles to Make Things Right

By 1968, Frank Taylor seemed to recognize that, even though African cultural displays had just been redone in the NMNH, there were still issues with how African heritage was represented in the National Museum system. Taylor asked curators, Smithsonian-wide to list all “items relating to the Negro “ – both historical and social contributions, that might be reflected in current exhibitions.³⁷ Carroll Greene, an African American museum professional, took charge of producing a printed guide for visitors that listed exhibits that dealt with distinctively African American points of interest.³⁸ This may have in part been due to the fact that African Americans were not visiting Smithsonian museums on the National Mall. While there was much protest over race outside the museum, none of it seem to revolve around offensive displays of African culture at the NMNH when the Cultures of Africa opened.

Multiculturalism

By the 1970s, multiculturalism was embraced by the American government which began to acknowledge and meet the needs of a more diverse public, as a means of “nation building”.³⁹ Multiculturalism, as defined Migration Policy Institute writer, Will Kymlicka, is an instrument that “replac[ed] older forms of ethnic and racial hierarchy with new relations of democratic citizenship.”⁴⁰ It is an approach to cultural issues that allows for greater equality.⁴¹ “In this period,” Walker said, “museum staffers engaged in

many practical and theoretical discussions about how best to design exhibits and programs so that they both educated and entertained the public.”⁴²

2.6 Figure: African-American Fife & Drum Music: Mississippi & Jamaica. February 1, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6mRdPP6wRo>.



Smithsonian Thinks Outside the Box

The same year as the Cultures of Africa opened, S. Dillon Ripley inaugurated two never-done-before approaches that included African material culture and were designed to attract a diverse population and help the National Museum compete with other entertainment venues. Both of these endeavors took place outside of the Smithsonian Museum Complex. The first, the American Folklife Festival, was an ephemeral event that has since recurred every Summer on the Washington Mall. The second, was a permanent, culturally specific, Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, located in an African American section of the city. According to Walker, Ripley was “very much a Great Society liberal”, and forward- thinking approach seemed to anticipate a future period when multiculturalism would be embraced.⁴³ Ripley recognized that museums were “extremely

popular venues for education and entertainment” Walker says that “...museum leaders realized they needed to compete with other forms of entertainment in order to remain popular destinations.”⁴⁴ These changes were necessary to attract visitors-- the Smithsonian had to vary its approach

Festival of American Folklife

The Smithsonian is becoming much more than a repository for old artifacts. The exhibits are coming out of display cases and the men and women directing the institution are showing us that a museum can be vital and creative. Just the fact that the Smithsonian was able to attract more than 430,000 people on a hot July weekend is proof enough of the success of the venture.

Sen. Thomas McIntyre, D.- N.H.⁴⁵

Multiculturalism was a feature of the Festival of American Folklife which first occurred July 1-4, 1967, on the National Mall. Here, living exhibitions presented people from different cultures, engaged in activities. For this new museum, the displays were no longer static. Instead of reflecting non-Western cultures as frozen in time, contemporary craftsmen demonstrated how traditions and art forms, rooted in a given heritage, were assimilated into contemporary life.⁴⁶ Because this event was so multicultural in focus, National Coalition to Save Our Mall spokesperson, Judy Scott Feldman, argued the Mall was an especially apropos spot for this event. She said, “The Mall is not just a park—it is

a democratic idea. What happens to it and on it, is a physical expression of the Nation's historical memories, its cultural values, hopes, and sense of the future."⁴⁷ Because this spot was so symbolic, it was the perfect place to hold a festival that celebrated all American people.

Exhibits for the American Folklife Festival were designed by both native and non-native curators, and they were considered to be highly experimental. Reminiscent of happenings of the 1950s and 1960s this festival is spontaneous, and ephemeral and it is embraced for escaping conventional museum practices. Smithsonian archives described the museum's approach as: Seeking the participation of the scholar as well as the layman, the Smithsonian sponsored an international interdisciplinary conference at which a dynamic approach to folklore research and field work in this country was explored the light of foreign accomplishment. Strong support was expressed for the inception of a national program to chart, analyze and encourage traditional culture in America.⁴⁸ This festival was an opportunity for the museum to acknowledge contributions made to American culture from all of the country's varied constituents. For this event, craftsmen demonstrated basket-making, pottery making, blacksmithing, carving, needlework, and doll making. There were also spinners, weavers, rug-hookers, silversmiths, a boat builder and a Navaho sand painter.⁴⁹

Musicians, like Ed Young and Family, from Mississippi, represented African cultural heritage in a performance of fife and drum in the 1967 event.⁵⁰ (Figure 2.6) This tradition was a carryover from the 18th and 19th centuries, when African American musicians performed fife and drum music for U.S. militia units as a means of military service, in a time when they were not allowed to bear arms. While this activity allowed

the enslaved to continue ancestral drumming that was so important to African culture, black Americans made it their own by changing the melodies and the rhythms. Fraternal organizations and communities often support the endeavors of these groups and it is an activity that has been commonly performed at African American celebrations.⁵¹ While this folk music was invented in the early 1940s, as a black cultural creation, it has also acted as a cultural retention by perpetuating African rhythms from the mother continent.⁵²

Figure 2.7 is an image of the Northern Kenyan Ngaharin Lebitileg Nguru Basket Weavers Group --one of three African groups featured in the 2011 American Folklife festival. Other African cultures represented at this year's festival were Moroccan Weavers, and Malian mud cloth and bologan bag makers. The 2011 Festival celebrated the Peace Corps, which was instituted in 1961, by President John F. Kennedy. The Smithsonian Institution's mission to act as "a steward and ambassador of cultural connections, by building bridges of mutual respect" and presenting "the diversity of world cultures" was reinforced by the Peace Corps inclusion in this event.⁵³

While the Folklife Festival was popular with the American public, Kymlicka warns events such as these may act as a "Disneyfication of cultural differences" as they do not address political or economic woes of minority populations. "Multiculturalism", says Kymlicka, "takes familiar cultural markers of ethnic groups- clothing, cuisine, and music- and treats them as authentic practices to be preserved by their members and safely consumed by others."⁵⁴ This means that what is presented for the public, as culture, does not actually represent a culture. Intra-cultural issues, such as controversial customs or religious values are not addressed in events like the Folklife Festival. Here, like inside the NMNH, there is a danger of stereotyping or essentializing a society.

Figure 2.7: Master Weaver Ngaharin Lebitileg Nguru Basket Weavers Group, Northern Kenya. Smithsonian Folklife Festival.2011. Photo, courtesy of Laura Lemunyete.



While government multicultural policies and the American Folklife festival were intended to ease racial strife, Kymlicka says they can actually fuel ideological disputes, as conservatives began to feel increasingly marginalized.⁵⁵ Senator E.L. Bartlett, a Democrat from Alaska said, “... our society today is the outcome of the different forces of different peoples which make up our past. This is why the study of history is so important, not just as an academic exercise, but as a guide to an understanding of the present and a roadmap to the future.”⁵⁶ Bartlett, indicated more liberal leanings that embraced the history of all Americans and the festival’s multicultural goal. This willingness to embrace all Americans was not shared by all, however, as, at the 1968 festival, Texas storyteller, Ace Reed, was offended by Reverend Frederick Douglass Kirkpatrick’s speech for the Poor People’s Campaign that ended with a call to the crowd to join him in singing, “This Little Light of Mine”. Kirkpatrick left the stage and said, “Ohhh, I’ll tell you it is really something to be here in Washington with all these coonies,

our Mexicans, and our Indians. We're the most integrated bunch of people you've ever seen in your life. But all of you that think that Lyndon ain't done nothing right, well this is his last big deal, he sent all poor white folks up here now."⁵⁷ Walker explained that Reed felt Kirkpatrick had crossed the line, as the festival was paid for by tax dollars.⁵⁸ These oppositional responses demonstrate how American ideology is not homogenous and how museum exhibitions can be subject to critical response. Even though there were some disagreements, this event was seen as a resounding success to those who were looking at attendance. Within the greater Smithsonian organization, however, "paternalistic" attitudes were still pervasive, and the festival was not taken seriously by curators and administrators who were not involved in its making.⁵⁹

Anacostia Neighborhood Museum

For his second Smithsonian offsite project, Ripley created a distinctly African American space at the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum (ANM), three and a half miles from the National Mall. The ANM opened on September 15, 1967, was initially located in a storefront once occupied by the Carver Theater. (Figure 2.8) Here, a "mini-Smithsonian" was created that "provided counter-narratives to the dominant narrative of American history and culture" for a segment of the population that was not customarily visiting the Smithsonian.⁶⁰ According to Walker, it was here that the "museum became an active instrument of change".⁶¹ In this culturally-specific museum, Africa was no longer presented through a white Western-biased lens. ANM exhibitions put forth a more positive view of African heritage, created by and for community stakeholders. Here,

museum narratives, helped craft African American identity. Native Africans and African Americans curated exhibitions for the museum that focused on their own

Figure 2.8: The Anacostia Historical Society at the Carver Theater--first home for the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum. Smithsonian Archives.1967.



Figure 2.9: “Couple Enjoys ‘Black Wings’ exhibit”, Photographic print. Anacostia Museum; Smithsonian Institution Archives, 1967.



heritage, where exhibitions and cultural events linked the past with the present. John Kinard, an African American serve as the first Director of the museum.⁶² He, and most of the museum's employees resided in the neighborhood.

Early exhibitions at the ANM, were characterized as a “hodgepodge”, and they featured prominent African Americans, and focused on African material culture that dealt with social issues faced by the black community.⁶³ 1968 exhibits for Negro History Week featured portraits of notable black Americans, such as: The Sage of Anacostia 1817-1895: Frederick Douglass and Black Patriots of the American Revolution. Another, Toward Freedom, was an exhibition that synopsized the Civil Rights Movement after 1964. One short-term exhibit, This is Africa, displayed a mix of traditional and contemporary costumes, textiles, and art objects that were on loan from private collections, Columbia University, and African embassies.⁶⁴ Figure 2.9, illustrates how the museum also featured recent African American accomplishments, like the graduation of the 1967 class of Tuskegee airmen.

One notable exhibit, The Rat- Man's Invited Affliction, November 16, 1969 to January 31, 1970. dealt with the realities with living in Southeast Washington. (Figure 2.10) In this exhibit, the history of rats, what attracted them, and how to manage them was explained in a simulated backyard setting with live vermin. Walker claims this exhibit is “...considered landmark in the history of museum exhibitions.”⁶⁵

The ANM differs from the Smithsonian Natural History Museum, as it has a social mission which makes it relevant to its stakeholders and it intends to “shape the future” by engaging in community outreach. The museum's Mission Statement explains how the institution sometimes deals with challenges facing black Americans such as drug

addiction, youth detention, and incarceration. The museum has also pledged to “sustain an ongoing commitment to community documentation and the stewardship of cultural legacies.”⁶⁶ Exhibitions in the 1970s began to be increasingly concentrated in a more cultural and historical direction with *The Evolution of Community*. This exhibition presented the oral histories of 50 D.C. residents, which was visually supported with documents, photographs, and important objects.⁶⁷ Currently, the ANM maintains a permanent exhibition, “African-American History and Culture”, which is balanced by temporary events such as a food fairs, African dance and music performances, a panel discussion, and films on Africa. All of these are all quite popular with the community.⁶⁸

Figure 2.10: ‘The Rat: Man’s Invited Affliction,’ November 16, 1969 to January 31, 1970. Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, Smithsonian Archives, 1970.



Today, the ANM mission statement reads: “The Anacostia Community museum explores social issues impacting diverse populations of the DC metropolitan area to promote mutual understanding and strengthen community bonds.”⁶⁵ The museum acts as a unifier for a melting pot of people and it tries to address their concerns. Walker points out that this effort by the Smithsonian, “... illuminates how the museum field was

changing as new actors, inspired by the Civil Rights movement and Black Power, pressured established institutions to adjust their representation of non-white peoples and, more important, created their own institutions that provided counter-narratives to the dominant narratives of American history and culture.”⁶⁹ By creating a culture-specific-museum, African Americans gained agency and they could interpret their own history as only they understood it.

In 2010, the ANM traced African American cultural heritage in the exhibit: Word, Shout, Song: Lorenzo Dow Turner, Connecting Communities Through Language. (fig. 2.11) For this exhibition, museum volunteer, Alcione Amos, curated a show that utilized artifacts, photos, field notes, and tape recordings of African American scholar and linguist Lorenzo Dow Turner.⁷⁰ (Figure 2.12) Turner’s 40-year career had been dedicated to connecting the American Gullah dialect with Africa. Turner aimed to prove that cultural retentions from the trans-Atlantic slave era were still present in African American culture.⁷¹ A contemporary film designed for this exhibition supported Turner’s work, by showing how anthropologist Joseph Opala connected a 1932 Turner recording of a Gullah song with an African Mende hymn of a woman living in Sierra Leone. The film shows how a duet, where both women sang the hymn as they knew it, was recorded when these two women met in Africa.⁷² This exhibition also connected other Gullah cultural retentions of those African Americans who live on the Sea Islands, off the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia. The Gullah ring shout, shown in Figure 2.12, is an example of one such a cultural retention which has been linked to “African circular religious rituals”.⁷³

The ANM remained in the old Carver Theater storefront until 1974. ANM Director Kinard lobbied for a new location for the museum, as its annual attendance was only a fraction of that experienced by other Smithsonian Museums on the National Mall.⁷³ The ANM did relocate to Fort Stanton Park that same year, and its name changed to the Anacostia Museum. A decade and a half later, a new museum was built on the same site, which was named the American Museum Center for African American History and Culture. In 2004, this institution was renamed the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum.⁷⁴ The ANM has existed for half a century and it has honed its exhibition practices. Because exhibits here are designed by stakeholders, for stakeholders, a uniquely African American viewpoint is reflected in this museum. While stakeholder presence is also inherent in the Folklife Festival, and this annual event has been well-received, the real success of this collaborative formula, will become most evident in the 1997 African Voices exhibition at the NMNH, addressed in the next chapter.

Warren Robbins's African Art Collection

In 1963, another notable development in the exhibition of African material culture occurred outside the Smithsonian when Warren Robbins co-opted his fledgling African art collection to serve as the basis for his two-pronged endeavor-- the Center for Cross Cultural Communication (CCCC) and the Frederick Douglass Institute of Negro Arts and History. For these projects, Robbins married arts with the social sciences, to create an educational institute that inspired racial and global understanding on both popular and academic levels. In the spirit of racial advancement and having a goal to educate, Robbins' endeavor was in some ways similar to that of Albert Barnes, some four decades

before. In 1969, Robbins told the Africa Report, “We want to show the rich creative heritage of Africa, and to underscore the implications of this heritage in America’s quest for interracial understanding.”⁷⁵ African art exhibitions at the Center were used for didactic purposes, especially geared to expose African Americans to their heritage. As a non-profit organization, the Center began raising money for its inaugural project-- the eventual creation of the Museum of African Art.⁷⁶

The CCCC hosted an “eclectic” array of performances including talks and lectures during key years of the Civil Rights Movement, many of which were delivered by Robbins himself.⁷⁷ These events, along with cultural exchange programs and interactive community projects were funded by grants. To help him accomplish his goals at the CCCC, Robbins assembled an eclectic board of thinkers, scientists, politicians, artists, and writers who all had progressive leanings. Robbins’ selections were quite strategic, as in addition to being like-minded, these scholars were all well-connected and could potentially attract resources for the Center.⁷⁸ The CCCC board included: including: Saul Bellow, Joseph Campbell, Ralph Ellison , Buckminster Fuller, S.I. Hayakawa and Margaret Mead .Other notable affiliates for the center included: William O. Douglas, Eliot Elisofon, Rene d’Harnoncourt, Francis Humphrey Howard, Langston Hughes, Jacob Lawrence, Jacques Lipchitz, Ben Shahn, Adlai Stevenson, and Mike Wallace.⁷⁹

In 1964, when Robbins’ collection outgrew his home, he moved the collection to abolitionist, Frederick Douglass’, former home at 316-18 A Street Northeast, on Capitol Hill and opened the Museum of African Art (MAA).⁸⁰ This new iteration of Robbins’ collection was the first American institution dedicated solely to the exhibition of African

Figure 2.11: “Word, Shout, Song: Lorenzo Dow Turner, Connecting Communities Through Language”, Aug. 9 through March 27, 2011. Anacostia Community Museum; Published Cotter, Holland. “A Language Explorer Who Heard Echoes of Africa.” *The New York Times*, September 2, 2010.



Figure 2.12: The Gullah Ring Shout. “Word, Shout, Song: Lorenzo Dow Turner, Connecting Communities Through Language”, “Aug. 9 through March 27, 2011. Anacostia Community Museum; Published in Cotter, Holland. “A Language Explorer Who Heard Echoes of Africa.” *The New York Times*, September 2, 2010.



art.⁸¹ As curator, Robbins preferred a comparative approach when displaying African art and he often juxtaposed African traditional forms from the permanent

Figure 2.13: Warren Robbins instructs with his “focus exhibits”. Smithsonian Institution Archives.



collection alongside Euro-American works in small “focus exhibits”, in an effort to school visitors in how to appreciate art.⁸² (Figure 2.13) Unlike Barnes, Robbins did not have original modernist paintings with which he could compare his African sculpture. Nonetheless, as seen in Figure 2.13, a reproduction of Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger* did help him make his point.

