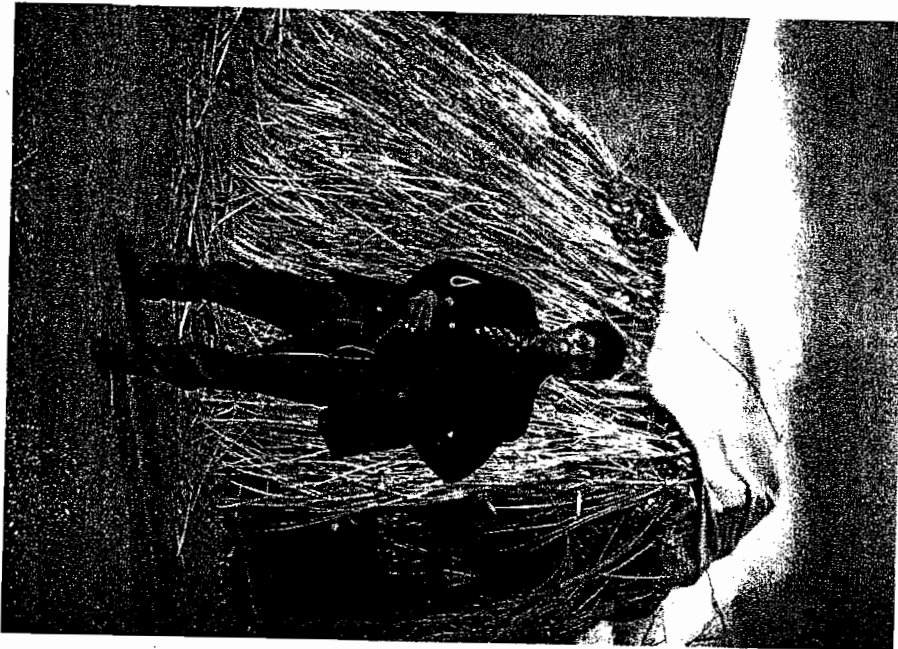


Him
with
from
front
lling.



sacred and
d exhibited
: demanding
s are to be
Reservation
first tribal
los Apache
Apache and
n front of a
use. Photo

From: Andrew Gulliford. 2000.
Sacred Objects and Sacred Places: Preserving
Tribal Traditions. Boulder: University of
Colorado Press. ISBN: 087081-560-1.
Total pages in book: 285

Native Americans and Museums Curation and Repatriation of Sacred and Tribal Objects

The National Museum of the American Indian is not only about the preservation of physical objects, of things. It is also about the preservation of cultures, of ways of being. Native communities throughout the Hemisphere have persisted, against almost overwhelming odds, to this very day. And their cultural viability, including, as it always has, response, adaptation, and innovation grounded in a timeless tradition, not only continues to exist but is experiencing a profound renaissance.

—W. RICHARD WEST, founding director,
National Museum of the American Indian

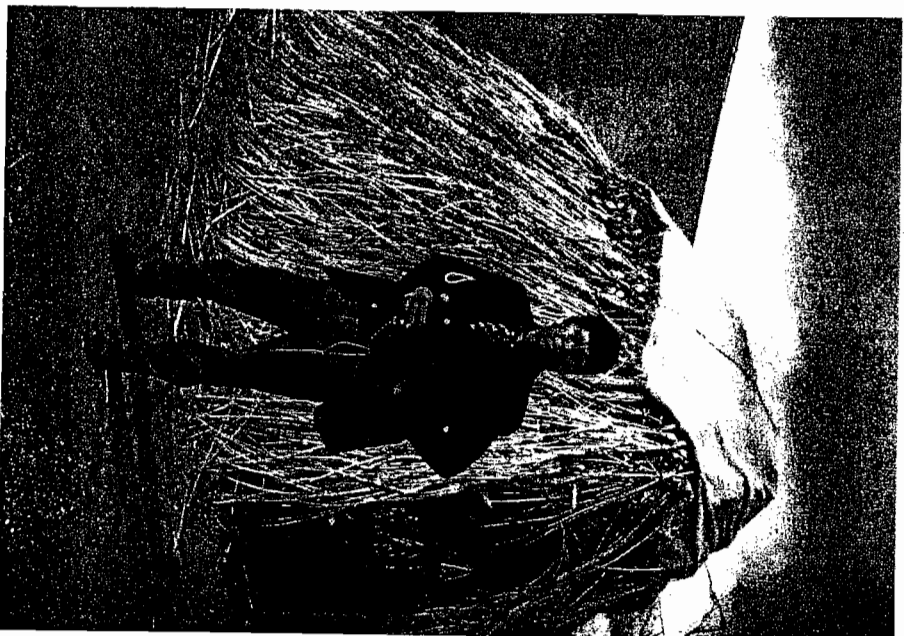
Across the country, Indian museums thrive as tribes preserve and protect their cultures by interpreting tribal histories to their own peoples and to a growing number of tourists interested in Native American culture and tradition. Over 150 tribal museums and cultural centers now exist, with both simple and elaborate exhibits, public programs, educational programs for children, and collections of prehistoric and historic materials. On the Apache Reservation at San Carlos, Arizona, the museum features an introduction to Apache lifeways and artifacts such as saddles, bridles, and rifles from the days of Geronimo and other Apache warriors and scouts. At Ak-Chin Him Dak, an ecomuseum in central Arizona, the tribe curates its own prehistoric lithic materials and actively engages in ongoing oral history projects. In Idaho, the Shoshone-Bannock Museum utilizes both historic and contemporary photographs to tell the tribe's story. But the flagship of tribal museums will be the National Museum of the American Indian on the mall in Washington, D.C.

Other buildings of the National Museum of the American Indian are located on the upper west side of Manhattan, far from the sources of many of its artifacts, and they contain over a million items. The old Heye Foundation structure on Broadway at 155th Street has housed one of the largest collections of North American tribal objects in the world. Begun at the end of the nineteenth century by industrialist George Gustave Heye, the Heye Collection is distinguished not by its quality or

Staff members of the Ak-Chin Him Dak Ecomuseum in Arizona with director Marilyn Peters, second from left. The staffers are standing in front of a reconstructed desert dwelling. Photo by author, January 1997.



After decades of having their sacred and historical materials curated and exhibited elsewhere, Native Americans are demanding control over how their histories are to be interpreted. On the San Carlos Reservation in Arizona, Dale Miles, the first tribal historian, directs the San Carlos Apache Cultural Center for the Western Apache and collects oral histories. He poses in front of a reconstructed Apache brush house. Photo by author, January 1997.



Native Americans and the Curation and Repatriation of Sacred and Tribal

The National Museum of the American Indian is not only preservation of physical objects, of things. It is also about the preservation of cultures, of ways of being. Native communities throughout the Hemisphere have persisted, against almost overwhelming odds every day. And their cultural viability, including, as it were, response, adaptation, and innovation grounded in a timeless response, not only continues to exist but is experiencing a profound renaissance.

—W. RICHARD WEST, founding
National Museum of the American Indian

Across the country, Indian museums thrive as tribes protect their cultures by interpreting tribal histories to peoples and to a growing number of tourists interested in Native American culture and tradition. Over 150 tribal museums and cultural centers now exist, with both simple and elaborate exhibits, public educational programs for children, and collections of prehistoric materials. On the Apache Reservation at San Carlos, the museum features an introduction to Apache lifeways as well as saddles, bridles, and rifles from the days of Geronimo and Apache warriors and scouts. At Ak-Chin Him Dak, an ecological center in central Arizona, the tribe curates its own prehistoric lithic artifacts and actively engages in ongoing oral history projects. In Shoshone-Bannock Museum utilizes both historic and contemporary photographs to tell the tribe's story. But the flagship of tribal museums will be the National Museum of the American Indian on t Washington, D.C.