Robbins took his cues from visits to Europe, but he also visited the African continent in 1973. Traditional African art forms that represented sub-Saharan Africa were the focus of collection for the museum in the 1970s and 80s.⁸³ The museum also collected traditional African craft forms that were not previously collected by museums. These personal objects, textiles, and ceramics were decorated with indigenous designs. Unlike

the Smithsonian, Robbins sought to connect names of art makers to the objects they created.⁸⁴

In its early history, MAA was seen as welcoming, and somewhat quaint, as it occupied a pair of 19th C townhouses on Capitol Hill.⁸⁵ The museum was fronted by a large bay window. It had small galleries on its upper and lower floors, where walls were painted in dark colors such as maroon, blue and brown, which were accessed by a spiral staircase that met in the reception area. Receptions were held outdoors on a patio which was decorated with Ndebele-style wall painting.⁸⁶ The basement served as curator's offices and for storage. Frederick Douglass' study was restored on the third floor of the museum. The museum also had a gift shop, situated in a separate townhouse, along with offices for educators, photo archives, and its library.⁸⁷

The de Havenon Collection

In 1971, the museum featured its first show--The de Havenon Collection, which displayed the African art collection of New York dealer, Gaston de Havenon. This dealer introduced sub-Saharan African art to Americans after WWII. The show highlighted 250 individual works—mostly carved figures, used for a variety of purposes. This collection also included regalia used by royalty, such as scepters, staffs, fly whisks, and stools, and ritual objects such as masks, power objects, headdresses, ceremonial adzes, ritual bells, and reliquaries. There were also other functional pieces, such as: granary doors, gold weights and rings, heddle pulleys, gong beaters, and door latches.⁸⁸ While much in the collection was made out of wood, there was a range of media shown, including: terra

cotta, ivory, soapstone, iron, brass and copper.⁸⁹ All works were tagged with “inconspicuous explanatory labels” that described who made them and their functions.⁹⁰

Figure 2.14: Catalogue, *African Art: The de Havenon Collection*. Museum of African Art, 1971.



The exhibition catalog introduces the collection on its cover with a color photograph of a mixed-metal Kota reliquary, “Mbulu-Ngulu” (image of the spirit of the dead) with a stylized heart-shaped face and expressive round eyes.⁹¹ (Figure 2.14) What is inside the catalogue, however, is a testament to de Havenon’s appreciation for a range of aesthetics that one would not find in the Barnes collection. Some wooden Dogon Tellem figures in the collection are so encrusted with propitiatory substances, such as blood and millet, that their features are barely legible. Other wooden pieces, like Dogon masks, are so worn that effects of the human hand can hardly be detected. One remarkable Ekoi headdress departs from the typical leather-covered single-head format

by including the whole body. (Figure 2.15) This male figure sits on a mound-shaped woven basket which is intended to be worn like a cap. Positioned in this way, his feet rest on the wearer's forehead when it is worn. The figure's arms are in front of him, bent upward at the elbows, and positioned right above his knees. The eyes of this character seem focused on something in the distance and his hands are open, as if he is posed to catch something coming his way. Shocks of black hair have been attached to the head of the figure that look like an unkempt mane.

Other pieces, like Ba Songa Figure Fetishes, appear much more threatening, as they have retained magical substances, that were once applied by a ritualistic specialist—the Nganga. These figures are covered with seemingly haphazard applications of fur, seeds, beads, horn, grass cloth, metal, twine, feathers, raffia, and snakeskin, to name a few. The inclusion of these works of the de Havenon Collection, as they are shown, is unusual, as in most other collections, especially that of Barnes, magical substances were stripped away, and the figures were polished. When shown in the de Havenon Collection, these works are divorced from their ritual context and from Africa. In Barnes' Collection, however, works such as this the works have also lost their reference to their original ritual function. Once the magical substances were stripped away, and they were polished and mounted, they were presented in the same manner as Western art.

Robbins wrote a foreword for the catalogue thanking Alan R. Sawyer, for providing material for the text, which was edited by Nancy Hallmark and William Hommel of the MAA, and Ellen Gleason of the Museum of Primitive Art.⁹² The introduction was likely also written by Robbins, but it is not labeled. This text touches on

the spiritual qualities of African art that has attracted Western artists since the 19th century, as well as the modernists' preoccupation with form. The images in the catalogue are black and white and they are categorized by three stylistic regions: Western Sudan, Western Coastal Countries, and the Congo river Basin. Notably, none of the objects are dated.

Robbins' cross-cultural platform for his museum is hinted at in the monograph's text:

From an historical point of view, this wider appreciation is a function of a world social revolution that has been going on throughout this century. It has taken two world wars and a considerable number of smaller upheavals to break down the structure of international colonialism, by the self-justifying myths which it spawned die hard, leaving behind such misnomers as "primitive art", which, like the once derogatory term "Gothic" appears here to stay. Westerners are now compelled to respect the cultural heritage and aspirations of diverse peoples, as all of us together are caught up in an inexorable trend toward a single world community where understanding is vital to survival.⁹³

Here, the author is saying enough time has passed for change to have occurred, and it is time for 19th century attitudes toward non-Western peoples to end. In addition to suggesting that we must appreciate all cultures as a unified whole, the author also points

out that the term “primitive”, which has had negative connotations in the past, is still used to describe African art. In hindsight, the writer’s words seem omen-like, portending trouble for William Rubin, who would go on to use the word to describe his project for MoMA, two decades later.

Figure 2.15: Ekoi Headdress. *African Art: The de Havenon Collection*. Museum of African Art. 1971.



New York Times art critic, James Canaday, picked up other aspirations that are also spelled out in the catalogue text, which he translates as “replacing racial myths with accurate information concerning the African and Afro-American facets of the American heritage.”⁹⁴ Here, the critic acknowledges the need for corrective measures in the presentation of African art, for the sake of the black community. Canaday commented, “...it is the only program I know of that dedicated to black art, hold no hint of

condescension to black people.”⁹⁵ Canaday understands Robbins’ goal for the museum and he validates that the institution’s goal is being met. The need for updating what is known about African art, suggested in the de Havenon catalogue, had begun at the ANM in 1967, and it would come about again in future African exhibitions, such as Sieber’s African Textiles and Decorative Art, at MoMA and Kan’s African Art of the Dogon: The Lester Wunderman Collection, at the Brooklyn Museum, both in 1973.

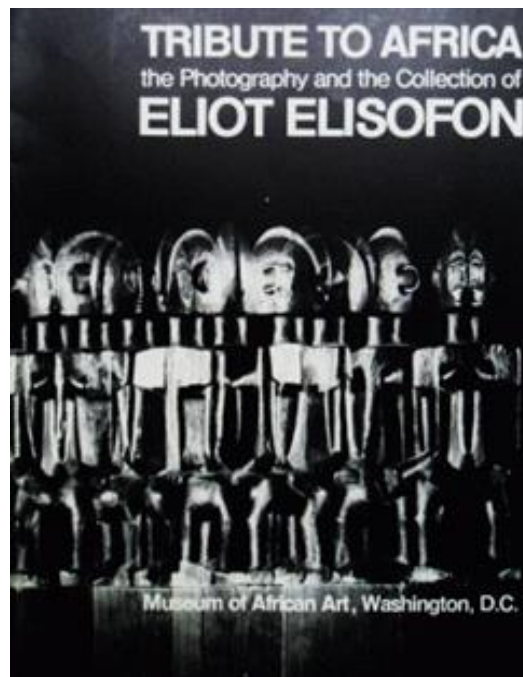
Tribute to Africa the Photography and the Collection on Eliot Elisofon

In 1974, the MAA featured its second exhibition the Tribute to Africa: The Photography and the Collection on Eliot Elisofon: A Memorial Exhibition of the Museum of African Art, June through December 1974.⁹⁶ The cover of the exhibition catalogue displays a black and white photomontage of helmeted Dogon figures that read like a horizontal version of Duchamp’s painting *Nude Descending a Staircase*. (Figure 2.16) Elisofon was a photojournalist, and the first staff photographer for MoMA. He was also an author, and filmmaker, and art collector, who had a special interest in Africa. For the show, the MAA presented Elisofon’s photos, slides, and films, as well as his collection of African sculpture.⁹⁷

The significance of Elisofon’s photographic work of African cultures was its first-hand demonstration of how Africans lived, and how they used their material culture. (Figure 2.17) This visual documentation could be tied to the actual objects on display in museums that dealt with Africa. “I think what he did is he created a more intimate view of Africa,” said MAA Curator Amy Staples, “There was a humanity there. He was actually trying to educate audiences in the U.S. about how he perceived the real Africa to

be.”⁹⁸ Like those with degrees in art history, this photographer visited the continent many times to document the lives of Africans, and his photographs to bring greater understanding to the rest of the world.

Figure 2.16: Catalogue, *Tribute to Africa: The Photography and the Collection of Eliot Elisofon: June through December 1974.* Museum of African Art, Washington, D.C., 1974.



The Sculptor's Eye: The African Art Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Chaim Gross

In 1976, the MAA presented *The Sculptor's Eye: The African Art Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Chaim Gross* (1976-77). (Figure 2.18) Gross, a founding trustee of the MAA by 1963, amassed a collection of over 1000 that represented around 200 tribal styles.⁹⁹ Like most African art collections, the bulk collection is made up of wooden figurative pieces. In addition to these figures, there are masquerade paraphernalia, such as masks, headdresses, a dance wand, and a drum. The collection also contains a personal

shrine, purification trough, fertility doll, and other functional objects such as a heddle pulley, a bell striker, a hunting trophy, a game board, a ladle, spoon, seat, headrest, and comb. Gross and his wife also owned 200 brass weights used for weighing gold dust, some of which are featured in the show. The couple also owned a Kota reliquary, Kongo power figures, an unused divination object, a terra cotta pipe, an ivory pendant, royal beadwork and a Benin bronze, which is featured on the catalogue cover.¹⁰⁰ Like the de Havenon, Gross also had an appreciation for rusticity and collected a range of styles. Some objects in his collection, like de Havenon's, still have their original ritual accessories.

Figure 2.17: Portrait of Kubanyim Mbopey Mabiintsh ma-Kyeen in Mushenge, Congo (1947). Photograph by Eliot Elisofon. In: "National Museum of African Tribute to Africa: The Photography and the Collection of Eliot Elisofon: June through December 1974." Museum of African Art, Washington, D.C., 1974.



In the exhibition catalogue, Warren Robbins noted a new approach taken in categorization of these works, taken by UCLA professor Arnold Rubin. Here, however, like with the de Havenon Collection, objects are not dated.¹⁰¹ Rubin organized work

according to “supra-tribal” means of categorizing the work by language and other cultural traits instead of geography.¹⁰² Sculpture was divided into the Sudan (Western, Central, and Eastern) the Guinea Coast (Western, Southern, and Central, Eastern, and Cameroon Grasslands) , and Equatorial Africa, (Ogowe River Basin, , Lower Zaire Basin, Kasai, and Katanga).¹⁰³ After its 1976 showing at the MAA, *The Sculptor’s Eye* traveled to the Worcester Art Museum, the Cincinnati Museum of Art, and The University of Georgia Museum.

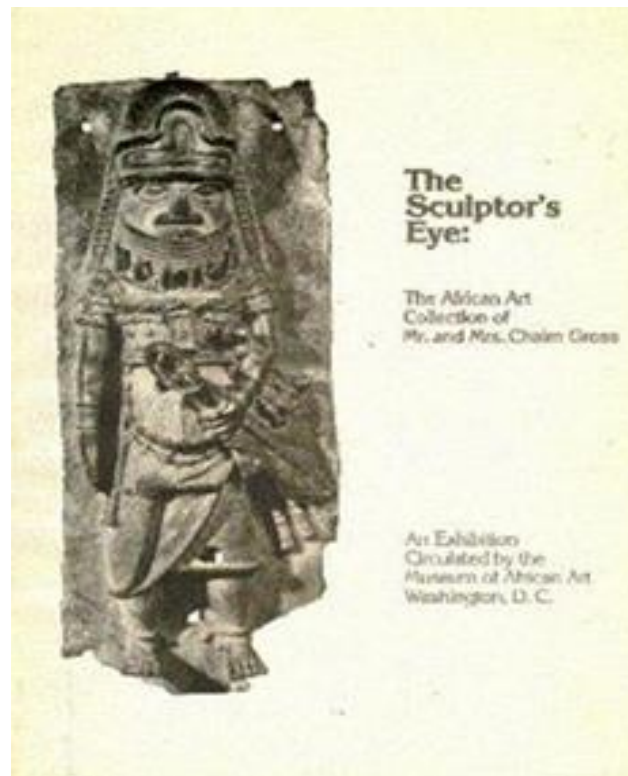
By the mid-1970s, Robbins’ museum occupied eight houses which held 5,000 objects. He managed a staff of thirty-five and operated his museum on an \$800,000 budget. With longevity of his collection in mind, Robbins solicited congressional friends, asking for the government make his collection part of the Smithsonian. On October 5, 1978, President Jimmy Carter signed law S. 2507, which authorized the Smithsonian Institution to “acquire the museum, and its collection and properties.”¹⁰⁴ In 1981, Robbins’ collection was renamed the National Museum of African Art, and in 1987, it moved to its current location on the National Mall. Today, the Museum is known as the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of African Art. Like the ANM, community stakeholders make up the museum’s board and help craft exhibitions that offer positive interpretations of African art and culture that are especially meaningful to the African American community.

Sieber’s Corrective Show for MoMA

While the NMNH did not suffer any repercussions for perpetuating an old paradigm when the Cultures of Africa opened, Africanists like Roy Sieber understood

that African art history was not adequately represented in American museums or in literature, and he sought to take corrective measures. This is notably similar to what was mentioned by Robbins in the de Havenon exhibition catalogue. In 1972, Sieber, the first scholar to receive a PhD in African Art History (1957), curated the exhibition African Textiles and Decorative Art, for MoMA.¹⁰⁵ This show presented a “comprehensive “pan-Africanist approach to clothing, and personal adornment intended to “reveal the breadth and range of the aesthetic life of traditional Africa with greater accuracy than the limited formulations that currently serve[d] in the West as a basis for most studies in African art.”¹⁰⁶

Figure 2.18: Catalogue, *The Sculptor's Eye: The African Art Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Chaim Gross*. Museum of African Art, 1976.



Sieber intended to expand upon what was known about African art, as most of what had been shown to date was largely limited to the western part of the continent and was largely focused on wooden figurative sculpture. In a monograph for the exhibition catalogue, Sieber complained, “The literature of African arts has tended to deal with their “traditional” aspects, implying that as they have become “modern”—that is, as they have come increasingly under the influence of outside factors—they have lost an irreplaceable *elan*.”¹⁰⁷ Sieber’s comment, here, first addresses the idea that the Africans’ ability to create an abstraction is a modern quality, which is like what the European artists exhibited in the early 20th century. Secondly, he addresses the paradox, where Westerners characterize African cultures as nonprogressive, but demand “authentic” traditional art forms for it to be considered worthy. When change does happen in African art, it is credited to outside influences.

What Sieber addresses, here, might be interpreted as a criticism of the NMNH, as this is the very thing reflected in the African Art: Old and New display in the Cultures of Africa exhibition. In this particular display, Westerners define African art by its “traditional” forms, and this is what is demanded by tourists. Any change in contemporary African art is attributed to needs of commerce, where forms evolve in the hands of nontraditional craftsmen. African art-making is then criticized for being of a lesser quality because it no longer bears all the traits of “traditional” African forms. Africans are not credited for breaking away from old ways of doing things, on their own, as they have long been seen as un-evolving.

Instead of linking African works to Western accomplishments, in African Textiles and Decorative Art, Sieber sought to isolate what of African history had been otherwise

been “muddied” by its exposure to the West.¹⁰⁸ He explained that while Islamic exposure created syncretic African forms, Western exposure “replaced traditional forms and values.”¹⁰⁹ Sieber was interested in correcting those “passage of time” issues that was so problematic in exhibitions dealing with non-Western cultures. He said, “... African art is no more frozen in time than any other society.”¹¹⁰ This curator wanted Africans to be considered historically.

For this exhibition, some 250 forms from 26 countries in sub-Saharan Africa were displayed. Objects shown included fabric, daily clothing, costumes, jewelry, as well as status objects (whisks, batons, and fans), hair styles and adornments, and head wear as well as wigs, combs, razors, tweezers, and hairpins.¹¹¹ Most of the work included in the show was made in the 19th century. According to art critic, John Canaday, 75% of the forms displayed were still in use in Africa today.¹¹² This was unlike exhibits at the Smithsonian, where no distinction was made between the age of an object and whether or not it was still a viable art form. In his review of the exhibition, Canaday revisited the artifact/art shift when he discussed how the show was a “revelation of fine artistry in an area that has been thought of largely in terms of anthropology and folk crafts.”¹¹³ While these objects were indeed functional, their aesthetic qualities and the ingenuity of their maker was what was being highlighted.

As seen in Figure 2.19, some of the dimly lit galleries in this exhibition were reminiscent of jewelry store presentation. Round columns contained objects of personal adornment in dramatically-lit with acrylic vitrines at eye level that circled the room. Some spaces between the columns were punctuated with glass- front wall cases that held additional items. There were also occasional stage-like presentations of clothed

mannequins or garments suspended from poles or mounted to the wall. In some galleries, visitors were corralled along constructed half-walled chutes, that distanced the viewer from displays of hanging fabrics; some were displayed flat on the floor. (Figure 2.20)

Figure 2.19: Installation view of “African Textiles and Decorative Arts.” October 11, 1972–January 31, 1973. Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN1012c.3. Photograph by George Cserna. © 2018 The Museum of Modern Art.



Figure 2.20: Installation view of “African Textiles and Decorative Arts.” October 11, 1972–January 31, 1973. Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN1012c.12. Photograph by George Cserna. © 2018 The Museum of Modern Art.



While Sieber called for the geographic ordering of objects in the exhibition, these objects were not contextualized in dioramas like they were at the Smithsonian. These objects were not presented as proof of culture, but instead, were intended to be appreciated aesthetically. “The exhibition,” said Canaday, “takes on an extra dimension as proof of the persistence of an esthetically highly developed culture that, so far, has not entirely succumbed to the aggression of neon, plastics, and factory cloth.”¹¹⁴ While the Smithsonian continued to assess Africa through a Western eye, Sieber “resurrected” objects typically held in “museum storage bins” and gave them a new purpose in this exhibition that exalted African creativity.¹¹⁵

Brooklyn Museum and African Art in the 1960s and 1970s

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Brooklyn Museum continued to promote African art in a series of eight shows: African Sculpture: Old and New (November 1, 1962- January 3, 1963), Paintings by Young Africans (July 01, 1967- July 23, 1967), African Sculpture (May 20, 1970-June 21, 1970), Doing the Dogon (April 8, 1973-May 1973), African Art of the Dogon: The Lester Wunderman Collection (April 14, 1973-May 20, 1973), Textiles from Morocco and Algeria (February 20, 1974-April 14, 1974), Yoruba Religious Images (November 3, 1976- March 27, 1977), and Africa in Antiquity: The Arts of Ancient Nubia and the Sudan (September 30, 1978-December 31, 1978).¹¹⁶ As can be seen by perusing the titles of these exhibitions, primitive art curator, Michael Kan is moving away from essentializing African art as a continental canon, and instead, chooses to feature single African cultures, such as: African Art of the Dogon (1973).¹¹⁷

This body of work for African Art of the Dogon had been collected by advertising executive, Lester Wunderman who visited the African continent with photographer Eliot Elisofon in the 1970s. While the taxonomic shift had encouraged showing what was once considered as artifact as art, from the 1920s on, Kan said, “We are moving away from the more superficial “masterpiece show” which emphasizes only fine objects removed from their African context.”¹¹⁸ African objects could still be appreciated aesthetically, but they would now be contextualized-- tied to the culture that made them.

In a review for African Art of the Dogon (1973), [the reviewer] described the show as “an adventure in aesthetic discovery” that revolved around “involvement with a people and their culture”.¹¹⁹ The contextualization of over 100 objects, allowed the audience to

achieve a greater understanding of both art form and culture of the Dogon peoples through a multimedia approach. For this exhibition, Dogon music played in the background.¹²⁰ Codified Dogon traits were reflected in objects, such as the primordial couple, granary doors, Kanaga masks, horse and rider sculptures, and Tellem-style nommo figures, which were contextualized in front of a backdrop of super-sized photos. These photos, taken in the field by Elisofon, showed masked dancers in full regalia. (Figure 2.21) According to Canaday, Dogon mythology was outlined in the museum catalogue, *African Art of the Dogon: The Myths of the Cliff Dwellers* (1973), written by Jean Laude.

Figure 2.21: African Art of the Dogon: The Lester Wunderman Collection, April 4, 1973 through May 20, 1973. Photograph. Brooklyn Museum Libraries and Archives, 1973.



As a nod to European artists, who recognition of African work as fine art, Canady said the show “round[ed] out... our understanding of primitive art”. He claimed it was “...as if the tribal sculptors themselves had been members of the School of Paris”.¹²¹

Almost three quarters of a century after the European avant-garde first called attention to African art, and New York gallerists highlighted these connections, curators and critics were still drawing parallels between the African and the modern. This practice would continue into the next decade, with MoMA’s *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinities of the Modern and the Tribal*, and in the next decade, it would prove to be problematic

Kan’s approach to African Art of the Dogon may have indicated that a new trend towards contextualization was underway, as five out of the eight shows over these decades focused on specific African cultures, rather than the whole continent. It is therefore possible, that this trend may have later influenced critical response to MoMA’s 1984 show, as it was the lack of contextualization that Thomas McEvilley would so vehemently protest.

Summary of the State of African Art in the Late 1960s

Because the NMNH perpetuated 19th century cultural evolution theory when it presented the 1967 *Cultures of Africa* exhibition, there is little debate over Arnold’s revisionist assessment that this exhibition was an anachronism from the day it opened. Reception-wise however, I have found no evidence that suggests anyone took immediate offense, even though the museum’s narrative seemed to support Western hegemonic interests that implied racism. While the *Cultures of Africa* exhibition did present Africa through a Western lens, there were subtle signs in a museum brochure and in the *Arts of*

Africa: Old and New display that hinted that the continent's many peoples were not extinct, or frozen in the past, but instead allowed for African peoples to progress. Within the greater Smithsonian system, there were also agents who were more mindful of the contemporary socio-political climate who pushed for change. This is evident in the efforts of S. Dillon Ripley who instituted the American Folklife Festival and the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum. These projects allowed the Smithsonian to reach out to those who did not feel welcome in its museums and they allowed the Institution as a National Museum system to promote a more multicultural approach which will be demanded of the NMNH in the last decade of the millennium.

While the Smithsonian was struggling to find a narrative that did not offend those whose cultural heritage they were representing, Africanist scholars like Roy Sieber and Michael Kan steered African exhibitions away from the essentialization of the continent and trended back towards contextualization of the African art object in their respective shows: *African Textiles* (MoMA, 1978) and *African Art of the Dogon* (Brooklyn Museum, 1978). The precedent set by New York gallerists in 1914, where non-Western art was compared with Western art, had continued for decades, but it was now being challenged by Sieber. Kan's decade-long focus on the continent also seemed to anticipate the future rise in popularity in African art that would materialize in the next decade. In addition to contextualizing work, scholars continued to focus on the aesthetic qualities of African art, without emphasis on a masterpiece. The attitudes of Sieber and Kan, I argue, may have been contributing factors to the development of a mindset which found "Primitivism" to be so offensive, in 1984.

In addition to those with degrees in the field, Warren Robbins demonstrated how the exhibition of African art could be influenced by a collector who was passionate and scholarly, who could use his personal collection to not only to present a positive interpretation of African art on behalf of the black population, but also to better racial relationships in the U.S. The absorption of Robbins' Museum of African Art in 1979 as the National Museum of African Art would be one of the first culture-specific entities to occupy the National Mall.

Conclusion

For twenty-five years, the Cultures of Africa (1967-1992) exhibition at the NMNH would remain on view, without incident. In the future, a negative letter-writing campaign by the African Study Group Tu Wa Moja will bombard the museum with a negative letter-writing campaign that the exhibition closed.

From Arnoldi's revisionist standpoint, the Cultures of Africa, by late 1990s standards, was indeed a failure for ignoring changes in anthropological beliefs, as cultural evolution theories that hierarchically positioned Westerners above everyone else had long been outdated. Her assessment does not, however, address how this exhibition was received by the viewing public between its installation in 1967 up to the late 1980s. From a social reception standpoint, I argue, that when the Cultures of Africa exhibition opened in 1967 it was not as offensive to the viewing public because those who were visiting the museum were not being represented in its cultural displays. These visitors were part of the hegemonic majority that likely had little problem with the hierarchy posed by cultural evolution theory that had been the paradigm for almost a century. As the socio-political

climate began to change, and African Americans gained more agency, protests for fairer representation in the Nation's Museum were voiced and the museum would be forced to respond.

While the NMNH did not fairly represent all American peoples, I argue, it did reflect the mainstream American mindset of the Nation's majority when the exhibit opened in 1967. I believe this exhibition likely grew more offensive each passing day, as the American ideology evolved, and a new paradigm would be demanded.

Chapter 3: Tu Wa Moja and the Paradigm Shift

At the close of the twentieth century, we are witnessing across the globe competing, frequently cataclysmic discourses about identity. These discourses are literally erupting into activities that reshape the meaning of “national culture.” Simultaneously, many of these cultural confrontations are giving visibility and voice to transnational cultural communities. Within this world-wide context, U.S. cultural and educational institutions are at the national frontline of a related volatile, but potentially promising, debate frequently referred to as “cultural wars.” Museums in particular have become a flashpoint on the cultural landscape of what cultural conservatives Arthur A. Schlesinger and Patrick J. Buchanan accurately, although shrilly, formulate as “a struggle to redefine the national identity.”

James C. Early¹

The passage above, from J. Early’s monograph, “Culture [Wars]” and the African Diaspora: Challenge and Opportunity for U.S. Museums, could serve as an abstract for museum activities in the decades surrounding the most recent turn of the century. It is especially relevant to this thesis as it revolves around the same reshaping of national culture that has been influenced by socio-political wrangling over race for the past hundred years. Until 1992, evolution theory in the cultural exhibits at the National Museum has supported the belief people of Euro-American descent occupied the top rung

in the evolution of human culture. From the earliest decades of the 20th century, cultural displays in this museum have presented Africans as uncivilized peoples, without a history-- as subjects to be studied and in some sense fundamentally different from those peoples--Euro-Americans--with history. Further, these categories were directly connected to old evolutionary categories of “race.”. If narratives in the NMNH African cultural displays are a reflection of American mainstream attitudes about race—up to the 1990s-- the Nation’s mainstream mindset seems to have been mired in a 19th century paradigm. This hegemonic viewpoint may have been understandable in the early decades of the 20th century, when anthropology theories were first being questioned, however, this practice is harder to defend after mid-century for the *Cultures of Africa* (1967) exhibition. One must wonder, if the Smithsonian is tasked with representing all Americans, and not a paradigm that inherently places some Americans above others, how long can this possibly continue?

This chapter will address how the 1980s were a memorable decade for African art and material culture exhibition, that coincided with ideological debates within the nation, that spilled over into art exhibition spaces.² According to Karp and Kratz, it was a “chilling climate within museums...curators and directors wanted to avoid being targets”.³ Controversies stirred by non-museum scholars played out in the media, which resulted in a plethora of discourse and collaboration, that influenced visitor’s thoughts on museum presentations.⁴ This chapter examines how the 1980s were not only a boon for African art exhibition, but also a turning point in the exhibition of non-Western art and material culture. I will examine how MoMA’s 1984 show *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Modern and the Tribal* seems to mark a turning point in our cultural

history, that not only changed how non-Western work would be shown in the future, but also may have indicated that a paradigm shift might have occurred in American mainstream attitudes concerning race. I will look at how a boost in black agency precipitated a late 1980s letter-writing campaign that brought about the demise of the Cultures of Africa at the NMNH, in 1992. This protest on behalf of the African American community not only signaled a change in patronage for the museum, but also called for a new approach to African cultural display that was far more democratic.

1980s a Banner Decade for African Art

While interest in African art had been growing since the 1960s, the 1980s proved to be a banner decade for African art exhibition—some of it good, some of it discursive. In 1981, three years after being adopted by the Smithsonian, Warren Robbin's MAA was renamed the National Museum of African Art. Six years later, this museum would move from its Capital Hill location into its new home on the National Mall and it would be called the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of African Art (NMAA, 1987). In New York, Nelson Rockefeller's collection of African, Oceanic, and Native American work (the former Museum of Primitive Art) was installed in a wing honoring his son, Michael, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in 1992. While the addition of these two permanent exhibition places was a boon for African art, much of this chapter will focus on the dialogue surrounding MoMA's 1984, *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Modern and the Tribal*, and the late 1980s letter-writing campaign by the black study group Tu Wa Moja, that would eventually bring about the closing of the 1967 Cultures of Africa exhibition at the NMNH in 1992.

Primitivism in 20th C Art- Criticism Heard to Africa and Back

The sacrifice of the wholeness of things to the cult of pure form is a dangerous habit of our culture. It amounts to a rejection of the wholeness of life. After fifty years of living with the dynamic relationship between primitive and Modern objects, are we not ready yet to begin to understand the real intentions of the native traditions, to let those silenced-cultures speak to us at least?

Thomas McEvelley, Doctor Lawyer, Indian, Chief ⁵

While the Museum of Modern Art has long been known as a bastion of progressiveness, Thomas McEvelley's diatribe in Artforum, admonished the museum's curators for their misguided approach for the 1984 exhibition, Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern. For this show, curators William Rubin and Kirk Varnedoe juxtaposed objects made by unknown Africans next to work made by well-known European modernists and asked the viewers to appreciate their similarities and consider how one may have influenced the another. At first, McEvelley embraced the show for its aesthetic appeal, but he later denounced it for rehashing Western and the non-Western comparisons that had gone on since 1914.⁶ McEvelley scolded, "...something important is at issue here, something deeply, even tragically, wrong. In depressing starkness, 'Primitivism' lays bare the way our cultural institutions relate to foreign cultures, revealing it as an ethnocentric subjectivity inflated to co-opt such cultures."⁷ Here, the critic accuses Rubin and Varnedoe of putting foreign cultures

under a microscope, to be used at will. As McEvilley goes on, he reasons that the contextualization of objects made by under-represented peoples would lead to a greater understanding of their cultures and would help situate their work on the global art historical timeline.⁸

The Many Sides of “Primitivism”

For “Primitivism”, Rubin’s intent for this exhibition was to demonstrate how both modern and tribal artists took conceptual approaches to their subject matter. Here, 150 modernist works of well-known artists like Picasso, Gauguin, Klee, Modigliani, and Brancusi, as well as works of other Expressionists and Surrealists, were shown alongside 200 tribal objects made by African, Oceanic, and North American makers. Some tribal objects were masterpieces lent by museums, and others had been collected by European artists in Paris flea markets—once displayed in their studios for inspiration. Some of the best-known modernist works included in the show were: Picasso’s “Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J.)”, Guitar, Klee’s “Mask of Fear”, Brancusi’s “Madame L.R.”, Ernst’s “Bird-head” and Nolde’s “Masks”.⁹

MoMA Presents African Material Culture as Art

Alongside these modernist works, decontextualized African objects were shown, but their makers were unknown.¹⁰ Because the taxonomic shift had justified the presentation of artifact as art earlier in the century, Price points out that some of the non-Western objects exhibited in this show are the very objects that are found in natural history museums. She says, “...visitors to these exhibits are made to understand-through

a variety of cues ranging from lighting, spacing, grouping, and so forth, but most directly through label copy-that one set of objects represents the artifacts of life, and that the other represents world-class works of art, sometimes even masterpieces.”¹¹

Unlike what was being done in the cultural exhibits at the NMNH, MoMA presented African material culture as art. For the “Primitivism” show, some galleries had dark walls; others were lighter in color. Western paintings hung on the walls, as expected, but sculpture in the galleries was presented in a mix of exhibition styles. In some galleries, isolated sculptural works were situated on pedestals of differing heights, which acted like a dotted line, pulling the viewer’s eye through the gallery. (Figure 3.1) Sculpture could also be found in glass front vitrines where objects were mounted to bases or hung on the walls. There were also freestanding display cases in some galleries. The interiors of these display cases were lighter in color than their surroundings and offered a contrast for objects encased within them. Objects throughout the exhibition were carefully spaced and well-lit, and no obstacles disrupted the flow on the gallery floors. Critic Arthur Danto acted a voice of dissent over MoMA’s installation, which he commented looked like “decorative touches destined for tasteful interiors.”¹² Hilton Kramer complained that the low lighting in the galleries and brightly illuminated displays created a “slide-lecture atmosphere” and that felt quite didactic.¹³ While tombstone-style labels were used to identify objects, there was also additional wall text that called attentions to the affinities between Western and non-Western works Kramer characterized as “authoritative.”¹⁴

“Primitivism” was divided into four categories: “Concepts”, “History”, “Affinities”, and “Contemporary Exploration”. For “Concepts”, MoMA described the function behind the display to “probe the basic issues raised by the intersection of the two arts”.¹⁵ These “issues” were arguments over who might have used abstraction first, and whether or not the Europeans were directly influenced by African work. In the “History” section, non-Western inspirational objects used by modern artists were displayed alongside the works they influenced, from Gauguin up through Abstract Expressionism.