Other buildings of the National Museum of the American Indian are located on the upper west side of Manhattan, far from the many of its artifacts, and they contain over a million items from the Heye Foundation structure on Broadway at 155th Street has the largest collection of North American tribal objects in the world. Begun at the end of the nineteenth century by industrialist Gustave Heye, the Heye Collection is distinguished not by its

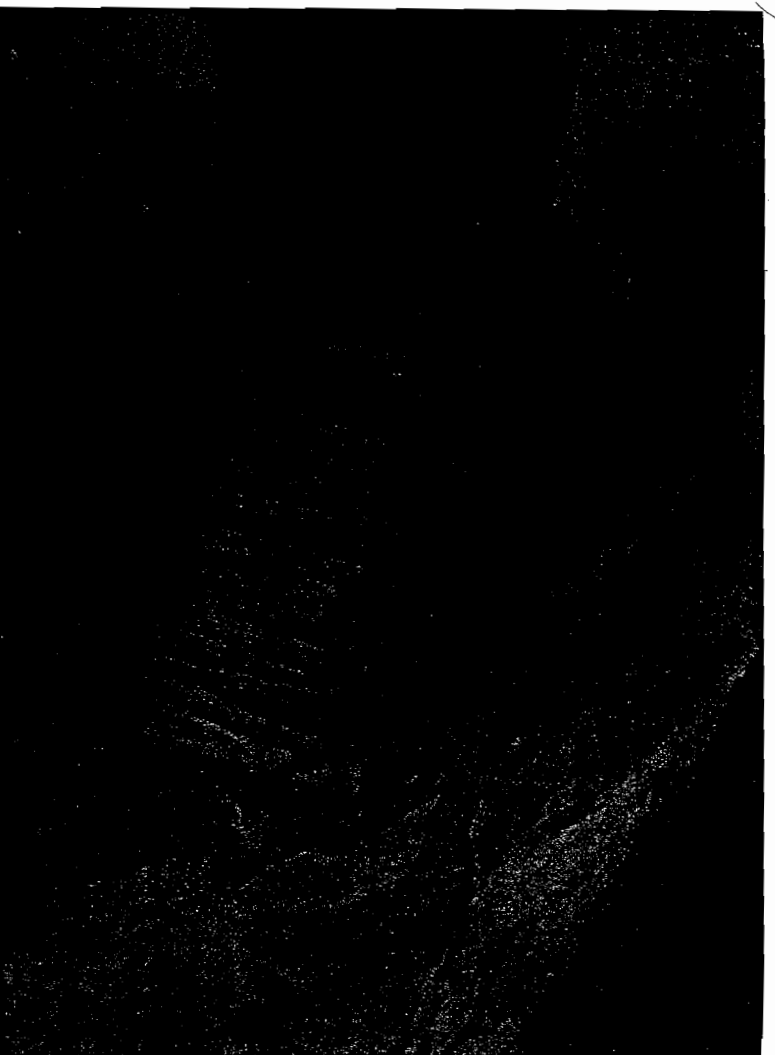
its careful provenience, for both are lacking in the collection, but by the sheer volume of prehistoric and historic materials collected by scouts and buyers who roamed from Inuit villages on the Arctic Circle to tribal encampments on the tip of Tierra del Fuego.¹

Wampum belts, battle axes, bows, arrows, shields, beaded dresses and beaded moccasins, masks, rattles, and ceramics of all kinds characterize Heye's vast private collection. In 1989, Congress reorganized the Heye Foundation Museum of the American Indian as the National Museum of the American Indian. By acquiring the Heye Collection with a \$150 million authorization, Congress established the fifteenth museum of the Smithsonian Institution and the first national museum dedicated to the living cultures of the native peoples of the Western Hemisphere. The museum's founding director, W. Richard West Jr., a member of the Cheyenne-Arapaho Tribe, has stated, "The new museum seeks to represent and interpret Indian cultures as the contemporary living people that they are—from roots in a glorious past to a difficult but vital present."²

Across the United States, Native Americans are asserting hegemony over their own cultural values and insisting on curatorial change in the nation's museums. A bellwether of that change was found in the stone building on Manhattan's upper west side in Washington Heights, which is now the Research Branch of the NMAI; the public visits exhibits at the Old Customs House. Thousands of objects had been displayed at the original Heye Center in the Bronx, including a magnificent Ghost Dance shirt, a Paiute shaman's rattle made from the head and claw of a bald eagle, and a Medicine Society bonnet attributed to the Oglala chief Crazy Horse, but ceremonial calumets, medicine bundles, and peace pipes had been removed from display. An empty exhibit case on the first floor in the hall of North American ethnology contained pins and labels but no artifacts.

Under the heading "Medicine Bags & Bundles" a caption explained that the National Museum of the American Indian had contacted tribal leaders "to discover what are the appropriate and sensitive methods for storing, displaying and interpreting objects in its collections."³ Trips by museum staff to tribal leaders began in the fall of 1990 and included visits to the Prairie Band of the Potawatomi in Kickapoo, Iowa, the Sac and Fox Tribes in Kansas, and the Hannahville Potawatomi of Michigan.

When museum staff conferred with tribal leaders, they learned that bundles and contents of medicine bags "possess life forces of their own" and that the public display of medicine bags is "disrespectful and possibly harmful to people who come near them." Because all bundles have a specific purpose known only to their owners and possibly other members of the tribe, when the bags and bundles are not used for their original purpose, they must always be stored "reverently."⁴ Such reverence increased with passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act in 1990.⁵

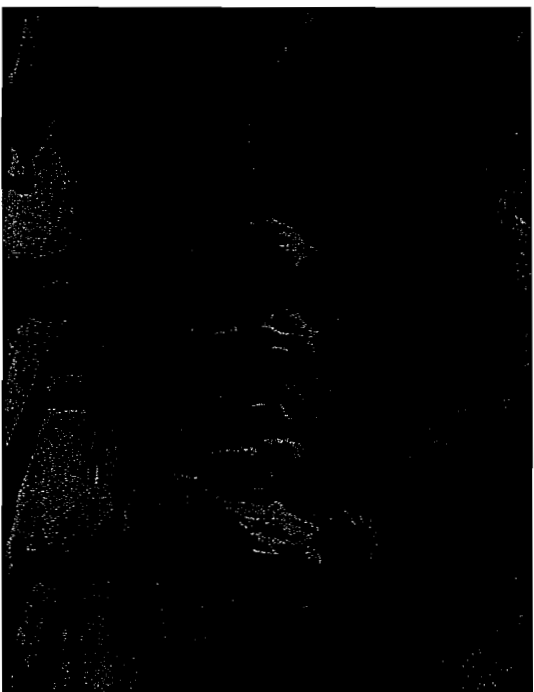


The act specifically required all museums and institutions receiving federal funds, including national and state parks and historical societies, to inventory their Native American collections within five years and to identify funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony with specific ceremonial or religious significance for tribes. Sacred objects were defined as "specific ceremonial objects which are needed by traditional Native American religions by their present day adherents." Museums were asked to make a "good-faith effort" to inventory and identify their holdings of sacred objects, associated funerary objects, and human remains, sending inventories and descriptions to the tribal leaders who had cultural authority over the final disposition and exhibition of the artifacts. The Peabody Museum of Harvard University allocated one million dollars to begin this inventory process by replacing their mainframe computer and hiring eight additional staff members.⁶

Some tribes prefer that major cultural institutions continue the curation of artifacts or human remains while transferring actual ownership and legal title back to the tribes. Others actively seek the repatriation or return of special objects, the long-standing Zuni claim for the return of

Zuni War Gods reverently placed in a Zuni shrine, 1897. The return of these gods to the Zuni Tribe in New Mexico is one of the ongoing repatriation success stories for Native Americans. Museums, courts of law, private collectors, and federal law enforcement officials have all come to realize that Zuni War Gods are communal tribal property and not to be displayed, traded, or sold. The War Gods represent continuing religious traditions and are considered vital to Zuni spiritual health. Young Zuni athletes even visit the remote shrines before participating in athletic events off tribal lands. Photo by F. H. Maudslowe. Courtesy, Southwest Museum, Los Angeles, California.