Figure 3.1: Installation view of “‘Primitivism’ in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern,” September 19, 1984–January 15, 1985. Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Photograph by Katherine Keller, 1984.



Figure 3.2: Picasso's "Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.)" hung next to African masks. "Primitivism" Installation View. "'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern," September 19, 1984–January 15, 1985. Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN1382.20. Photograph by Katherine Keller. © 2018. Picasso's "Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.)" hung next to African masks.



Figure 3.3: "'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art" installation view". September 19, 1984–January 15, 1985. Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. IN1382.20. Photograph by Katherine Keller. © 2018.



In one gallery, as seen in Figure 3.2, Picasso's "Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.)" was hung next to a row of masks of the Dan, the Pende, and the Songye peoples, and one from the Etoumbi region. These masks were hung high on the dark-walled gallery and they were dramatically lit. To demonstrate similarities between the painting and the masks, extended labels with in-situ text flank photographs of the three female faces, isolated from Picasso's painting, juxtaposed next to images of the African works that influenced them. On an adjacent wall in the same gallery, seen in Figure 3.3, objects from the Trocadero, a place often visited by Picasso, are displayed in a tall glass-front display case. This grouping includes a mask and large Grade society figure of the Malekula, and Grebo and Susu masks.

The finest tribal examples in the exhibition were reserved for the "Affinities section" where connections could be made between modern taste and non-Western arts.¹⁶ In these exhibits, "common denominators" were illustrated by juxtaposing tribal and modern objects, where the makers had independently arrived at similar aesthetic solutions in their work, where conceptualization was credited to intuition and "mythic universals".¹⁷ One of most famous African/modernist pairings in this section was a wooden Tswana Mask from Upper Volta and Max Ernst's bronze Bird-Head (1934-1935). (Figure 3.4) These works shared "a flat rectangular head, straight horizontal mouth, small round eyes, and a bird's head projecting from the forehead."¹⁸

McEvilley finds the approach taken here as "presumptuous" and "fortuitous", as he believes these similarities could merely be "coincidental resemblances".¹⁹ Unlike Rubin, the critic also allows for the possibility that Western works could have been directly influenced by African objects, saying, "Modern artists don't necessarily have to

Figure 3.4: “Primitivism” Catalogue. Tusyan Mask from Upper Volta and Max Ernst’s Bird-Head. Published in *Primitivism in 20th Century Art; Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern. Volume II*. William Rubin, editor. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. 1984.



have seen an object exactly similar to one of their own for influence to exist.”²⁰

“The museum’s decision to give us virtually no information about the tribal objects on display, to wrench them out of context, calling them to heel in the defense of formalist Modernism reflects an exclusion of the anthropological point of view”, complains McEvelley.²¹ By merely looking at stylistic similarities does not inform the viewer of what drove the aesthetic choices made by “tribal” creators and what the work meant to them, which he feels is “misleading”, as their ritual function is not disclosed.²² He criticizes Rubin for limiting the “general function” of tribal objects to aesthetics, implying that they fulfill the same roles as art in Western cultures.²³ McEvelley is perhaps most offended by the lack of chronological contextualization, and says that even assigning them to a century would have been helpful.²

Figure 3.5: Installation view of *Marble Stone Circle*. Marble. 8' diameter. Richard Long. Published in *Primitivism in 20th Century Art; Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern. Volume II*. William Rubin, editor. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. 1984. Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Photograph by Katherine Keller, 1984.



As a culmination to the exhibition, a “primal sense of art-making” was sought out in “Contemporary Exploration”, where comparisons were made between formal and conceptual aspects of Western art, made after 1970.²⁵ Most of the works in this section were large in scale, and they were not put on bases or pedestals. Some work was wall-mounted or leaned against the wall. As seen with Richard Long’s *Marble Stone Circle*, in Figure 3.5, most of these large-scale works sat on the gallery floor. Some specific works found in this area include: *Variability and Repetition of Variable Forms* (1971) and *Totem* (1970) by Nancy Graves, *Untitled* (1970), by Eva Hesse, *Untitled, Four Corners* (1972), by Jackie Winsor, and *First Gate Ritual Series, 10/78* by Michelle Singer.²⁶

McEvilley was quite critical of this section of the exhibition as he found Varnedoe's connection of women with the primal to be cliché.²⁷

Rubin and Sweeney Differ in their Approaches to African Art

The 1984 MoMA exhibit approach was not the only way the museum had approached the relation of modern arts with the arts of those outside Euro-America. MoMA's 1935 African Negro Art exhibition, curated by James Johnson Sweeney, was quite antithetical to "Primitivism", in both form and content. Unlike Rubin's use of dark walls, Sweeney's spaces were stark-white. The labels for Sweeney's show were tombstone, in style. (Figure 3.6) There was no didactic text used for this exhibition, because he wanted the viewer to concentrate solely on form. Rubin, however, provided much information that explained the similarities between Western and non-Western creative forms. Sweeney did not make comparisons, between the two, as his focus was solely on African art.

Sweeney acknowledged modernists on the cover of his exhibition catalogue, but inside, the curator organized objects by function and ethnicity, and provided a cultural context as he knew it, all within a span of 156 pages. Sweeney's words "Today, the art of Negro Africa stands in the position accorded it on genuine merits that are genuinely its own." seem to imply that this curator did not necessarily appraise African art through a Western lens.²⁸ Sweeney's contextualization of African work in the exhibition catalogue and sole focus on African forms seem to indicate that his exhibition was truly about Africa. Rubin, on the other hand, has been accused of using tribal work to present a show about Classical modernism.²⁹ Text wise, Rubin's two-volume, almost 700-page catalogue

for “Primitivism”, was criticized by McEvilley for bombarding the reader with information.³⁰

Rubin’s lack of contextualization of non-Western work for “Primitivism” is not really surprising, as the passing of seventy years had likely solidified what was begun with the taxonomic shift since 1914. Sweeney’s show, on the other hand, came only two decades after the shift. Sweeney was the first to implement the taxonomic shift for an exhibition in a fine art museum, and he may have not yet felt comfortable parting from old habits, when dealing with a foreign culture. At that time, there seemed to be a growing interest in Africa, as Goldwater was pursuing it for his PhD at this time. His pursuit is credited with eventual college programs in African Art History. The two men were also known acquaintances.³¹

A trend toward recontextualization, discussed in Chapter 2, seemed to be on the rise by the 1970s, as newly educated Africanists were trying to take corrective measures in what was known about Africa. Roy Sieber had addressed issues of greater specificity in cultural recognition and contextualization in *African Textiles and Decorative Art* (1972), in this same museum, less than a decade before *Primitivism*.³² This had also been Kan’s practice at the Brooklyn Museum, in the 1970s for: *Doing the Dogon* (April 8, 1973-May 1973), *African Art of the Dogon: The Lester Wunderman Collection* (April 14, 1973-May 20, 1973), *Textiles from Morocco and Algeria* (February 20, 1974-April 14, 1974), and *Yoruba Religious Images* (November 3, 1976- March 27, 1977), and *Africa in Antiquity: The Arts of Ancient Nubia and the Sudan* (September 30, 1978-December 31, 1978).³³ When considering what seemed to be a newly emerging trajectory, Rubin does seem somewhat behind the times.

Figure 3.6: Installation view of “African Negro Art.” March 18, 1935–May 19, 1935. Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Photograph by Soichi Sunami, 1935.



Visual Success/Conceptual Failure

From solely a formal standpoint, without considering the inherent baggage, such as inequities in who made the work, fame vs. anonymity, socio-political context, and who influenced who, it is hard to deny that similarities between the works in the “Primitivism” don’t exist. From a conceptual standpoint, when one reads Rubin’s monograph for the “Primitivism” catalogue, his intentions for the show seem pure. He said, “... I want to understand the Primitive sculptures in terms of the Western context in which modern artists ‘discovered’ them.”³⁴ In other words, Rubin wanted to experience the same turn - of-the-century emotions modernists felt when they first identified with non-Western work. What Rubin cannot justify in his introduction is the lopsidedness of the presentation. Western artists were lauded as geniuses and placed on art history’s timeline. Non-Westerners, on the other hand, were unacknowledged by name, culture or

chronology, as seemingly accidental creators, appraised through a Western lens. While McEvilley raved about the formal presentation of the show, calling it “brilliant”, he also criticized it for being short sighted, and Western-dominated in approach.³⁵ “By their absolute repression of primitive context, meaning, content, and intention, (the dates of works, their functions, their religious or mythological connections, their environments),” McEvilley, railed,” they have treated the primitives as less than human, less than cultural—as shadows of a culture, their selfhood, their Otherness, wrung out of them.”³⁶ McEvilley found the lack of contextualization of non-Western work unacceptable. This statement was seconded by Clifford who claimed that Western fascination with traditional non-Western artifacts, essentially “ignore[s] the values of those it claims to celebrate.” Clifford did not approve of Westerners’ consideration of primitivism as an outward sign of genuineness, as they were not concerned about who made it or the culture from which it came. Danto also called Rubin out, claiming the exhibition was “stupendously misconceived”, blaming the curator for “museumological manipulation.”³⁷

While Rubin attempts to explain his way out of the use of primitivism as the uniting concept for his show, his declaration that tribal works were not the driving force behind modern art seems defensive. Rubin is willing to draw parallels, but he rejects any notion that non-Westerners may have influenced work of the modernists. Rubin’s use of Picasso’s own words in his monograph, “The African sculptures that hang around my studios are more witness than models” is also problematic.³⁸ When Picasso collected non-Western work, he embraced primitivism on new terms, as a description of the novelty and immediacy of emotion reflected in of abstract forms. Here, primitivism describes an appreciation for the simplified style of an object for which Picasso felt an emotional

affinity. However, when the artist denies any influence of non-Western art may have had, on he, or other modernists, he embraces the 19th century outlook that considers them to be less than equal.

Ultimately, it was the lack of context for the non-Western work- that proved to be the show's downfall. While this exhibit, went down in history as how to not show non-Western art, it was not just art critics who protested Rubin and Varnedoe's approach. Jones, characterized the public's response to the show as " ... the 'politicization of the humanities [that] has blasted out of the academy and into media and has hit the museum world like a hurricane."³⁹ Critics were joined by anthropologists, historians, sociologists, and Liberal Arts professors in voicing their objections.⁴⁰ The public recognized that this show did not reflect the contemporary mindset. To the public, Rubin and Varnedoe did not do justice to the work of non-Westerner artists. African, Oceanic, and Native American artists were lumped together as Other, without a history, and without personal recognition. "Once a viewer reads between the lines...", explains Winad Al-Tawil, "...the seemingly innocent exhibit, the presumed to be outdated views expose themselves as operating alive and well in contemporary times, and furthermore, at such inherently trusted educational institutions as respected as the MoMA".⁴¹ Like the Smithsonian, the perpetuation of outdated beliefs has haunted this institution that had otherwise been held in high esteem.

Meaning of the Backlash

As curator, Rubin was blinded by his goal of documenting the meeting point of "tribal" objects with the modern, and he did not consider the hidden consequences in the

use of primitivism as a touchstone for appreciating African art. Rubin dutifully laid out his methodology by tracing the evolution in the meaning of primitivism in his introduction for the exhibition's catalogue, but he did not account for the public's interpretation of a word that had so much historical baggage.

While much had been made of Rubin and Varnedoe's shortcomings for "Primitivism", the public reaction to this exhibition marked a pivotal moment in American thought, that seemed to indicate that eight decades of conflict over identity and ideology finally caused a paradigm shift in mainstream beliefs about race.⁴² The upholding of orthodox beliefs and practices by MoMA curators, late into the 20th century, finally elicited a response from the public that said these Eurocentric practices could go on no longer. Here, the same negative stain of cultural evolution theories that still plagued the Smithsonian's in-house exhibits, would not be tolerated for MoMA's 1984 show. While the term primitivism has long been associated with non-Western art, its use in 1984 proved to be a minefield for these curators, as the public defined it as racist. The negative dialogue surrounding the show was seconded, so publicly, it has reverberated throughout the art world for almost three decades.⁴³

"Primitivism" was a pivotal moment in the exhibition of non-Western art, and it changed how African art would be shown in the future. It was also important from a cultural standpoint, as I believe it marked a paradigm shift in American ideology that would have to eventually be acknowledged in NMNH African cultural exhibits. For a year after the show, McEvilley, Rubin and Varnedoe publicly debated the show in *Artforum*.⁴⁴ According to New York Times Art Critic, Holland Cotter, "They were the opening salvos in an argument about multiculturalism that would define American art for

the rest of the 1980s and '90s. When the dust had settled, it was clear who the winner was, and it was clear that a new era in thinking about art had begun.”⁴⁵ The ensuing years would reflect greater agency for non-Western and a shift in the American mainstream mindset over race.

Trouble on the Horizon

While “Primitivism” was taking heat at MoMA, the Cultures of Africa was in its seventeenth year of exhibition at the NMNH. The same pugilistic zeitgeist that battered Rubin and Varnedoe would soon be aimed at the Smithsonian. The Smithsonian’s century-long refusal to abandon 19th century beliefs would finally be addressed by a group that acted as a voice for black Americans, when they publicly voiced their displeasure and demanded change in the cultural displays at the NMNH.

Tu Wa Moja African Study Group

Five years after “Primitivism” (1989), Helen Bernice Maddox, a statistical supervisor for the Agency of International Development, attended a Smithsonian seminar on Ancient Egypt and Evolution of the Species. The museum’s “Out of Africa” explanation of evolution offended Maddox, as the museum’s explanation did not include black people.⁴⁶ “Their exhibits show species throughout the evolutionary process as being White.”, complained Maddox, “This is simply incorrect because life and human ancestry began in Africa. These human ancestors that the Smithsonian depicts as White were actually Black.”⁴⁷ Maddox, a proponent of Afrocentrism-- a “worldview that places Africa, rather than Europe, at the center of scholarly focus” formed the Tu Wa Moja

(“We are One” in Swahili”) African Study Group in 1989.⁴⁸ The function of this study group was to better “understand the vital role they [African Americans] have played in civilization as we know it today”.⁴⁹ While the group took an Afrocentric approach to the study of scientific theories surrounding human evolution, but they “pay[ed] tribute to all ethnic groups whose history has been neglected in American education.”⁵⁰ Because Tu Wa Moja activism sought to correct misinformation pertaining to African heritage, NMNH cultural displays came in the group’s crosshairs.⁵¹ While African Americans were indeed part of the paradigm shift that seemed to be demonstrated in the “Primitivism” show, this fight over the 1967 exhibits in the NMNH were more culture specific, as it was black heritage that suffered in the 1967 Cultures of Africa exhibit in this museum.

In 1990, Tu Wa Moja African Study Group began to pepper the National Chronicle (Washington D.C.) with scathing reviews of NMNH displays. Headlines that read: “Blacks Excluded from Human Evolution in Smithsonian Exhibits”(8/3/1990) and “Smithsonian Exhibit-False Interpretation of the Truth”(8/17/1990), commanded readers’ attention and the accompanying articles criticized the museum for inaccuracies in its narratives and the promotion of racism.⁵² Prior to 1990, I found no evidence in African American newspapers that indicated the Smithsonian was offending stakeholders with their lectures or exhibitions. However, that same year (1990), Christy B. Day, a reporter for the Washington Informer, did voice her displeasure with “The Bushman” diorama in the 1967 Cultures of Africa exhibition. Day protested the less-than-flattering depictions of Khoi-San figures that were “designed to look dusty, partially nude and destitute with downcast eyes.”⁵³ Day was uncomfortable with the display and she intended to do something about it. Newspaper articles in the National Chronicle and in the Washington

Informer, proved to be an effective form of black activism, as they kicked off a letter-writing campaign that would finally bring about the 1992 closing of the NMNH Cultures of Africa exhibits. Success was, in part, due to a note at the end of each article, that asked for commentary to be directed to Mr. Robert McCormick Adams, Office of Secretary, at the Smithsonian.⁵⁴

Over time, the Smithsonian amassed a file of letters from academics, local residents, and minority interns who complained about NMNH exhibits.⁵⁵ The litany of complaints included, a lack of direction, mono-dimensional presentations of society and individuals, racist terminology, stereotyping, and overall misinterpretation of Africans.⁵⁶ Day explains that the Study Group was "... adamant in its protest because it believes the Smithsonian is a center for historical and cultural education and these exhibits will affect how people, particularly people of African descent, view themselves."⁵⁷ As the National Museum, the Smithsonian has a social responsibility to accurately depict African culture and museum goers expect the museum to present the most current theory. The crucial nature of getting it right is underscored by current Tu Wa Moja president, Scot Brown, who said, "Changes are only made when we change the way we perceive ourselves. The Black community has problems that are directly related to how we think about ourselves. But when you start learning our history and understand that we have achieved remarkable things since, throughout civilization, you realize that [African Americans] are not just people struggling in the streets."⁵⁸ The African cultural exhibits in the NMNH serve as a source of identity formation for black Americans, and if the narrative is negative, so too might be their understanding of self.