Return of the Omaha Sacred Pole in the courtyard of the Peabody Museum, June 1988. The Omaha Sacred Pole is central to the spiritual life of the Omaha Tribe. Elaborate Plains Indian buffalo ceremonies centered around such poles, which were adorned with special feathers or scalps as this one is. Reversed for centuries as a symbol of the Omaha, the pole was returned to the tribe prior to passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. The use of a sacred shaman's pole to ensure successful buffalo hunts may represent an unbroken cultural tradition from ca. 6,000 B.C. to the end of the nineteenth century. The cultural and religious importance for peoples dependent on bison makes this pole a sacred object of unparallelled value. Courtesy, Peabody Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, no. N31958.



all their wooden War Gods to sacred tribal caves and shelters in New Mexico is one such example. There, the hand-carved figures gradually age and deteriorate, thus reaffirming both the cyclical nature of all Zuni-made objects and the power of the spirit world. Keeping the War Gods in acid-free boxes in climate-controlled vaults violates their sacred purpose.⁷

Many tribes also believe in the residual power of sacred artifacts. At the NMAI in New York City, an empty exhibit case testified to the belief of Potawatomi elders that medicine bundles should have been buried with their owners. Consequently, the museum returned the bundles and medicine bags "to their communities so that the people could bury or burn them." Sacred powers inherent in the bundles are not to be dealt with lightly and may not have diminished over centuries. Martha Krejpe de Montañó, from the Prairie Band of Potawatomi and manager of the NMAI Information Center, discussed medicine bundles: "We were advised that some of the communally owned bundles could be dangerous, and that only war veterans could handle them without personal risk. It was widely felt that the public display of all these materials is inappropriate." Therefore, on October 19, 1990, a Native American war veteran removed all Potawatomi, Kickapoo, Iowa, and Sac and Fox bundles from public exhibition at the National Museum of the American Indian. Staff members then stored the items "in an appropriately respectful way as dictated by the elders of these communities."⁸

Museums across the United States must now carefully consider the curation and exhibition of prehistoric and historic Native American artifacts, especially those of dubious provenience. As early as 1906, widespread trafficking in grave goods and wholesale looting in the Southwest

prompted passage of the federal Antiquities Law, which Congress strengthened in 1979 with the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA). However, a thriving black market in Indian artifacts continued, and in 1989, new ARPA provisions increased fines and penalties. Unfortunately, the black market is still booming because many non-Indians simply do not consider Native American burials sacred.

Margaret Kimball Brown, director of the archaeologically unique Cahokia Mounds Historic Site in Illinois, is experienced in evaluating prehistoric sacred sites and objects. Just across the Mississippi River from St. Louis, Cahokia represents the height of the Mississippian mound-builder culture and has been proclaimed a World Heritage Site. Brown explained, "Most of our problems in dealing with the issues of sacred materials and human remains spring from our lack of understanding of Indian cultures [and] Indian spirituality. That it is pervasive through all actions rather than a separate element called religion, has blinded our perceptions in the meaning of sacred."⁹ Because Native Americans did not mark graves in the same way that Anglos did, amateur collectors who unearth Indian grave goods such as pottery and jewelry believe they have recovered abandoned property. This "finders keepers" philosophy negates centuries of tribal tradition and respect for the dead.

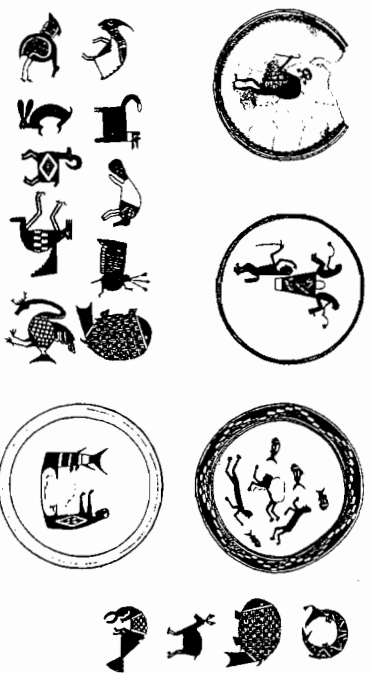
The Navajo did not disturb dozens of cliff dwellings left by earlier peoples, perched high on south-facing cliffs; instead, they respected the ghosts of the ancient ones, whom they named the Anasazi. Destruction of those ancient Puebloan sites and their subsequent looting only came with white exploration and settlement in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Today, many artifacts and grave goods, buried for centuries in the dust of abandoned southwestern villages, are in museums and private collections in the United States and around the world. A prime example of this unrestrained looting is the irreplaceable loss of much of the eleventh-century ceramics representative of the Mimbres people of the Mogollon culture from southwest New Mexico.

The Ancient Mimbres People

Having lived in apparent peace and harmony for 300 to 400 years, the Mimbres people reached their cultural height between A.D. 900 and 1150, when villagers produced exquisite black-on-white pottery decorated with ingenious animal and human motifs. The Mimbres were a people of mystery because they had no distinctive architectural traditions and left no direct descendants.¹⁰

What this people did leave, however, was an outstanding tradition of black-on-white pottery. They used magical symbols and extraordinarily sophisticated geometric designs to produce perhaps the finest prehistoric ceramic pottery in the United States. The designs on their beautiful bowls and jars give us a vivid, timeless perspective on the Mimbres culture, with realistic images of animals, insects, birds, deer, antelope, mythic creatures, and paintings of the Mimbres themselves. Women

Most of the pottery designs are from mortuary ware at the Western New Mexico University Museum in Silver City, New Mexico.



A priceless ceramic bowl damaged by the FBI. Valuable pieces of Mimbres pottery were stolen from one southwest New Mexico pot hunting couple and resold in Phoenix and San Francisco. The FBI recovered most of the collection in San Francisco but then shipped the irreplaceable prehistoric ceramics back to New Mexico in single-strength cardboard boxes. As a result, eighteen of twenty-six bowls were smashed like this one. The author was in the Grant County, New Mexico, sheriff's office when deputies opened the boxes. Photo by author, 1988.



Unharmed by the FBI, this magnificent Three Cranes Bowl represents the height of Mimbres ceramic art. The painting is exquisite, and the hatchmark lines are excellent, with no lines that touch and no errors anywhere in the design. A very wide and thin bowl, it rang like a fine crystal goblet when tapped with a finger. Having recovered the bowl from thieves, the elderly pot hunting couple who had dug it from a Mimbres grave quickly sold it on the black market before anyone else could steal it. Photo by author, 1988.



native americans and museums

porters depicted their people coming from the belly of the earth, gambling for arrows, hunting, fishing, wrestling, making love, and giving birth. Within the span of 150 years, in a burst of inexplicable creativity, the Mimbres mastered perspective in a way that would not find its equivalent in Europe until the Renaissance. Approximately 5,000 Mimbres bowls are thought to be in existence today; all come from graves.

The Mimbres buried their dead in the floor of their houses. The deceased's knees and elbows were flexed, and one of these magnificent black-on-white pots was placed on the head. Because the person had died and would be reborn in the next life, the pot, too, was killed by making a small hole in the bottom. The ritually killed bowl was then placed on the head of the deceased so that the human spirit and the spirit of the pot would be joined in the next world.¹¹

The semiarid climate and the relative isolation of southwest New Mexico protected Mimbres villages and the sacred burials until the first decade of the twentieth century, when looting began. Local pot hunters would spend their weekends probing for Indian burials and even bring their families on "skeleton picnics." In addition, because outlines of the ancient villages were visible from the air, military crews training for World War II near Deming, New Mexico, routinely bombed these sites. By 1987, when the General Accounting Office (GAO) of Congress issued a report titled *Cultural Resources: Problems Protecting and Preserving Federal Archaeological Resources*, the GAO estimated that over 75 percent of the ancient Mimbres sites had been destroyed because Mimbres bowls were selling for up to \$75,000 on the black market.¹²

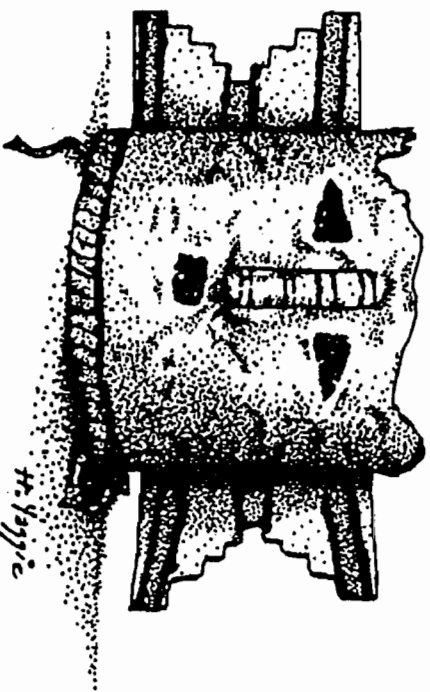
This rare pottery is scattered in American museums such as the Smithsonian Institution, the Peabody Museum at Harvard University, the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the Logan Museum of Beloit College in Wisconsin, the University of Minnesota Museum, the Museum of New Mexico, and others. According to National Park Service (NPS) federal regulations about exhibiting grave goods, these bowls should not be displayed, but they are nevertheless exhibited frequently. Their exotic designs make them some of the most coveted prehistoric ceramics in a museum's collections. In Europe, Mimbres grave goods can be found at the National Museum of Denmark, the University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Cambridge in England, the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, the Statens Etnografiska Museum in Stockholm, the Ethnographic Museum in Budapest, and the Museum für Völkerkunde in Leipzig, Germany.¹³

Unfortunately, these sacred burial bowls may never be returned to their places of origin because many efforts at repatriation from international collections have failed. However, before foreign nations can be expected to return Native American artifacts, the United States must first pass legislation banning its own international sale and export of sacred objects. Such legislation has not been forthcoming, and both Germans and Japanese speculate and trade in sacred Indian materials.

When two Navajo and one Hopi mask came up for sale at a Sotheby's auction in New York City, the auction firm insisted on proceeding despite vehement protests from tribal members. Elizabeth Sackler, a wealthy socialite, bought the masks for \$40,000, explaining she would return them because "period examples of Native American ritual objects should not be for trade, purchase or collecting . . . people shouldn't be paying enormous amounts of money for such objects for their personal enjoyment."¹⁴

For similar reasons, the National Museum of the American Indian urges an increasing dialogue and involvement between Native Americans and white museum curators and directors. Because of such a dialogue, the Sacred Pipe of the Sioux, *pehincala hu cannupa*, has been removed from display. A label placed in the exhibit case above where the pipe once stood announces, "When a pipe bowl and stem are joined a consecration occurs and the pipe becomes an instrument of divine communication." Therefore, pipe bowls and stems are traditionally stored separately when not in use. Plans have been made at NMAI to ensure that "pipes which have long been exhibited with their bowls and stems joined will be separated and purified and removed from display." Gary Galante, assistant curator of North American ethnology, explained that the museum had begun discussions with Arvol Looking Horse, a Minneconjou (or *Mnikowojia*) who is the keeper of the Sacred Pipe. In a cultural tradition without parallel among white Americans, Arvol Looking Horse is the nineteenth generation of his family to keep the Sacred Pipe originally given to the *Mnikowojia* by the White Buffalo Woman.¹⁵

Other objects pulled from exhibition at the National Museum of the American Indian included four Zuni masks, an Iowa tribal tomahawk with a unique design, and an ancient blade crafted from native copper. The Bear Cult Knife worn by members of the Bear Society from Montana's Blackfeet Tribe has also been removed. With a handle made from the jawbone of a bear and a sheath of buffalo hide, this ritualistic knife has



Indian masks used in sacred ceremonies are subject to repatriation under the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act; however, some sacred items are still traded and sold on the open market. Navajo masks like this one were purchased in 1990 at a Sotheby's auction by philanthropist Elizabeth Sackler, who then created the American Indian Religious Object Repatriation Foundation in New York City. Courtesy, Navajo Nation Historic Preservation Department.

native americans and museums

been labeled by curators as "extremely sacred"; they have also verified that it has been "used in initiation ceremonies as well as in warfare."¹⁶ As the museum world begins to consider its own ethnocentrism and as the hegemony of whites over the curation and interpretation of native objects lessens, a new kind of museum may emerge. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine have argued that "the museum is a uniquely Western institution"; "exotic objects displayed in museums are there only because of the history of Western imperialism and colonial appropriation, and the only story such objects can tell is the history of their status as trophies of imperial conquest."¹⁷

Previous exhibitions of Native American materials at the National Museum of Natural History of the Smithsonian Institution demonstrated the treatment of Indian artifacts as "trophies." Exhibits interpreted Indians as a warlike and proud but vanishing race in the curatorial equivalent of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "noble savage." Visitors found Indian exhibits in proximity to snakes, whales, and saber-tooth tigers. The insensitivity of locating exhibits about living tribal peoples adjacent to the bones of million-year-old reptiles has not been lost on Indian activists. Cultural symbolism remains important, and poet Susan Shown Harjo has argued, "If we can get Indians out of the halls with the dinosaurs and elephants, we may really do something to change federal policy."¹⁸ Indeed, museum policies are already changing. Removal of sensitive objects from display at the National Museum of the American Indian represents a significant shift in curatorial practice and increasing respect for tribal and native cultures.