Who's to Blame?

What is happening in this little corner of the Natural History Museum is a collision of two irresistible forces: Science and politics. Or, if you prefer, scientific correctness and political correctness...The problem is that the science of humankind—anthropology—is every bit as turbulent at the moment as the political realm. Not even scientists are sure what a “balanced” view of human evolution would show.”

Washington Post writer, Joel Achenbach⁵⁹

Like any other situation where wrong has been done, those who find fault with an exhibition look for someone or something to blame. Achenbach's statement above, reflects how the scholarly community cannot come to a consensus on what is reflected in scientific evidence and how difficult it is design a narrative that is embraced by all people. While this is understandable, the NMNH's habit of taking what Achenbach calls a 'Ripley's Believe it or Not' approach to exhibition content where “freakishness and exoticism” is embraced, is not.⁶⁰ Achenbach cites one display in the NMNH that addressed race whose supporting text commented on Steatopygia associated with African Hottentot and Bushman women, that is reminiscent of early 19th century need for titillation sought out by colonizers, which exemplifies questionable judgement.⁶¹ Exhibits such as this made the museum feel like a Cabinet of Curiosities and focused on the differences between people.

Donald Ortner, Department of Anthropology Chair, defends mid-century exhibition designers, saying they did not intend to reflect a racist point of view—that, “...It may be just a matter of history.”⁶² Achenbach points out that “scientists have their own political history that to this day influences their research and theories, and that a “political undercurrent flows through the hottest debate in anthropology today...”⁶³ This is perhaps why there are differences in opinion within an institution, as people have their individual beliefs which influence their decisions.

As evidenced in 1922 and 1967 NMNH exhibits, there does not seem to be enough definitive proof to dissuade some anthropologists from maintaining their evolution-theory approach. Howard University anthropologist, Michael Blake said, “The problem from the beginning with these exhibits is that they have always been created by white, mostly but not entirely male scholars....That has not changed.”⁶⁴ Some believe these issues are inherent in natural history museums, as they exhibit fossils and skeletal remains of dinosaurs next to dioramas of “primitive” cultures.⁶⁵ Others, blame the shortcomings at the NMNH on changes in museum leadership which changed five times between 1985 and 1991. The shortage of funds is yet another excuse.⁶⁶ While the Smithsonian does receive an annual pittance to pay for exhibition overhauls, when funds are set aside for such projects, narratives and skin color, I must argue, are the least costly aspect. Associate director of programming, Bob Sullivan admits, “Issue number one we’re facing is how to get Eurocentrism out and replace it with a balanced view.”⁶⁷ To achieve this, the museum presents multiple views, however, they do side with a particular perspective, which Sullivan believes is the most politically correct.⁶⁸ This is why I believe the NMNH often reflects mainstream American mindset.

As previously stated in this paper, up to mid-century, African Americans who sought heritage information were looking for it in black institutions-- not the Smithsonian.⁶⁹ By 1967, the Smithsonian recognized that the black segment of the population was not being served by the National Museum System. The Anacostia Neighborhood Museum was put in place to serve as a culture-specific mini-Smithsonian for African Americans. This museum likely had more appeal, as it was designed by blacks, for blacks, and was closer to home. In the early decades of the 20th century, I propose that there were two possible scenarios that may have existed. First, it is possible that many African Americans may not have known that controversial African cultural exhibits at the NMNH even existed. This seems to be supported by a timeline that suggests, that African Americans were not frequenting the Smithsonian campus until after mid-century. While Smithsonian exhibits had not changed since 1967, Maddox's complaints were not registered until 1989. Second, I argue that the African American community had so much going on—between activist activities and just trying to survive, that exhibitions in the National Museum in the 1960s and 1970s did not yet register on their list of concerns. After decades of identity politics and culture wars waged among the Nation's people, reactions to the "Primitivism" show at MoMA, in 1984, seemed to indicate that at last, the public mindset was beginning to change. Tu Wa Moja's emergence validated the notion that racism would no longer be accepted in a museum that represents the people of the United States. A paradigm shift, it seems, was finally measurable in American ideology as it was reflected in museum narratives.

1990s Transformation

Karp and Kratz, acknowledge that a transformation began in the 1990s, which demonstrated that even the most conservative institutions could change.⁷⁰ They noted an increased involvement of community, international scope, and the focus on the importance of heritage to help museums make their displays relevant to contemporary society. In their article, *The Interrogative Museum*, Karp and Kratz note that museums in the last decade of the twentieth century took a “collaborative turn” here where pillars of certain communities contributed input, especially in cases where ritual practices were displayed.⁷¹ These authors are encouraged by the open dialogue that is allowed when heritage practices are merely displayed, which allows for the visitor to arrive at his own conclusion, rather than one dictated by the museum. In his monograph *Culture Wars* and the African Diaspora: Challenge and Opportunity for U.S. Museums, James C. Early describes how altercations over museum content “rous{ed} museums from elite isolation towards more public engagement.”⁷² Such was the case when the *Cultures of Africa* was dealt its final blow, in 1992. After the backlash against offensive Smithsonian displays, the museum was faced with inventing a more positive approach to presenting African culture.

Shuttering of the Cultures of Africa

The shuttering of the NMNH “Cultures of Africa” exhibit in 1992 was a point of reckoning where “politics of representation” at the Smithsonian had to be examined.⁷³ The date for changing out this exhibit was not scheduled for another twelve years, but when Smithsonian Secretary Adams was called to testify in front of the house of

Representatives on the National African American Museum, in 1992, he was queried about “offensive and racist labels” in the Cultures of Africa exhibition.⁷⁴ An article in African Arts stated, “Its anthropological interpretation and style of display were deemed by the museum staff and by a concerned public to be at best out of date and at worst offensive to Africans it represented.”⁷⁵ Smithsonian administrators had been barraged by complaints lodged by African specialists, local African American organizations such as Tu Wa Moja, and African diplomats since 1990. It was at this time, that the political aspects of museum exhibition in relation to the communities they represented began to be argued among museum professionals and exhibitions began to be assessed for potential bias. Curators needed to determine just how their narratives might be received by the communities they represented.⁷⁶

African Voices

In 1993, a new two-part team was assembled to refashion exhibitions for the NMNH Hall of Africa—a “Core Team” made of museum curators and exhibition designers, and an “Extended Team” of some sixty advisors--diasporic Africans, Africanist scholars, local, national, and international contributors.⁷⁷ To best serve the public, the team identified two sets of visitors for whom they would craft their displays. The largest group of visitors to the museum were intergenerational families, who likely had little knowledgeable about Africa. The second group were thought to be more “motivated” and they consisted of primary and secondary school children, African Americans, and visiting or re-located Africans.⁷⁸ The team established a “baseline” of information on the continent which they intended to present for a new exhibition known

as “African Voices”.⁷⁹ The NMNH website states the goals for this project: “This exhibition examines the diversity, dynamism, and global influence of Africa’s peoples and cultures over time in the realms of family, work, community, and the natural environment.”⁸⁰ The information that was addressed in the exhibition aimed to present a balanced view of the approached from a monolithic standpoint, frozen in the past. It would be presented as a culturally diverse continent that competed on a global stage.

Exhibition Layout

Because the 6500 square feet of exhibition space is rectangular and has entrances at each end, the chronicles told within the hall are not able to be presented in a linear fashion. Instead, competing introductions at both points of entry ease visitors into a comprehensive look at African history, which is plotted along ten important narratives that address African identity, agency and global connections. Each point on the historical timeline offers a multitude of paths that can be followed, each with a unique story. The walls in the “Walk Through Time” is easy to discern, as it is colored an earthy rusty red with indigo highlighted areas. Adjacent galleries are defined by brighter accent colors.⁸¹ While curators sought to represent the entire continent, regional diversity was important, as well as urban and rural representation.⁸² Arnoldi explained that these exhibits were intended to challenge stereotypes about Africa and to show the interconnectedness of people of African descent that spanned both time and space.⁸³

Unless you know the road you've come down, you cannot know where
you are going.

—Temne proverb, Sierra Leone⁸⁴

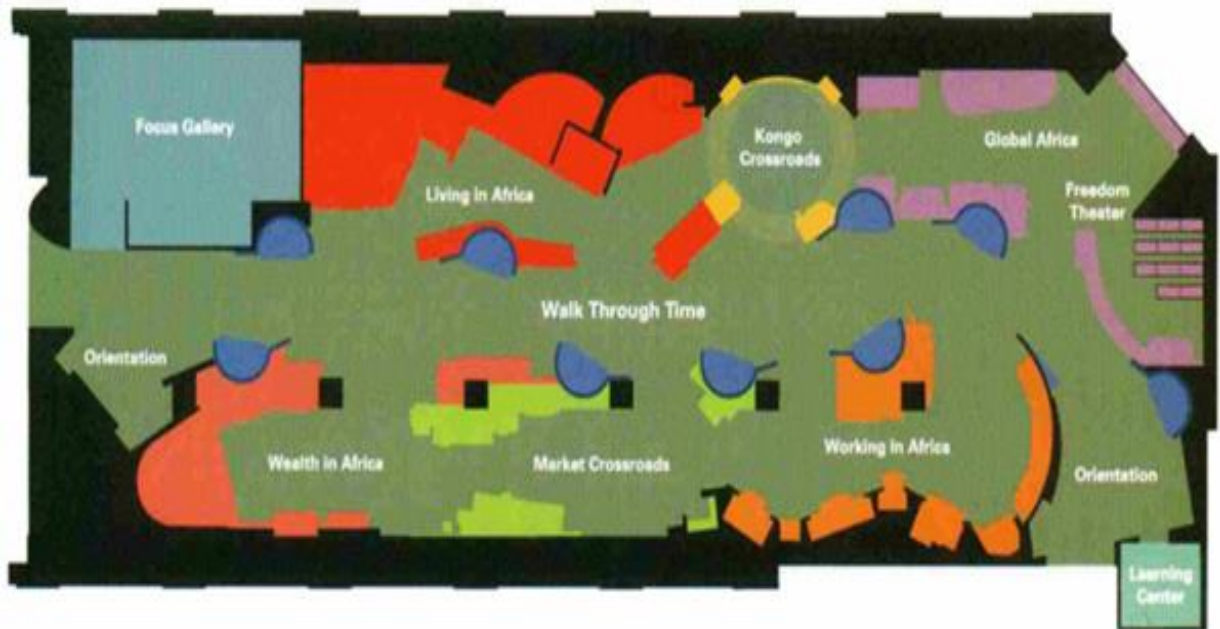
This collaborative approach was used for the NMNH to meet its goals of imparting a true reflection of African culture in the new exhibition, that finally opened late in 1999. This exhibition embraced the entirety of the continent's history, from its known beginning to the present, and focused on a distinctly African perspective. Curator's sought to subvert "primitive" tropes so long embraced by Americans for the reconstruction of a new African identity.⁸⁵ According to James C. Early, the exhibition, "struck at the core of personal and social values held by the African American public and scholars and Euro-American museum professional as well as at the deep-rooted concerns of both for scholarship and accurate portrayals of contested subject matter".⁸⁶ Finally, the Smithsonian mirrored what African Americans felt and a more up-to-date assessment of Africa could be presented.

For this exhibition, all possible viewpoints were sought out, from the continental to the Pan-African, but in a thematic, rather than geo-ethnic presentation.⁸⁷ "African Voices," said George Collinet, "expresses the variety of traditions defining Africans, with each voice representing an important part of the grand mosaic. Through African Voices, Americans will discover the cultural richness and diversity of today's Africa,"⁸⁸ Each point on the historical timeline offers a multitude of paths that can be followed, each with a unique story.⁸⁹ The walls in the "Walk Through Time" is easy to discern, as it is

colored an earthy rusty red with indigo highlighted areas. Adjacent galleries are defined by brighter accent colors.

The map of African Voices, reflected in Figure 3.7 shows how this exhibition is made up of “layers of information” within four overarching themes “Living in Africa”, “Global Africa”, “Wealth in Africa”, and “Working in Africa.” These four thematic galleries are linked by transitional spaces known as “Crossroads” – one dedicated to the Kongo region and the other dedicated to the African Market. Focus Gallery, for temporary exhibitions, is located at one end and the Freedom Theatre, which features videos, is located at the other end. The gallery and the theater are close to the points of entry.⁹⁰

Figure 3.7: “African Voices” Floorplan. Published in Mary Jo Arnoldi et al., “Reflections on ‘African Voices’ at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History,” *African Arts* 34, no.2 (2001):18.



In an article for African Arts, writers characterized the exhibition, “The kaleidoscope of images of peoples, objects, and places, set against a background of contemporary African music and voice narration.”⁹¹ Multi-screen video monitors greet visitors with flashing images at each of the entrances. The first overall impression of the exhibition is that it is dark, and dramatic, and visually dizzying, as there is much vying for the viewer’s attention. (Figure 3.8) Media used for this exhibition, to name a few, include: 400 objects, old and new, photos on a variety of scales, video, text and audio recordings. The material is deliberately “layered” to provide enough interest to keep visitors coming back and many of the exhibits are interactive—some video, some low tech.⁹²

Figure 3.9 shows a low-tech exhibit where rotational displays present viewers with an opportunity to match ecological, educational, technological, cultural, and political images in photographs with those found on different denominations of African currency. Other displays are designed for children and feature games and wire toys which have been situated in low set cases, as seen in Figure 3.10. Viewer experience is augmented by sounds of children playing in the backgrounds, here, and there are eleven additional listening situated throughout the exhibition with which museum visitors can interact. Recordings present stories told by individual Africans, interviews, poetry, music, and atmospheric soundscapes, to name a few.⁹³

Walk Through Time

While the NMAA contextualizes objects in its exhibitions, African history is addressed through stylistic changes in material culture. Differentiations between

traditional, colonial-influenced, and global contemporary practices indicate change in African society. Literary art forms such as poetry, songs, proverbs, idioms as well as the writing of contemporary African authors which highlighted other areas of African creativity are also interspersed throughout this exhibition.⁹⁴ An historical timeline runs down the middle of the exhibition space.⁹⁵ Along this central “Walk through Time”, ten separate stories act as moments in history that have been regionally significant for social, political, or economic reasons, are delineated in “monumental” semi-circular spaces. No single domineering culture is represented.⁹⁶ The timeline begins with the appearance of humans in Rift Valley, 230, 000 years ago. It then takes a leap to 1238, to Muslim ruled Spain.”⁹⁷ Figure 3.11 shows how curators have approached these historical stops. On the left of this image, the top of an illuminated vertical placard reads 1086 to 1238. Below it, the title identifies the period in history: “African Muslims Rule Spain”. Under the title, a brief historical explanation of the period is given. Additional information is provided in a contrasting box, which contains a map of Africa, and a pair of black and white photographs. Overall, the display is tenebristic, as objects seem to emerge from a shadowy setting; pools of light help direct the viewer’s eye from stop to stop. In an adjacent apse-like space, to the right, a pictorial fiber work with stylized figures is mounted to a concave wall. The red and white pattern of a chess board, flanked and two vessels. There are layers of labeling here. The pieces in the display case are identified by name, date, medium and function on a sloping panel beneath them, in front. There is additional contextualizing information on a dropdown label beneath the display in a complimentary olive green. with stylized Moorish figures and a servant, is graphic

and acts as a focal point for this woven work. In front of the wall piece, a vitrine holds an embellished basin, an oudh,

Figure 3.8: “Chewa Kasiyamaliro mask”. 102’. “Living in Africa” Gallery. Published in Mary Jo Arnoldi, et al., “Reflections on ‘African Voices’ at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History”, *African Arts* 34, no. 2 (2001):33. Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. 1997-present. Image by Donald Hurlbert.



Figure 3.9: “African Paper Currency Interactive”. “Wealth of Africa” Gallery. Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. 1997-present. Published in Mary Jo Arnoldi et al, “Reflections on ‘African Voices’ at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History”, *African Arts* 34, no. 2 (2001):29. Image by Donald Hurlbert.



Figure 3.10: “Toys from Congo, Ghana, Mali, and Rwanda”. “Wealth in Africa” Gallery. Published in Mary Jo Arnoldi et al., “Reflections on ‘African Voices’ at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History”, *African Arts* 34, no.2 (2001):29. Image by Donald Hurlbert.



Figure 3.11: “African Muslims Rule Spain”, “Walk Through Time”. Published in Mary Jo Arnold et al, “Reflections on ‘African Voices’ at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History”, *African Arts* 34, no.2 (2001):31.



Approach to Museum Text

Throughout this exhibition, text is hierarchical. Sizing of labels is done according to function, such as: introductions, subtext, focus labels and object labels, and they were ordered in descending scale of its importance to the narrative.⁹⁸ The tag sizes for each category are consistent among all galleries. When possible, details were provided about the object, such as how it was made, or by whom it was made. Dates of objects are included, and when possible, the maker's biography is presented. For this display, the wall piece has a small label, attached to the wall, on the right. Spaced above the wall-hanging, a spot lit text in large print reads:

At Malaga (Spain) ...the mosque covers a large area and has a reputation
for sanctity, the court of the mosque is of unequaled beauty.