Using Indian Consultants

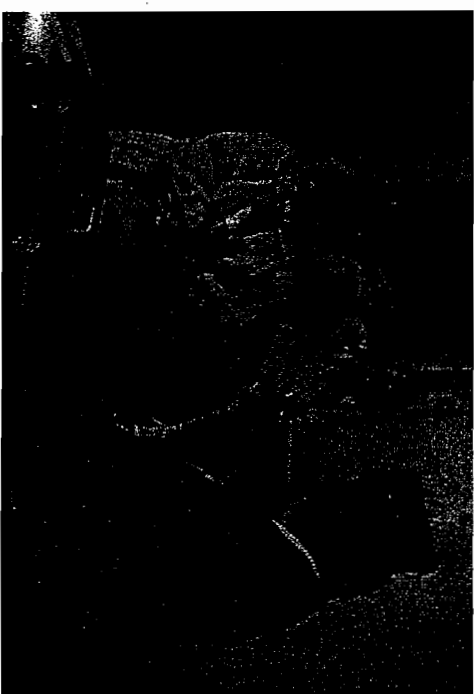
Part of this transformation is taking place in Washington, D.C. Other changes are occurring with the use of Indian consultants by traditional museums and archaeological sites and the establishment of successful tribal museums on reservations. In the nation's capital, the Smithsonian Institution, under the direction of Secretary Robert McCormick Adams, reversed its previous position against repatriating human remains and artifacts. Forced by legislative fiat to change its policies, the Smithsonian reevaluated all aspects of the curation of Native American artifacts and now actively seeks the help and support of tribal peoples and Alaskan natives. As Secretary Adams made clear in testimony before the U.S. Senate, "Native Americans today are increasingly asserting their right for [their] heritage to be reclaimed and protected as a national responsibility." "They do so," he continued, "not as dwindling numbers of survivors whose communities are on the verge of disappearance, but as vital, growing components of the diverse, multi-ethnic society in which we as a nation take pride."¹⁹

In addition to the new National Museum of the American Indian, the American Indian Program at the National Museum of American History has been expanded to offer curatorial training for Indian curators

and museum professionals. At the National Museum of Natural History, Native American public programs include select artisans and craftspeople who demonstrate their crafts before live audiences visiting the museum. Don Tenoso, a Hunkpapa Lakota Sioux dollmaker, became the first artist-in-residence. Before an eager and fascinated public, he crafted faceless Sioux-style dolls or toys and displayed his personal interpretations of an Arctc Jaguar-Warrior, a Zuni Buffalo Dancer (ca. 1875), and a Lakota-style Coyote Storyteller stick puppet.

The use of Native American consultants by museum professionals at state or national historic sites continues to increase along with sensitivity to Indian curation issues. Evelyn Voelker, a Comanche, directs the American Indian Center of Mid-America in St. Louis and has advised both the Cahokia Mounds Site in Illinois and the Missouri Historical Society in St. Louis. From her institution, Voelker also accepted human remains for reburial. Through a purification ceremony using smoking cedar, she cleansed the remains, the staff who had handled them, and the building where the remains had rested. As she waved a beaded eagle feather to gently waft cedar incense over the remains, she observed, "If people say they respect the American Indian culture, they can't ignore the beliefs of that culture."²⁰

In the Northwest, the Makah Tribe built the Makah Cultural Center on Washington's Olympic Peninsula near the site of a thousand-year-old mudslide that buried a tribal village and preserved it untouched.²¹ On the Columbia River plateau near Pendleton, Oregon, the Umatilla, Cayuse, and Walla Walla Indians have opened the Tamassilkt Cultural Institute, which features dramatic museum exhibits and their version of the social impacts resulting from zealous Christian missionaries, settlers on the Oregon Trail, and mandatory boarding school attendance at the turn of the twentieth century.



Native American repatriation ceremony, June 1990. Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri. Evelyn Voelker, right, fans cedar smoke over a box containing the remains of Native Americans. Lynn Kussman holds the tray of cedar as Richard Bear and his son, Jacob, watch. Photo by Marilyn Zimmerman. Courtesy, Missouri Historical Society.

In the southeastern United States, tribal museum activities include setting up a conservation lab on the Tunica-Biloxi Reservation near Alexandria, Louisiana, to repair seventeenth-century historic ferrous artifacts returned from the Peabody Museum at Harvard University. The tribe hired expert conservators to teach young Indians proper techniques to conserve and curate sacred objects, relics, and cultural material from other tribes. The unique conservation facility was a specially outfitted and climate-controlled tractor trailer.²²

Ongoing repatriation to tribes includes the return of a historic Revolutionary War-era Bible to the Stockbridge-Munsee Tribe in northern Wisconsin. Chief Red Cloud's Sharps carbine model 1851 rifle from the Sam Davis Historic Home in Smyrna, Tennessee, went home to Bernard Red Cloud of the Oglala Sioux Indian Tribe in Pine Ridge, South Dakota. The Heye Foundation also divested itself of eleven wampum belts repatriated to the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy on Grand River in Canada.²³

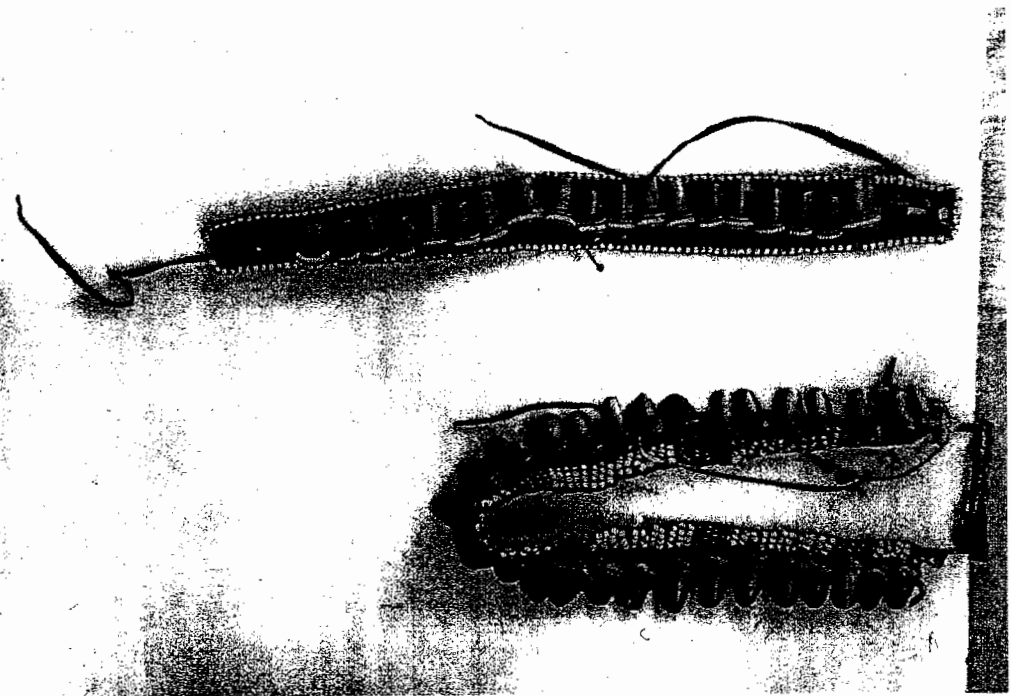
What has happened to cultural items that have been returned? Most of them remain in the care of tribal elders or are secure in tribal museums, but rumors persist that some sacred objects have been resold on the black market for even higher prices, though such allegations have been impossible to verify. The fact that native peoples continue to be unemployed or underemployed, with few opportunities to earn a decent living on or near tribal lands, persists as a depressing reality. But reselling repatriated objects to collectors would be a heinous crime, indeed. Tribal thieves would face severe consequences.