Ibn Battuta (1304-1377), Moroccan geographer⁹⁹

Throughout the exhibition, the voices of Africans, such as the Battuta's above, have been captured in text, or preserved in audio recordings. Africans tell the viewer what they have experienced and how they live. These voices have been quoted from literature, poetry, prayers or music, or from scholarly sources such as essays.

From this point on, the following historical stops jump forward in 500-year increments. The next stop is the "rise of the Asante confederacy", followed by the Atlantic Slave Trade between 17 & 19th centuries, Colonialism from 17-19th century, 20th century resistance and independence, South African Elections of 1994, ending with a focus on children's health in Kenya. Contemporary Challenges is a changing exhibit

format that updates the timeline with the most recent material that occupies the last stop.⁹⁹ In 2014, a new theme “African Voices Today: Global Problems, Local Solutions” was installed which addresses endangered sea turtles in the Lamu Archipelago, Kenya. This exhibit deals with the protection of nesting sites on Kenyan beaches and how this affects the community and their economy.¹⁰⁰

Historical artifacts as well as contemporary additions are mingled throughout the exhibition to give a sense of evolution in African cultural practices.¹⁰¹ Key objects are situated along main storylines to get the museum’s point across, and unusual objects are staggered throughout the exhibition to provide an element of surprise.¹⁰² One such object, seen in Figure 3.12 is mud cloth outfit used by designer Chris Seydou. A photo mural behind the display shows how the Malian designer’s clothes are worn on a fashion runway.

Living in Africa

From the “Walk Through Time”, viewers are free to choose their own path through the exhibition. On one side of the historical path, “Living in Africa” and “Global Africa” are linked by “Kongo Crossroads”. A sculpted Head of an Oba, situated in the “Walk of Time”, is backgrounded by a life-size mural on the current king who is discussed in a biography in museum text. A display that features Benin City takes the viewer into the “Living in Africa” themed section of the exhibition. In this same section, the nomadic lifestyle of the Somali people is featured in a diorama: “The Somali Aqal—An Object of Memory”. A “text rail” high up on the wall reflects a Somali proverb that speaks of a longing for lasting peace and describes how Somali are arranged, socially.¹⁰³

Figure 3.13 is an image of a Somali aqal, a type of abode that has been in use for centuries. Here, the abode has been stripped back to reveal how it is constructed and to reveal the material culture one might expect to find in a Somali home such as this. Inside

Figure 3.12: Mud cloth mini shirt ensemble by Chris Seydou, Bamana, Mali. 1992. “Wealth in Africa” Gallery. Published in Mary Jo Arnoldi et al., “Reflections on ‘African Voices’ at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History”, *African Arts* 34, no. 2 (2001):28. Image by Donald Hurlbert



the domicile, visitors will see carved wooden headrests, textiles, a coffee pot and brass tray, water and milk containers fashioned out of woven grass, and a short-wave radio. While a spear and shield –” potent symbols of Somali heritage” are present so too is a more practical for of protection—an automated rifle.¹⁰⁴

Dioramas, utilized in early Smithsonian exhibitions are still seen in the museum today, where they are used to contextualize African material culture. In this exhibit, a Somali aqal has been constructed and positioned in front of a photo mural that depicts a landscape where a cluster of similar domiciles are arranged. Because the Somali are

herders, camels are shown in an adjacent photograph.¹⁰⁵ While Arnoldi acknowledges that this method can be somewhat static, she justifies the practice, as a practical way to transmit understanding.¹⁰⁶ Life-size photos, she says, are a more contemporary approach taken in these exhibitions which is well-received by museum visitors.¹⁰⁷ Unlike dioramas in the 1967 Cultures of Africa exhibition, there are no mannequins in this diorama. Instead, to the right of the aqal, a life-size video is playing. Faduma Mohammad and Abirahman Dahir, Somali Americans raised in Africa, inform the viewer of their life experiences and tell how the aqal plays a role in marriage celebrations, and expressions of hospitality.¹⁰⁸ Exhibition designers hope to impart the importance of gendered work in Somali culture, as materials gathered for and the construction of this abode is done strictly by women. The aim here, is to demonstrate how the aqal is an architectural form that is important in Somali history and cultural identity.¹⁰⁹ In the video, Fadma also discussed the first mat she wove and likens it to quilts made in the U.S. She also discusses how her Somali heritage is precious to her and deserves preservation. Abdi address the difficulty of living in the African environment, how aqal construction has evolved over time.

Kongo Crossroads and Global Africa

In the nearby linking gallery, “Kongo Crossroads”, focuses on evolution of religious practices and ritual forms, due to outside influences, and the African diaspora. Here, curators differentiate between practices that are no longer used, and those which have been perpetuated or that have been adapted in some way. African objects used to honor ancestors, such as Kongo power figures and funerary objects are shown in relation

to Christian crosses in this gallery. To set the mood, the Bakongo cosmogram—a cross within a circle motif—is repeated on floor and ceiling element, and the lighting in this gallery is more subdued.¹¹⁰

Figure 3.13: Somali aqal. “Living in Africa” Gallery. Published in Mary Jo Arnold et al., “Reflections on ‘African Voices’ at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History,” *African Arts* 34, no. 2 (2001):34.



As the gallery merges with “Global Africa” the Candomble religion of Brazil is also featured here, in an installation of a store setting- Tenda Omolu-- that deals with religious items that help propitiate traditional deities of the faith such as orixa Omolu, of Bahia, Brazil. The stories reflected here are based on the experiences of artist Eneida Sanchos and Candomblé priestess Mae Stella de Oxossi. This exhibit deals with the morphing of original African religious practices into other African-based religions, such as Brazilian Umbanda, Haitian Vodou, and Cuban Santeria practiced elsewhere.¹¹¹

Global Africa

We're related you and I,
You from the West Indies,
I from Kentucky.
Kinsmen, you and I,
You from Africa,
I from the U.S.A.

Langston Hughes,¹¹²

The poem above, written by black American writer Langston Hughes, is an acknowledgment of his African heritage ties and acts as the African voice related to the next gallery, “Global Africa”. Here, themes surrounding the African diaspora are explored. In this exhibit, curators show the spread of African cultural influences, the Atlantic Slave Trade, African resistance, and new African cultural creations. It is the goal of curators, here, to reflect the “cosmopolitan nature of Africa past and present.”¹¹³ One exhibit in this gallery deals with the varied diasporic journeys of Africans during the Atlantic Slave Trade era and during waves of migration. Visitors trace journeys by Africans to Rome, and other parts of Europe, Australia, and the Americas throughout history. In another display, visitors can hear once-enslaved Americans relay their own life experiences. This was made possible by recordings made in the 1930s by a Works Progress Administration project in an attempt to preserve history.

The wide-reaching effects of African culture is reflected in an exhibit that features Malian mud cloth—a much recognized symbol of Africa. Today, mud cloth artist Nakunte Diarra, creates haute couture products out of a fabric tradition that originated in Africa.¹¹⁴ An interactive activity is featured here where the visitor is asked to design his or her own pattern on a computer.¹¹⁵

Figure 3.14: Mudmason still from *Masons of Djenne*. “African Voices”. Video by Trevor Marchand, 1997.



Mud Masons of Djenne

One of the most progressive conventions used today for this exhibition is video, which is currently used in the Global Africa gallery. Here, museum visitors can experience Africans telling their own stories. In a short video, (represented in a still in Figures 3.14 and 3.15) titled, *Masons of Djenne* explain how the act of re-mudding of the city’s Great Mosque is an annual community ritual that began two millennia ago. The narrative is rich in cultural references as it tells of a tradition that has long been guided by

the ancestral Boso people.¹¹⁶ One spokesman tells how the structure of the mosque represents Djinn sacrifice of a sister and a brother. A different man, a mason, describes how he harnesses the “special powers” of the agama lizard for this activity. The mason describes how he watches the reptile climb on the walls of the mosque. If the lizard falls, trouble might be expected.¹¹⁷ The video shows how village men bring in baskets of dried mud on one day. Women bring them water the next. All wait for the village elders signal before the plastering work begins. Everyone in the village is involved in this ritual, and some even travel from around the world to partake in it.¹¹⁸

Figure 3.15: Masons of Djenne re-plaster Great Mosque. Video by Trevor Marchand “African Voices” exhibit, 1997-present. Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. Image from <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian>.



The video goes on to tell how the 2009 restoration of the mosque put this ritual on hold for three years, much to the disappointment of the community. While they are grateful that the Aga Khan Foundation helped make the Great Mosque of Djenné a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Africans look at it as a Europeanized version, and they

feel it has lost its distinctly African flavor.¹¹⁹ This mode of presentation is quite effective in transmitting cultural information. Africans speak for themselves and the richness of their traditions are spelled out in ways that a static diorama or case of taxonomically ordered objects never will.¹²⁰

In the adjacent Freedom Theater, a video on the “Atlantic Slave Trade”, where the “other Mayflower” and the “Muslim rebellion in Bahia, Brazil” are discussed.¹²¹ A second video deals with the Pan-African triumph over European colonialism in “The Struggles for Freedom”.¹²² Here, difficult subject matter surrounding the African slave trade and new life outside the continent is discussed. This is a part of the exhibition that separates African Voices from others natural history museum installations.

Wealth in Africa

On the other side of the historical walkway, “Wealth in Africa” and “Working in Africa” are linked by “Market Crossroads”. Within these spaces, the historical is juxtaposed next to the contemporary. “Wealth in Africa” deals with how objects are valued and traded on the continent, and how relationships develop between those who exchange goods for goods and goods for currency.¹²³ Comparisons are made between the status objects such as a carved staff, owned by a Luba Chief, a Mende Soweï mask (mid 20th c), and Tunisian bridal wear, which are quite traditional. These traditional objects are compared with a more contemporary object-- a university of Ghanaian graduation cap.¹²⁴ One work sure to attract visitor attention is a Ghanaian coffin in the shape of an KLM airliner commissioned made by Paa Joe. (Figure 3.16) This is one of the contemporary pieces commissioned by the museum for this exhibition. The proverb on

the wall above reads: “Everyone helps carry the burden of a funeral”.¹²⁵ A photo mural behind the work shows a fish-shaped coffin being carried in a funeral procession, giving the sense of the breadth of creative possibilities.

Figure 3.16: Airplane Coffin by Paa Joe. Acra, Ghana, 1997. Wood, paint; length 106.3”. “Wealth in Africa” Gallery. Published in Mary Jo Arnold et al. “Reflections on ‘African Voices’ at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History,” *African Arts* 34, no. 2 (2001): 24. Image by Donald Hurlbert.



Market Crossroads

In the “Market Crossroads” a busy African market has been recreated. The associated text reads: The work is very difficult. Some come to buy, and some want you to reduce the price. Because we need our money, we have to convince them to buy from us.

Ernestina Quarcoopome,¹²⁶

The installation,” December Makola Market—Accra, Ghana, 1996”, features Ernestina Quarcoopome, a blue and white cloth dealer from Ghana, who spoke the words above. As seen in Figure 3.17 She is represented in the tableau as a life-size photographic cutout, posed in front of her wares. In this gallery, female agency is focused upon in the context of the Ghanaian market which is central to the region’s way of life. Individual stories of Ernestina, and housewares vendor, Adjoa Kwakyewa Dwamena, “kola [nut] queen” Adama Salifo, and Marjorie Botchway are presented in this gallery.¹²⁷ A parallel discussion in the exhibition is Africans’ contemporary propensity to recycle the very goods these women sell, as well as ritual regalia and raffia. Here, a music listening station has been installed for visitors’ experience radio personality, George Collinet’s program.¹²⁸ In the “Wealth of Africa Gallery”, a map with fiberoptic details illustrates the history of African trade.

Figure 3.17: Model of Ernestina Quarcoopome’s cloth stall. “Market Crossroads” Gallery. Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. Published in Mary Jo Arnoldi et al., “Reflections on ‘African Voices’ at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History”, *African Arts* 34, no.2 (2001):34. Image by Donald Hurlbert.



Working in Africa

In the next gallery, “Working in Africa” features a variety of African occupations, some that are waning, such as metallurgy, ceramic production, and agriculture next to more contemporary jobs in teaching, dentistry, manufacturing and mining.¹²⁹ One of the specific issues explored here, is the problems Africans face when owning land or using land for commercial purposes in Ngorongoro Crater.¹³⁰ Different perspectives are presented here, as this is an area of Africa where wildlife conservation, tourism, and the African Maasai must find common ground.¹³¹ The African voice represented in museum text reads:

The Conservation Area Management should seek to understand the socio-economic aspirations and needs of the local Maasai.

-Deo-Gratias Gamassa, ecologist, Mweka, Tanzania,¹³²

As intimated by this quote, Smithsonian curators are presenting a debate that is ongoing in Africa between native residents, conservationists, government, and tourism. The museum presents this discussion as ongoing and does not indicate that a solution has been achieved.¹³³

Checks and Balances at the NMNH

Between the Cultures of Africa in 1967 and African Voices, installed thirty years later, much has changed in the Hall of Africa in the NMNH. For the first exhibition, cultural evolution theories were perpetuated, and Africans were approached as inferior

subjects of study, frozen in an ethnographic present. African Voices provides the history for the continent which has been missing in natural history museums and allows Africans to tell their own stories. The importance of this thesis is to demonstrate how museum narratives can, at times, be at odds with those who it seeks to represent, and to offer solutions for avoiding this situation. After the unfortunate backlash against NMNH exhibitions in the Hall of Africa, curators for Hall 7 have established measures to verify that the museum's narrative stays on course. Curators for this project poll their audience to verify that the intended message was in fact getting through to the public. In cases when something unintended had been imparted, they move to recreate the narrative to put forth their intended message.¹³⁴ This ability to make changes as needed is important for the Smithsonian so that outdated narratives are not allowed to go on when they are no longer valid.

This multi-directional approach taken for African Voices can possibly be traced back to Rene d'Harnoncourt's innovations for exhibiting of non-Western cultures at MoMA, in the 1940s.¹³⁵ African Voices also shows how progressive education approaches, begun in the 1960s, are still in play, as visitors are encouraged to make their own choices as to how they proceed through the exhibits and they are encouraged to draw their own conclusions from the materials being displayed.¹³⁶ While the use of multiple museological conventions within a single exhibition was begun by d'Harnoncourt in the 1940s, Susan Vogel, has also been instrumental in educating the viewer on how museums potentially manipulate their narratives in the 1980s.¹³⁷ Arnoldi believes that by using a variety of approaches, as has been done in Voices of Africa, the museum process becomes more transparent.¹³⁸

Summary of African Voice

While many objects used in African Voices are the same as what might have been found in the 1967 Cultures of Africa exhibition, and some traditional conventions have been retained, the narrative presented by Smithsonian curators and exhibition designers, for this latest endeavor, address what was absent in the NMNH Hall of Africa for most of the century—a sense of “history”, “dynamism”, “agency”, and the “global” scope of the continent.¹³⁹ African Voices overturns 19th cultural evolution theory that has been perpetuated for most of the century, and the museum allows the continent’s cultures to be translated through the eyes of Africans, as citizens of the world. There is an authenticity that is imparted with this exhibition, that has not been present before, as Africans have been given a platform to tell their own stories. Unlike Smithsonian exhibitions of the past, like the Cultures of Africa (1967) and the Ward Collection (1922) before it, African history is addressed, and the ingenuity and complexity of African peoples is highlighted. African Voices is distinguishable from other African cultural exhibitions, as Smithsonian curators do not shy away from unsavory parts of U.S. history, such as slavery, typically avoided by other museums. This allows Americans to acknowledge the past and have a greater understanding of what the black community has endured.

While it is true that contextualization of material culture is important for visitors to understand the functionality of objects, as they have been used by Africans, the inclusion of continental literary forms imparts a deeper sense of African culture. This can be especially important for stakeholders, as it provides heritage links and helps with identity formation within the African American community. From the standpoint of experience, the museum visitor can progress at will through the exhibition and he is able

to draw his own conclusions about the African people, as museum text has lost its authentic voice. In its current iteration, the Smithsonian's exhibit reflects the U.S. as a nation that values all people and presents non-Western peoples with a sense of dignity, where racism can hopefully be replaced by a more constructive narrative that acknowledges African contributions to the world and provides the missing history African Americans have long sought.