Sensitive Curation and Pesticide Applications

Rare objects that have been returned must be properly curated and stored. Gordon Yellowhair of the Cheyenne-Arapaho Tribes discussed some of the sensitive curation issues for Great Plains objects; he pointed out, for example, that male and female objects should not be stored together and that care must be taken when moving objects because some should be stood up and all need sunlight. Dilemmas occur over the repatriation of war trophies such as scalps or fingerbone necklaces, for although one tribe may possess a trophy of this type, the scalp or fingers may have come from an enemy. Should that item be repatriated? If so, to which tribe should it go? As this scenario suggests, one negative aspect of the NAGPRA legislation has been that it can bring division into a tribe and create discord between tribes and their former rivals. Yellowhair also cautioned that a sacred object can have an impact on all who handle it.²⁴

Another serious problem brought to light by NAGPRA is the historic curatorial treatment of rare feathered objects such as eagle-feather headresses, prayer feathers, and bustles. Decades ago, nonnative curators, thinking only of preserving the objects, sprayed them with insecticide or arsenic compounds to eliminate insect infestations, but now that

Nineteenth-century fingertone necklace war trophies represent a repatriation enigma under provisions of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act: Warriors tortured their enemies and then removed their fingers. Who would claim grisly artifacts made from these bones? To what cultural group should they be repatriated? Courtesy, Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, no. 246-C.



those sacred objects are returning to their tribes of origin to be used in rituals and ceremonies, what will happen to the health of spiritual leaders who will wear or handle these items? New conservation methods must be developed for tribal leaders who use sacred objects for initiations and ceremonies before "ritually retiring" them to caves or secret storage areas.

NAAGPRA and Cultural Items

NAAGPRA may not work effectively for the return of cultural goods and cultural patrimony because of the vague wording in the federal law. For example, if a state historical society refuses to return a cultural good (such as a chief's headdress) to a tribe, does the law need to be amended

native americans and museums

to clarify congressional intent regarding the return of cultural materials, as distinct from burial goods and sacred religious objects? If a tribe makes a request for repatriation, why not honor that request as a matter of goodwill and reciprocity, regardless of whether the item fits within NAAGPRA categories—just as Curator David Bailey of the Museum of Western Colorado did when he returned an elegant beaded vest and a buckskin dress decorated with elk teeth to Northern Ute families.

Bailey discussed the need to return family heirlooms to the Ute: "We never put ourselves in their place and that's a mistake. Everybody benefits when we return items and receive valuable information back." "Other curators seem to believe their job is to fill their museum's storerooms and lock the door," he said, "but I would rather have a dialogue and exchange with living Indians to gain their respect and insight into our collections."²⁵ By returning the vest and dress, the Museum of Western Colorado received new beaded items as a gift from the tribal chairman, as well as stories and information. Thomas Livesay, director of the Museum of New Mexico, concurs with Bailey's position, and he reported that his institution's repatriation policy has brought it much closer to New Mexico's tribes; in fact, tribal members have gone through the museum's storerooms and told the staff about many of the objects there. Thus, the museum and the tribe have not had to deal with the formal, adversarial relationship that is sometimes brought about by implementation of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

Tribal Success Stories

Tribal museums are thriving, and collections are going home to the over 150 tribal museum and cultural centers in the United States, including the massive, five-story, \$193 million Mashantucket Pequot Museum in the hills of rural Connecticut.²⁶ With few actual artifacts to exhibit, this tribal museum, the largest ever built, features a two-acre indoor diorama and a presentation of Pequot history going back 11,000 years but focusing on the Pequot Massacre of 1637, when Puritans burned their village and killed at least 400. The 85,000-square-foot main gallery contains eleven permanent exhibits, incorporating life-size dioramas modeled from living Pequots as well as interactive programs and artifacts from ethnographic and archaeological collections owned by the museum.²⁷

In New York, the removal from public display of pipes, knives, and medicine pouches at the National Museum of the American Indian's Bronx facility represents only the beginning of a heightened awareness about the rights of tribal peoples to their own cultural heritage. The advent of tribal museums, which are both repositories and community centers, provides Native Americans with a positive sense of historical identity and an opportunity to look toward the future by sharing the past with the next generation. As one Indian staff

member explained, when exhibits become redefined and artifact collections are returned, the larger American society will continue to learn of Native American traditions—but “on our terms, in our time, by our people.”²⁸

To explain ongoing native concerns about sacred objects, commentators by tribal members and nonnative museum curators conclude this chapter. The common thread throughout their commentaries is respect for tribal beliefs, including the concept of sacred medicine bundles as portable altars.



Modern Native American museum exhibits often display the handiwork of local elders, such as the Shoshone beadwork of Helene Oldman and Millie Guinina from Crowheart, Wyoming. Photo by author, June 1997.

native americans and museums

The Loss of Sacred Blackfeet Medicine Bundles, Related by George Kipp, Blackfeet Reservation, Browning, Montana

The largest collection of sacred Blackfeet medicine bundles in existence was acquired over decades by the family of Robert Scriver, whose father was an Indian trader at Browning, Montana. While Congress debated the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, Scriver secretly sold the collection to the Glenbow Museum of Alberta, Canada. Blackfeet cultural leader and language specialist George Kipp described the devastating loss of those bundles and the shock of having a trusted friend betray the tribe by selling its priceless heritage outside the United States.

Private collectors saw a lot of value [in] these religious and cultural artifacts . . . At some point in time, when you are in an area where you're suffering from 90 to 95 percent unemployment and [you are] looking for the necessary food for the next meal and you have something of value, instead of letting your children starve you will sell that item.

In the Blackfeet way the rights [to open and use a sacred medicine bundle] are the prime thing of importance, and the object is secondary, but we find out now you need both the rights and the objects to perform these type of ceremonies. The United States government, through their agents, established quite a market [for] our items, and once that market was established we started rapidly seeing these items disappear, along with the deterioration of [our] whole society, culture, and social system. Now we're trying to regain our identity and our way of life, but we're having a very difficult time doing that without the artifacts—the ceremonial bundles that are placed all over the United States and Germany and Japan. So we're finding it very difficult to regain what we are, who we are.

Scriver was reared and raised here with the Indians. He was accepted. He became an artist and he saw a value in Indian artifacts and ceremonial objects. To make himself renowned in the Western art world, he entered into the culture of the Blackfeet. He gained acceptance and trust. He obtained a medicine pipe bundle from the Little Dog family, went to the traditional ceremonies of the transfer and all the items that were given to him were given to him in trust, because he was an [important] man in the Indian world.

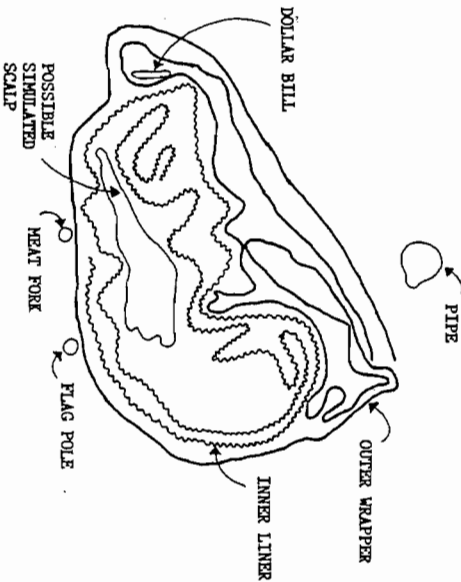
Pipe men have a certain social status. Consequently to the Western art world [because of our trust in him] he was also held in renown. He got to experience and touch and feel the actual cultural items. He made a living out of Western art, and a lot of it was duplication of Blackfeet objects. He wrote a couple of books, so he was well accepted.

All this time he was collecting items, and some of the items he purchased for I think \$3,500, \$5,000, \$1,500, something like that. It was very minimal, but he ended up selling them for \$125,000. A bear knife that was stolen from an old lady ended up in his hands and he sold that for \$10,000.