Conclusion

Between 1922 and 1997, a discourse over race played out in American museums that was reflected in exhibitions of African art and material culture. The National Museum has perpetuated Euro-American hegemony that carried over from a previous century, by showing African cultures under a microscope, as un-evolving subjects of study. Outside the National Museum, agents of change used African art to present their argument against racism. At first, this happened unintentionally, when Coady, Stieglitz and de Zayas exhibited what had been considered artifact as art. These men, however, had not lost their Western bias. A decade later, Albert Barnes, and to a lesser extent, Stewart Culin took a more activist role when they presented African art in their museums. Both men educated the public and provided heritage example for the black community. Four decades later, S. Dillon Ripley expanded the national conversation by offering the culture-specific Anacostia Neighborhood Museum and the multicultural American Folklore Festival in 1967—the same year the Cultures of Africa opened. That same decade, Warren Robbins created the CCCC with the deliberate agenda of bettering racial relations. The physical product of his endeavors, the Museum of African Art would not

only be the first dedicated solely to the exhibition of African art, but it would go on to represent the country, as the National Museum of African Art. Between the 1960s and the 1980s, Over the next decade, curators like Sieber and Kan sought corrective measures for the presentation of African cultures, perhaps influencing a change in attitudes that would come about in the 1980s which was marked by the outcry over “Primitivism”, at MoMA. From the late 1990s, the NMNH has presented a new narrative, which demonstrates that the mindset of the National Museum has evolved. Curators, like Arnoldi, work with stakeholders to bring a new perspective to the National Museum.

While Arnoldi does acknowledge that the 1967 Cultures of Africa was not relevant to the times, she was assessing the exhibition in 1999, thirty-two years after it was installed. I argue that when this exhibition opened in 1967, it was less offensive to the public than it was when it closed more than two decades later. In addition to what was going on in the museum world, two things happened between 1967 and 1992 that prompted a reaction to the Cultures of Africa--segregation was overturned (1967) and black agency increased enough for African Americans to publicly voice their displeasure. As for the delayed timing of protest, one can reason that, in the 1960s, there were likely more pressing issues for the black community, such as social and economic equality that would have demanded their immediate attention. After gaining some ground, socially and economically, I believe that black activists then turned then their attention to issues of heritage, and self-concept, for the sake of education and an improved black identity.

A second factor that facilitated the 1992 backlash against the Cultures of Africa, was the decades of social conflict that helped sensitize the American public to issues

pertaining to race. Between the 1960s and the 1980s, attitudes began to shift, and Euro-American hegemonic narratives would no longer be tolerated in the nation's museums. This is what was demonstrated in the public's response to "Primitivism", in 1984, and again, with the barrage of complaints against the Cultures of Africa a few years later. As American ideology evolved, the Cultures of Africa exhibit seemed to become increasingly unacceptable. From Arnoldi's revisionist standpoint, by late 1990s standards, this exhibition was indeed a failure. I argue however, in the eye of the public, throughout the exhibition's history, it was a gradual one.

While class struggles continued up to mid-century, the Smithsonian curiously held on to the same approach it used in the 1920s for the African Cultures exhibit, installed in 1967. My initial belief, that the Smithsonian was a stodgy institution that was often at odds with the American public, changed through this exploration. My research has led me to believe that the African cultural exhibits at the NMNH may have actually represented American mainstream thought. I hypothesize that, while Arnoldi's revisionist assessment of the Cultures of African exhibit was true from the standpoint of anthropological theory and contemporary exhibition conventions, when the Cultures of Africa opened, the mainstream American mindset probably still embraced 19th century attitudes. Over the ensuing decades, change came-- but slowly. Around 1984, people's attitudes shifted enough to break the hegemonic Euro-American stalemate. This, I believe, marked a shift in American mainstream thought. This is the new paradigm I see reflected in African Voices.

Introduction Notes

1. Mary Jo Arnoldi, "From the Diorama to the Dialogic: A Century of Exhibiting Africa at the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History," *Cahiers d' Etudes Africaines* 39, no. 155/156 (1999):712.

2. Arnoldi, "From the Diorama," 714.

3. C. B. Day, "Study group speaks out against the Smithsonian".
Washington Informer, January 112, 1994.

4. Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 98.

5. Stewart Culin, ed., *Primitive Negro Art, Chiefly from the Belgian Congo* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, 1923), 9-52.

6. Christa Clarke and Kathleen Bickford Berzock, "Representing Africa in American Art Museums: A Historical Introduction," in *Representing Africa in American Art Museums: A Century of Collecting and Display*, eds. Kathleen Bickford Berzock and Christa Clarke (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 10.

7. James Johnson Sweeney, ed., *African Negro Art* (New York: Modern Art, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1935), 11.

8. Clarke and Berzock, "Representing Africa," 10.

9. Arnoldi, "From the Dialogic," 712.

10. Arnoldi, "From the Dialogic," 712.

11. William Siegmann, "A Collection Grows," in *Representing Africa in American Art Museums: A Century of Collecting and Display*, eds. Kathleen Bickford

Berzock and Christa Clarke (Seattle: McClellan Book, University of Washington Press, 2011), 73.

12. Thomas McEvilley, "Doctor, Lawyer, Indian, Chief," *Art & Otherness*, Kingston, NY: McPherson & Company, 1992), 31.

13. Day, "Study group."

14. Mary Jo Arnoldi, Christine Mullen Kramer, Michael Atwood Mason, "Reflections on 'African Voices' at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History." *African Arts* 34, no.2 (2001): 35.

Chapter 1 Notes

1. Mary Jo Arnoldi, "From the Diorama to the Dialogic: A Century of Exhibiting Africa at the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History," *Cahiers d' Etudes Africaines* 39, no. 155/156 (1999): 712.

2. Christy B. Day, "Study Group Speaks Out Against the Smithsonian," *The Washington Informer*, January 12, 1994.

3. "Orthodoxy," *Oxford Living Dictionaries*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/orthodoxy>. Note: Orthodoxy is defined as 1) authorized or generally accepted theory, doctrine, or practice. 1.1 The quality of conforming to orthodox theories, doctrines, or practices.
<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/orthodoxy>)

4. William S. Walker, *A Living Exhibition: The Smithsonian and the Transformation of the Universal Museum* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 5.

5. Walker, "A Living Exhibition," 5.

6. Arnoldi, "From the Diorama," 714.

7. Sally Price, "Objets d'Art and Ethnographic Artifacts," *Primitive Art in Civilized Places, 2nd Ed.*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 57.

8. Arnoldi, "From the Diorama," 707.

9. Arnoldi, "From the Diorama," 706.

10. Arnoldi, "From the Diorama," 706.

11. Arnoldi, "From the Diorama," 707.

12. Arnoldi, "From the Diorama," 706.
13. Price, "Objets d'Art," 56-57.
14. Arnoldi, "From the Diorama," 714.
15. Walker, "A Living Exhibition," 61.
16. Karen Rosenberg, "A Continent's Art on a Long American Journey: African Art, New York, and the Avant-Garde at the Met," *The New York Times*, December 20, 2012.
17. Yaelle Biro, "Exhibition Preview: African Art, Exhibition Preview: New York, and the Avant-Garde," *African Arts* 46, no.2 (2013): 88, https://www-mitpressjournals-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/doi/10.1162/AFAR_a_00069
18. Biro, "Exhibition Preview," 92.
19. Rosenberg, "A Continent's Art".
20. Biro, "Exhibition Preview," 89.
21. Alfred Kreymborg, "The New Washington Square-Second and Last Installment in Which the Art Gallery, the Greenwich Village Gazette and Other Matters of Interest are Discussed," *The Morning Telegraph*, Dec. 6, 1914.
22. Biro, "Exhibition Preview," 90.
23. Yaelle Biro and Jack Flam, *How, When and Why African Art Came to New York: A Conversation*, June 21, 2013 (New York: The MET, June 28, 2013)
24. Rosenberg, "A Continent's Art."
25. Biro, "Exhibition Preview," 92.
26. Biro, "Exhibition Preview," 91-92.
27. Biro, "Exhibition Preview," 91.

28. Biro, "Exhibition Preview," 92. Note: Biro says: "A prolific theorist and essayist, De Zayas developed over almost two decades a series of essays, many of them published in the journal *Camera Work*. Inspired by evolutionist anthropology, its underlying goal was to demonstrate "scientifically" the role of the "primitive" as a source of inspiration for innovative creation. De Zayas' evolutionist take on artistic development had often been criticized for its outdated racist overtones. Through his theory, however, De Zayas was able to underline the radical nature of avant-garde thoughts: in a period of heightened racism, many artists saw in African art a way to progress and not regress." Biro, Yaelle. "Exhibition Preview: African Art, New York, and the Avant-Garde." *African Arts* 46, no.2 (Summer 2013): 92.

29. Yaelle Biro, "African Art, New York and the Avant-Garde: Exhibition Overview," *Tribal Art*, Special Issue 3, (2012):14, https://www.academia.edu/2315285/African_Art_New_York_and_the_AvantGarde_Special_Issue_of_Tribal_Art_Magazine_entirely_dedicated_to_the_exhibition_at_the_Metropolitan_Museum

30. Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 98.

31. Christoph Grunenberg, "The Modern Art Museum," *Contemporary Cultures of Display*, ed. Emma Barker, (New Haven: Yale University Press (1999), 30.

32. Grunenberg, "The Modern," 30.

33. Stewart Culin ed., *Primitive Negro Art, Chiefly from the Belgian Congo* (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1923), 64.

34. Christa Clarke & Kathleen Bickford Berzock, "Representing Africa in American Art Museums: A Historical Introduction," in *Representing Africa in American*

Art Museums: A Century of Collecting and Display, eds. Kathleen Bickford Berzock and Christa Clarke (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 8.

35. William Siegmann, "A Collection Grows," in *Representing Africa in American Art Museums: A Century of Collecting and Display*, eds. Kathleen Bickford Berzock and Christa Clarke (Seattle: McClellan Book, University of Washington Press, 2011), 64.

36. Culin, *Primitive Negro*, 4.

37. Siegmann, "A Collection," 63.

38. Siegmann, "A Collection," 66.

39. Siegmann, "A Collection," 66.

40. Price, "Objets d'Art," 46.

41. Siegmann, "A Collection," 68.

42. Siegmann, "A Collection," 68.

43. Culin, "Primitive Negro Art," 1-52.

44. Culin, "Primitive Negro Art," 9-52.

45. Culin, "Primitive Negro Art," 9-52.

46. "Research: African Art Exhibition of 1923," Brooklyn Museum of Art, 2018, 4, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/research/pna1923/cat_view?id=486&pg=4Research%20African%20Art%20Exhibition;%20Stewart%20Culin,%20%E2%80%9CPrimitive%20Negro%20Art,%20Chiefly%20from%20the%20Belgian%20Congo.

47. Brooklyn Museum of Art, "Research: African Art," 4.

48. Brooklyn Museum of Art, "Research: African Art," 4.

49. Christa Clarke, *African Art in the Barnes Foundation: The Triumph of L'Art Negre and the Harlem Renaissance*, (Philadelphia: Skira Rizzoloi in Association with the Barnes Foundation, n.d.), 34-35.

50. Clarke, *African Art in the Barnes Foundation: The Triumph of L'Art*, 35-37.

51. Clarke, *African Art in the Barnes Foundation: The Triumph of L'Art*, 22.

52. Judith F Dolkart, "To See as the Artist Sees: Albert C. Barnes and the Experiment in Education," in *The Barnes Foundation: Masterworks*, Judith F, Dolkart, Martha Lucy with Contributions by Derek Gillman, (Philadelphia: Skira Rizzoloi in Association with the Barnes Foundation, n.d.), 20.

53. Clarke, *African Art in the Barnes Foundation: The Triumph of L'Art*, 39.

54. Judith F, Dolkart, Martha Lucy, and Derek Gillman, "Balcony" Selected Masterworks", in *The Barnes Foundation: Masterworks*, (Philadelphia: Skira Rizzoloi in Association with the Barnes Foundation, n.d.), 353; Judith F. Dolkart, Martha Lucy, and Derek Gillman, "Room 22: South Wall": "Selected Ensembles and Masterworks," in *The Barnes Foundation: Masterworks* (Philadelphia: Skira Rizzoloi in Association with the Barnes Foundation, n.d.), 297.

55. Judith F. Dolkart, Martha Lucy, and Derek Gillman, "Room 18: East Wall"; Selected Ensembles and Masterworks," in *The Barnes Foundation: Masterworks* (Philadelphia: Skira Rizzoloi in Association with the Barnes Foundation, n.d.), 257.

56. Clarke, *African Art in the Barnes Foundation: The Triumph of L'Art*, 45.

57. Dolkart, Lucy and Gillman, "To See," 20.

58. Dolkart, Lucy, and Gillman, "Room 18: East Wall", 297. Note: Vitrine in Room 22: Top Row, from left to right: Lagoon Female Figure, late 19-20th C, Footnote:

Cote d'Ivoire; Pende Figural Pendant , late 19-20th C, DRC; Baule Mask: Portrait of a Bearded Man (Mblo) 1890-1915, Cote d'Ivoire; Lega Female Figure, late 19th-20th C, DRC; Baule Female Figure (Waka Snan) before 1910, Cote D'Ivoire; Fang Betsi Reliquary Guardian Head, 19th C, Gabon; Female Staff Finial? 19th-20th C; Lega Female Figure, late 19thC-20thC, DRC; Baule Portrait Mask (Mblo) early 20th C, Cote d'Ivoire; Pende Figural Pendant, late 19th-20th C, DRC; Bamana Female Figure, late 19th-20th C, Mali. Bottom row from left to right: Dan Mask (Tanka Gle or Dean Gle) late 19th-20thC, Liberia; Fang Reliquary Guardian Figure, mid 19th C (Eyema-Byeri), N. Gabon; Guro Face Mask, (Artist related to Master of Duono) , early 20th C, Cote d'Ivoire; Puni Olifant, late 19th-20th C, Gabon; Baule Mask: Portrait of a Man, Circle of Owie Kinon, late 19th C, Cote d'Ivoire, Senufo Seated Female Figure; Guro Face Mask, the Bouafle Master, late 19th C, Cote d'Ivoire.) Christa Clarke, *African Art in the Barnes Foundation: The Triumph of l'Art negre and the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Skira/Rizzoli in association with the Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, n.d.), 74-277.

59. Dolkart, Lucy, and Gillman, "To See," 9.

60. Clarke and Berzock, "Representing Africa," 9.

61. Clarke, *African Art in the Barnes Foundation: The Triumph of L'Art*, 51.

62. Clarke, *African Art in the Barnes Foundation: The Triumph of L'Art*, 51.

63. Clarke, *African Art in the Barnes Foundation: The Triumph of L'Art*, 25.

64. Clarke, *African Art in the Barnes Foundation: The Triumph of L'Art*, 40.

Note: functional items in an illustration in Clarkes book show small metal labels that identify the region of the work. However, Clarke states that galleries had no wall tags, 67.

65. Dolkart, Lucy, Gillman., "Room 18: East Wall," 297.
66. Clarke, *African Art in the Barnes Foundation: The Triumph of L'Art*, 41.
67. Christa Clarke, "African Art at the Barnes Collection," in *Representing Africa in American Art Museums: A Century of Collecting and Display*, eds. Kathleen Bickford Berzock and Christa Clarke (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 90.
68. Staniszewski, "The Power," 62. Note skying is a term used by Staniszewski to describe stacking paintings one above the other on a gallery wall.
69. Clarke, *African Art in the Barnes Collection*, 46.
70. Clarke, "African Art," 86-87.
71. Clarke, *African Art in the Barnes Collection*, 39.
72. Bridget R. Cooks, *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and The American Art Museum* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 19.
73. Yaelle Biro, "African Art, New York, and the Avant-Garde," Special Issue" of *Tribal Art* magazine entirely dedicated to the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum, 16, https://www.academia.edu/2315285/_African_Art_New_York_and_the_Avant_Garde_Special_Issue_of_Tribal_Art_Magazine_entirely_dedicated_to_the_exhibition_at_the_Metropolitan_Museum. Note: African art was seen as a path to bring about change. The Harlem Renaissance marked a period in history when African Americans had moved northward in the Great Migration, seeking greater opportunities. As they settled in cities like Harlem, New York, in Chicago, Boston, and Philadelphia, as well as in Paris, Africa, and the Caribbean. Black musicians, entertainers, poets, visual artists, and intellectuals used their art forms, to show how self-determination could create opportunities for

greater equality. These art forms crossed racial boundaries, as it was embraced by white intellectuals. While it did not maintain the same fervor after the Stock Market Crash of 1929, it did lay the foundation for future generations. This movement is also known as the New Negro Renaissance, The Jazz Age, The New Negro Movement, and the Negro Renaissance. Humanities Texas, Cary D. Wintz, "The Harlem Renaissance: What Was It, and Why Does it Matter?", <https://www.humanitiestexas.org/news/articles/harlem-renaissance-what-was-it-and-why-does-it-matter>)

74. Cooks, "Exhibiting," 4.

75. Christa Clarke and Kathleen Bickford Berzock, "Representing Africa in American Art Museums: A Historical Introduction," in *Representing Africa in American Art Museums: A Century of Collecting and Display*, eds. Kathleen Bickford Berzock and Christa Clarke (Seattle: McClellan Book, University of Washington Press, 2011), 8.

76. Clarke and Berzock, "Representing Africa," 8.

77. Cooks, "Exhibiting," 9.

78. 29. Biro, "African Art, New York and the Avant-Garde: Exhibition Overview," *Tribal Art*, Special Issue 3, 18.

79. Cooks, "Exhibiting," 19.

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81. Arnoldi, "From the Diorama," 707.

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84. Arnoldi, “From the Diorama,” 708.

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87. Arnoldi, “From the Diorama,” 711.

88. Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, “Herbert Ward”.

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95. Clarke and Berzock, "Representing Africa," 7.
96. "Birth of a Nation, the NAACP, and the Balancing of Rights," EDSITEment! National Endowment for the Humanities, <https://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plan/birth-nation-naacp-and-balancing-rights>; The Early History of the NAACP: A Timeline 1909 to 1965, <https://www.thoughtco.com/timeline-of-the-naacp-1909-to-1965-45429>).
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98. "The Early History of the NAACP".
99. Clarke and Berzock. "Representing Africa," 9.
100. Constantine Petridis, "A World of Great Art for Everyone," in *Representing Africa in American Art Museums: A Century of Collecting and Display*, eds. Kathleen

Bickford Berzock and Christa Clarke (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 111-112.

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102. Price, "Objets d'Art," 84.

103. Clarke and Berzock, "Representing Africa," 8.

104. Sweeney, *African Negro Art*, 13.

105. Sweeney, *African Negro Art*, 13.

106. Clarke and Berzock, "Representing Africa," 8.

107. Price, "Objets d'Art," 85.

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114. Sweeney, *African Negro Art*, 11.

115. Clarke and Berzock, "Representing Africa," 8.

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Chapter 2 Notes

1. William S Walker, *A Living Exhibition: The Smithsonian and the Transformation of the Universal Museum* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 48.

2. Mary Jo Arnoldi, "From the Diorama to the Dialogic: A Century of Exhibiting Africa at the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History, *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 39, no. 155/156 (1999): 712-726.

3. Arnoldi, "From the Diorama," 712.

4. Arnoldi, "From the Diorama," 714.

5. Arnoldi, "From the Diorama," 714.

6. Arnoldi, "From the Diorama," 714.

7. Arnoldi, "From the Diorama," 714.

8. Arnoldi, "From the Diorama," 714.

9. Arnoldi, "From the Diorama," 716.

10. Arnoldi, "From the Diorama," 711.

11. Walker, "A Living Exhibition," 89.

12. Walker, "A Living Exhibition," 89.

13. Arnoldi, "From the Diorama," 712.

14. Arnoldi, "From the Diorama," 712.

15. Arnoldi, "From the Diorama," 712. Notes: Arnoldi references Sherry Ortner for this article. Ortner quotes Bradbury, who said that change was happening in other fields, like literary criticism, where "... a volatile mix of linguistics, psychoanalysis, and

semiotics, structuralism, and Marxist theory and reception aesthetics had begun to replace the older moral humanism.” Like what had happened in the early decades of the century, a positive approach to life—based on reason, and dependent upon decency and based on experience, thoughts, hopes, was being replaced by subjectivity (Humanism). In her monograph titled *Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties*, Ortner lays out three movements in anthropology that emerged in that decade: “symbolic anthropology, cultural ecology, and structuralism.” In a nutshell, symbolic anthropologists largely believe symbols (“vehicles of meaning”) communicate values, ethos, and worldview. Favorers of Cultural Ecology considered how technology affected population growth and socio-political organization, and how cultures adapt to their environmental conditions. (“What ritual did for society.”) Structuralism was the only “original” theory Ortner says, served as the new paradigm in the 1960s. Ortner describes Structuralism as the “universal grammar of culture”, where cultural discourse is the result of binary oppositions, which looks at “how a culture thinks”. Proponents of this theory believe “real change” happens “when structure is transformed”. Sherry Ortner, “Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 26 (1): 141.

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17. Arnoldi, “From the Diorama,” 712.

18. Arnoldi, “From the Diorama,” 716.

19. “African Arts: Old and New” Exhibit, 1968, National Museum of Natural History (U.S.), Photographic Collection, 1959-1971, Smithsonian Institution Archives, 1959-1971.

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25. Arnoldi, "From the Diorama," 712.
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Science Society (1999): S249-S269, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/238018> accessed: 17-03-2018.

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34. Walker, "A Living Exhibition," 121.

35. Clarke and Berzock, "Representing Africa," 6.

36. James Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and the 1970s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005)
<https://www.uncpress.org/book/9780807855980/the-black-arts-movement/>

37. Walker, "A Living Exhibition," 127.

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<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/TCM-multiculturalism-success-failure>.

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42. Walker, "A Living Exhibition," 88.

43. Walker, "A Living Exhibition," 87.

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51. David Evans, "Fife and drum Band," in *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World: Part 1* (London: Continuum, 2003), 26–28,
[http://www.credoreference.com/](http://www.credoreference.com/book/contpmwmis) book/contpmwmis>
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54. Kymlicka, *Multiculturalism*, 3-4.
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56. "Festival of American Folklife," *Congressional Record*.: July 1-4, 1967, Smithsonian Institution, <https://archive.org/details/festivalofameric00festi/page/n17>.
57. Walker, "A Living Exhibition," 107.
58. Walker, "A Living Exhibition," 129, 152.
59. Walker, "A Living Exhibition," 116.
60. Walker, "A Living Exhibition," 125.
61. Walker, "A Living Exhibition," 127.
62. Walker, "A Living Exhibition," 123.
63. Walker, "A Living Exhibition," 123.

64. Walker, "A Living Exhibition", 125.
65. Walker, "A Living Exhibition," 126.
66. Walker, "A Living Exhibition," 125.
67. "Mission, "Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum,
<http://anacostia.si.edu/About/>.
68. Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum, "Mission".
69. Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum, "Mission".
70. Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum, "Mission".
71. Holland Cotter, "A Language Explorer Who Heard Echoes of Africa," *The New York Times*, September 2, 2010.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/03/arts/design/03gullah.html>.
72. Cotter, "A Language".
73. Cotter, "A Language".
74. Cotter, "A Language".
75. Cotter, "A Language".
76. Walker, "A Living Exhibition," 126.
77. Walker, "A Living Exhibition," 129.
78. David Binkley, Bryna Freyer, Christine Mullen Kreamer, Andrea Nicolls, and Allyson Purpura, "Building a National Collection," in *Representing Africa in American Art Museums: A Century of Collecting and Display*, eds. Kathleen Bickford Berzock and Christina Clark (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 265.
79. Binkley, Freyer, Kreamer, Nicolls, and Purpura, "Building," 265.
80. Binkley, Freyer, Kreamer, Nicolls, and Purpura, "Building," 266.

81. Binkley, Freyer, Kreamer, Nicolls, and Purpura, "Building," 266.

Note: MAA Board: Goodman, "Warren M. Robbins: A Brief Biography".

<http://www.robbinscenter.org/about-the-founder.html> CCCC board: Saul Bellow

(immigrant author, WPA beneficiary, Trotskyist), Joseph Campbell (Comparative

Mythology & Religion) Ralph Ellison (African American author, knew Hughes,

influenced by Bearden, quiet Communist, felt betrayed by Communist party around

WWII), Buckminster Fuller (lived in Greenwich in 1920s, spent much time at Romany

Marie's, taught at Black Mountain College -Summers 1948 &1949), S.I. Hayakawa

(wrote Language in Action- dangers of racist propaganda, 1968 create College of Ethnic

Studies at San Francisco State College) and Margaret Mead (cultural anthropologist,

wrote Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies, embraced by feminists) Other

notable affiliates for the center included: William O. Douglas (Associate Justice of

Supreme Court,SEC member, Progressive) Eliot Elisofon (photographer, Life Magazine,

sought to improve the world around him) Rene d'Harnoncourt (Mexico, gallery handled

Mexican muralists, MoMA Director in 1944, Francis Humphrey Howard (Washington

Socialite, asst. to Eleanor Roosevelt), Langston Hughes (African American writer &

social activist), Jacob Lawrence (African American painter, Univ. of Washington

Professor & Black Mountain College, WPA beneficiary, Black struggles), Jacques

Lipchitz (fraternized with Picasso in Montmartre in early 1900s), Ben Shahn (Social

Realist painter aided Rivera on Rockefeller Center murals in 1933), Adlai Stevenson (

Democratic politician, "promoter of progressive causes"), and Mike Wallace (journalist

and TV personality, addressed difficult issues- Malcolm X, homosexuality). (Goodman,

“Warren M. Robbins: A Brief Biography,” Robbins Center, <http://www.robbinscenter.org/about-the-founder.html>)

82. Binkley, Freyer, Kreamer, Nicolls, Purpura, “Building,” 269, 270.

83. Binkley, Freyer, Kreamer, Nicolls, Purpura, “Building,” 277.

84. Binkley, Freyer, Kreamer, Nicolls, Purpura, “Building,” 240.

85. Binkley, Freyer, Kreamer, Nicolls, Purpura, “Building,” 268.

86. Binkley, Freyer, Kreamer, Nicolls, Purpura, “Building,” 268.

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88. *African Art: The de Havenon Collection*, Museum of African Art, 1971.

89. *African Art: The de Havenon Collection*

90. John Canaday, “Somebody’s Doing Something Right,” *New York Times*

(1923-curren file) June 13, 1971: 23, *Proquest Historical Papers: The New York Times with Index*.

91. *African Art: The de Havenon Collection*, Catalogue cover.

92. *African Art: The de Havenon Collection* “Introduction”.

93. *African Art The de Havenon Collection*, “Introduction”.

94. William Rubin, “Modernist Primitivism: An Introduction,” in “*Primitivism*” in *20th Century Art, Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern, Volume I*, ed. William Rubin, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art (1984), 4.

95. Canaday, “Somebody’s Doing Something Right.”

96. Canaday, “Somebody’s Doing Something Right”.

97. *Tribute to Africa: The Photography and the Collection of Eliot Elisofon. A Memorial Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art*, June through December 1974, (Washington, D.C.: Museum of African Art, 1974).

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99. Susan Stamberg, “Life ‘The Picture Show’ Photographer Showed Africa Through a New: Lens”, Photo Stories from NPR, <https://www.npr.org/sections/pictureshow/2014/02/05/272041622/life-photographer-showed-africa-through-a-new-lens>.

100. *The Sculptor’s Eye: The African Art Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Chaim Gross* (Washington, D.C.: The Museum of African Art, 1976), 3-4.

101. *The Sculptor’s Eye*, 4.

102. *The Sculptor’s Eye*, 2.

103. *The Sculptor’s Eye*, 2.

104. *The Sculptor’s Eye*, 8-80.

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Africa in Antiquity: The Arts of Ancient Nubia and the Sudan (September 30, 1978-December 31, 1978).

106. Roy Sieber, *African Textiles and Decorative Arts*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1972, 10.

107. Roy Sieber, African Textiles,” 10.

108. Roy Sieber, African Textiles,” 11.

109. Roy Sieber, African Textiles,” 11.

110. Roy Sieber, African Textiles,” 11.

111. “African Textiles and Decorative Arts,” MoMA Press Release no. 109, 1972, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2553?locale=en>.

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113. Canaday, “African Arts”.

114. Canaday, “African Arts”.

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and Household Objects, June 20-September 7, 1981, Willbour in Egypt, January 1-October 31, 1983; Curator's Choice: The Arts of Central Africa, April 2, 1986-June 30, 1986; African Art. January 1, 1989; African Art and Leadership, April 15- August 21, 1

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118. "African Art of the Dogon".

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121. John Canaday, "In Brooklyn, the Splendid Art of Africa," *New York Times*, April 1973, <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/04/05/archives/in-brooklyn-the-splendid-art-of-africa.html>.

Chapter 3 Notes

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4. Anna Laura Jones, "Exploding Canons: The Anthropology of Museums", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 22 (1993): 204, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2155846>.
5. Thomas McEvelley, "Doctor, Lawyer, Indian, Chief," *Art & Otherness* (Kingston, New York: McPherson, 1992), 46
6. McEvelley, "Doctor," 46.
7. Lorraine Adams, "Kirk Varnedoe, Finding the Words and the Will to Go On," *The Washington Post*, March 30, 2003, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/style/2003/03/30/kirk-varnedoe-finding-the-words-and-the-will-to-go-on/5326ec41-0ef6-4b17-81d3-6b561c844ac0/?utm_term=.e512ad747cd2
8. McEvelley, "Doctor," 47.
9. "New Exhibition Opening September 27 At Museum of Modern Art Examines 'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art," MoMA Press Release, August: 4, https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/6081/releases/

10. McEvilley, "Doctor," 47.
11. Sally Price, "Objets d'Art and Ethnographic Artifacts," *Primitive Art in Civilized Places, 2nd Ed.* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 85.
12. Hilton Kramer, "The Primitivism Conundrum," *New Criterion*, December 1984, <https://www.newcriterion.com/issues/1984/12/theprimitivism-conundrum>.
13. Kramer, "The Primitivism".
14. Kramer, "The Primitivism".
15. "New Exhibition Opening September 27 At Museum of Modern Art Examines Primitivism" in 20th Century Art ", MoMA Press Release, August 4.
16. The description of this gallery came from enlarging 2 slides on the MoMA website dedicated to Primitivism in 20th Century Art and comparing images in photos with images in the Primitivism catalogue. William Rubin, "Modernist Primitivism: An Introduction", in *Primitivism" in 20th Century Art, Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern. Volume 1*, ed. William Rubin (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1984), 1-81.
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19. McEvilley, "Doctor," 38.
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28. James Johnson Sweeney, *African Negro Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1935), 11.
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31. Constantine Petridis, "A World of Great Art for Everyone," in *Representing Africa in American Art Museums: A Century of Collecting and Display*, eds., Kathleen Bickford Berzock & Christa Clarke (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2011), 111; Note: Robert Goldwater assisted Sweeney for *African Negro Art*.
32. Roy Sieber, *African Textiles and Decorative Arts* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1972), 10.
33. "Brooklyn Museum Exhibition Archives, 1922-1980", Brooklyn Museum, <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/exhibitions>.
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35. McEvilley, "Doctor," 28.
36. Jones, "Exploding," 205.
37. Jones, "Exploding," 204-205.
38. Jones, "Exploding," 204.

39. William Rubin, "Modernist Primitivism: An Introduction" in "*Primitivism*" in *20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern, Volume 1*, ed. William Rubin (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1984), 17.

40. Jones, "Exploding," 204.

41. Jones, "Exploding," 204.

42. Winad Al-Tawil, "Primitivism" in *20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Arrogant*," *8Mile: A Journal of art+ cultures in Detroit* 32, (October 2016), http://infinitemiledetroit.com/Primitivism_in_20th_Century_Art,_Affinity_of_the_Tribal_and_the_Arrogant.html.

43. Paradigm shift is described in change theories. Historical philosophers like Marxist proponent, Arnold Toynbee (British, 1889-1975) explains this cultural phenomenon as "challenges from [the] social environment provoke creative response". (Toynbee studied Hegel and Marx and he understands how class struggle can potentially bring about change.) Arnold Toynbee wrote "A Study of History", a discussion of early 20th century change theories, where civilizations transition from static condition to dynamic activity. According to London, challenge from the social environment provokes creative response. This was once described by Marx and Hegel. This "creative response" to class struggle in these early decades is evidenced in the alignment of activists who formed organizations for people of color, women, and for workers, who wanted a better life. Scott London, *Understanding Change: How It Happens and How to Make It Happen*, Richmond, VA.: Pew Partnership for Civic Change, 1996, <http://www.Scottlondon.com/reports/change.html>

44. Jones, "Exploding," 204.

45. Holland Cotter, "Thomas McEvilley, Critic and Defender of Non-Western Art, Dies at 73," *New York Times*, March 30, 2013.

46. Cotter, "Thomas McEvilley".

47. Christy Day, "Study Group Speaks Out Against the Smithsonian," *Washington Insider*, December 12, 1994.

48. Day, "Study Group".

49. Afrocentrism is sometimes credited to the applied anthropology theories of Senegalese Cheikh Anta Diop (1923-1986), who believed that Europeans were descendants of Africa. While the term Afrocentrism was coined by Dr. Molefi Kete Asante in 1976, it was used by W.E.B. Dubois in the 1960s, and the principles behind the theory are traceable to the 19th century. According to James H. Sweet, African Americans interpret "the history of Africa through their own lens." Afrocentrists embrace the notion that all Africans share a homeland and they believe African Americans should learn about their heritage from Africans. Intellectuals cite Egyptian and Ethiopian cultures to demonstrate that unlike, what the West believed, Africans were a progressive people. Edward Blyden espoused the notion that Africans spawned the Ancient Greek Civilization. Sweet mentions the benevolent African personality and that humanity actually developed in Africa, where it was first perfected. Sweet says it is the goal of Afrocentrists to "reclaim the glories of this common African past." Asante pressed for curriculum changes to reflect Afrocentrism, especially surrounding the acceptance of ebonics. James H. Sweet, "Afrocentrism," *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History Vol. 1 2nd*, ed. Colin A. Palmer (Detroit, MI: Macmillan, 2006), 151-156,

go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/ps/ido?p=GVRL&u=txshracd2588&id=GALEIcx3444700034&v=2.7&it=r&sid=exlibris.

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