There is renewed interest. There are a lot of younger people looking for these certain items that he sold so that they can start taking care of them in a traditional manner, but they're no longer available. . . . Those items were the prime backbone for us to assure ourselves that we would be Blackfeet in the future. We need them back.²⁹

Curating a Sacred Pawnee Family Medicine Bundle, Related by Diane Good, Kansas State Historical Society

In the summer of 1873, after planting their corn crop, 350 Pawnee Indians left their earthen villages along the Republican River on their annual buffalo hunt into western Nebraska. They traveled peacefully, though pioneers had already begun to take up land and establish homesteads. After a successful hunt, the Pawnee stopped in a small canyon to prepare and process their buffalo meat, unaware that over 1,000 armed Sioux were also in the area. White

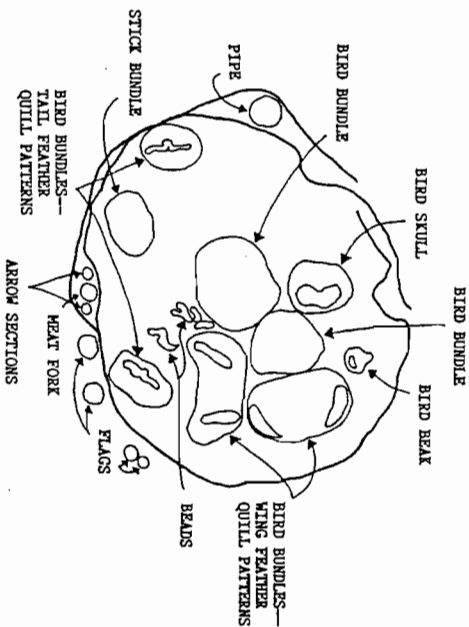


Honoring tribal traditions by not opening the Pawnee Sacred Bundle, Kansas State Historical Society staff members had the bundle scanned through a medical imaging process to determine effective means of curation and to gain some idea of what was inside. Courtesy, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

buffalo hunters warned the Pawnee, but Siky Chief of the Kitchchaki Band did not believe the report of so many hostile Sioux. On the morning of August 5, 1873, the Sioux attacked in one of the last major intertribal battles on the Great Plains. From that day forward, the canyon has been known as Massacre Canyon.

With Sioux shooting down at the Pawnee from both trins of the low canyon, chaos reigned. Desperate Indians abandoned horses heavily laden with meat and buffalo robes. Pawnee women and children tried to flee as warriors attempted a hasty defense. Seventy Pawnee died in the massacre, and white settlers came to take the meat and buffalo robes without bothering to bury the dead. In 1930, Congress authorized the construction of a granite monument to mark the Indian tragedy—one of the few instances in which federal funds were used to identify a local historical site.

One of the survival stories involves a young girl and a sacred medicine bundle. Anthropologist and education specialist Diane Good of the Kansas State



Honoring tribal traditions by not opening the Pawnee Sacred Bundle, Kansas State Historical Society staff members had the bundle scanned through a medical imaging process to determine effective means of curation and to gain some idea of what was inside. Courtesy, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

Historical Society cleaned the family medicine bundle and described in detail what it was like to work with a sacred object.

Objects themselves are interesting, but it's the stories behind them that really bring life to the whole situation. The story that we got with the bundle was that it had been in a Pawnee family for a hundred years. We don't know exactly when it was created. The family story that came with the bundle was that it had been at Massacre Canyon, and had belonged to a warrior who was there with his wife and family. As they were being attacked, in order to save his daughter, who was between 6 and 8 years of age, he cut the packs off the packhorse and tied his daughter to it. He tied the bundle to her back and put a [presidential] peace medal around her neck, which was all the medicine that he had available, all the power that he had with him, and he put all of his power onto that little girl and told her to take care of the bundle and that the bundle would take care of her. And then he whipped the horse and it ran from the canyon.

The story that was told us was told in those words—so the words themselves were almost as important as the object, and this appealed to me, being the mother of children of about that age and understanding from a parent's perspective what that meant. Knowing that the father knew he was going to die, because it was his job to fight to the death . . . but he also knew he had a chance to save his daughter, and he put a lot of faith and trust in the power that that bundle held. To me the bundle had a power and an energy that had been built into it as it was created. It became [a symbol] not only for the girl but for her family, as she grew up and had children and then grandchildren.

The other thing that was intriguing to me was that it came to us as a family bundle, yet the Pawnee don't have family bundles; they have individual bundles and they have village bundles. They don't have family bundles. And so what was a family bundle? It was clearly identified for us by the Pawnee owner as a family bundle, and I began to see that through time it had become a family heirloom.

This bundle really had two symbol sets attached to it. One was the symbol of the power, the medicine that it contained that it was originally created to have, and the second was the symbol of family that was tied so tightly to this bundle, which had been maintained according to Pawnee custom but had not been opened because the ceremony that was necessary to safely open the bundle had been lost with the warrior in Massacre Canyon. It was perpetuated and maintained as a sacred item but could not be used for its original purpose. So it took on a second sort of sacred meaning as an identity for the family, but it eventually became a liability to them because of the unknowns of what was in it. They felt that there would be people who would break into the house and steal it and possibly endanger the family in the process of stealing it, which was one of the reasons that it was donated to us.

I knew that whatever I did [as a curator] had to be reversible and defensible. I had to do the right thing for the right reasons. I also chose to look at this bundle as if it were a person with its own spiritual energy, and in a sense working with it, cleaning it, looking at it, studying it, I almost began to know it as its own personality. I tend to believe that things that are created with that kind of purpose have their own spiritual power anyway.

[The donor originally] did not want her name associated with the bundle, because she said too many people in the tribe said that harm would come to the tribe and to her because she gave this to a museum. She said it was her mother's dying wish that the Pawnee Indian Village Museum [be given the bundle, for it] was the appropriate place to safely care for this bundle [and in the museum] it wouldn't endanger anyone. They were concerned about keeping it in the family home for fear someone would break in and murder them in the process of trying to steal it. [The donor] was concerned about the bundle's safety. But she was also concerned about her own.

I can see where the woman was caught in a real turmoil because she had been raised by Pawnee cultural law [which] says the bundle is to be passed down from mother to daughter and to be properly cared for. The original owner of the bundle and the ceremonies that went with it were lost, so it's like having a locked box with no key. You can't get into it. You can't use it. It's there. You have to maintain it, but you can't do anything with it, and at the same time, it presents a danger because of the unknown of what's in it. People want it.

a mother's dying wish

She had to dispose of it in an appropriate manner, and she asked her daughters if any of them were interested in it, but none of them wanted to take the responsibility. Her son who was interested in it was not eligible by Pawnee law to receive it, because it is the property of a woman, handed down from mother to daughter. Even though her son wanted it, she didn't feel that she could give it to him because it would violate the law surrounding the bundle. It was her mother's dying wish that it be given to the Pawnee Indian Village, because that was a sacred place to her and to her family.

As we talked to the family, they were comfortable with us taking it, bringing it back to our facility to get the dust off it and determining how best to care for it—get it photographed, documented as much as we could, and with them it was alright if we opened it. They didn't care because when they gave it to us they broke all ties with it, at least in their own minds at that time. We've realized that because we did not choose to open it they've maintained ties to it as well.

But Mrs. Horschief [the donor] told us that her 21-year-old grandson had died as a result of that bundle. He died within weeks after she donated that bundle to us. He was killed in a car wreck, and she was convinced and helped in that belief by several tribal members who told

sacred objects and sacred places

her it was because of her decision to give us the bundle that her grandson had died. So she really felt that she had sacrificed her grandson for that decision to give it to the white people—to take it out of Pawnee culture.

Even though she felt it was going to a Pawnee sacred place, it was still being removed from her family. She had violated the rules. I think we all feel that way when we knowingly violate a rule. We tend to look around and see what our punishment is, and we sometimes take things that are not at all associated and link them in our own minds as justification. I'm quite sure that's what was happening here. I'm convinced that the boy's death had nothing to do with the bundle, but she is just as convinced, or was at the time, that there was a connection.

When Mrs. Horsechief donated the bundle to the Kansas State Historical Society, it was one of the few nineteenth-century Indian medicine bundles that had remained unopened and was now in a museum's collections. Anthropologists struggled with the ethical question of whether they should violate the bundle by opening it and perhaps damage its contents and the buffalo hide straps that secured it or whether they should respect tribal traditions and leave the bundle unopened. To their lasting credit, staff members at the Kansas State Historical Society did not open the bundle. They left it sealed, but they did carefully clean the ancient leather and then x-ray and CT-scan the bundle to learn more about its contents and how it should be curated.

When we accept things for collection, we accept them with the idea that they're to be preserved for as long as possible, which is a real challenge when you're trying to preserve an object that was not intended to be preserved forever. It was made out of materials that were intended to disintegrate. It was intended that the bundle be buried with the warrior, because it was an individual bundle, not a village bundle. But this was a very powerful warrior, judging from what we've been able to see [by X rays] into the inside of the bundle.

The outer covering is buffalo hide that has probably been brain-tanned as near as we can determine without specific tests, which would be destructive to the object. The X rays suggest an interior lining of a woven grass mat and the objects themselves include bird bones, metal bells, glass beads, and other natural material.

It was sacred. The practical aspect of opening it would have destroyed it. We could not have opened it and put it back together again for a number of reasons, not the least of which was that the leather ties that held it had become brittle, and they would have broken in the process. But simply to open a bundle intermixes and moves things, and we had no idea if they had a special location. We did know from research that the heads of the birds were all facing the same direction, and that was related to the direction that the bundle faced ceremonially—whether it faced north or south, depending on the season. Had we opened the bundle all of that would have changed, and we would have destroyed the

native americans and museums

context of that bundle, and probably destroyed the bundle as well, but to me it wasn't just the bundle that was sacred. It was the whole arrangement of things within it as well as the mystery.

maintaining the mystery

The item was sacred and the knowledge of what was in it was limited to certain people; the male owner had knowledge of what was in it, maybe some of the males that he associated with and some of the other warriors had knowledge of what was in it. The women, theoretically, did not, although I suspect the warrior's wife probably had a pretty good idea, because generally the women would have been left to put everything back after the ceremony, so I doubt that it was a total secret to her. Sadie was the young girl who came out of the canyon, and I'm sure Sadie had no idea what was in the bundle. After her parents died, that was a mystery, and to me, preserving that mystery was as important as preserving the item itself. We did X rays which left us with more questions than answers, which is fine. I feel like we maintained the mystery, while we answered some questions that helped us to interpret it.

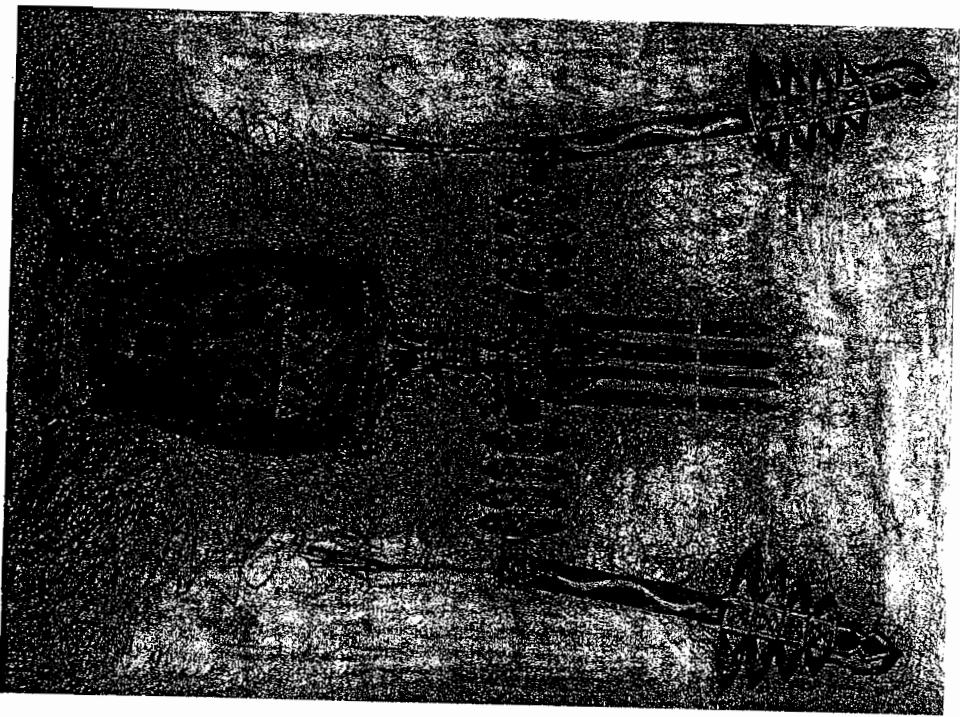
It served as a portable altar. During a ceremony, it would have been untied and opened and the tools within it would have been used in a variety of ceremonies. What was contained within it was like a combination of safe deposit box, insurance policies, and family bible. It had a record of where they had come from and insurance that they would get to where they were going. Items that were within it maintained the story even though the items themselves might not have been recognizable to people outside of the family. There were objects within that bundle that would help the family remember who they were and where they'd come from, to perpetuate the family and keep them on the right path.

The bundle would be considered alive in Pawnee cultural tradition. It was alive when it was being used. It was given birth at the time it was created, and I'm not sure at what point the bundle actually dies. Probably not until the warrior dies and the bundle is buried with him. Even then, there is a question as to whether the bundle actually dies at that point. A bundle would go through cycles of being used and then not being used. One component of the bundle was a perfect ear of corn—symbolizing mother corn, which was the mainstay of the Pawnee diet.

Every time they harvested in the fall, they would take a perfect ear of corn and put it into the bundle. The corn would have been encased in buffalo intestine, as if it were shrink-wrapped, and that would be in the bundle from the harvest until spring. Then the corn would be taken out and ritually used to plant the next corn crop. It was a ritual way of taking the energy of last year's corn harvest and putting it back into the ground for another successful year, so the bundle would have been with-out an ear of corn through most of the summer. It could be compared to a person asleep. They're still alive, but they're not consciously interacting with the world. The massacre took place in August, and the corn

might not have been harvested at that point, and so it's possible that the corn was simply never replaced in the bundle, because it had not yet been harvested. So the bundle is asleep.

"I feel that it is living," said Vance Horsechief, who believes that the Pawnee know about the bundle in ways that "it was only meant for us to know." The sleeping bundle now rests in an airtight case suspended from the ceiling above an excavated prehistoric Pawnee lodge at Pawnee Indian Village Museum in northern Kansas, almost on the Nebraska border. Appropriately lit by small spotlights, the two-foot-long bundle is on the western side of the ancient lodge, in the place of religious importance—six feet atop the faint outline of a bison skull that would also have served as an altar for prayers and offerings to the Great Creator. Unopened, the bundle's sacredness remains intact. It is a sacred item in a sacred place, residing quietly in an ancient village.³⁰



The historic Apache Gaan Dancer's mask curated at the Museum of Western Colorado awaits repatriation to the Mescalero Apache. Artist's rendition by Greg Phillipy; original art in the collection of the author.

native americans and museums

Returning an Apache Gaan Dancer's Mask,
Related by David Bailey, Curator,
Museum of Western Colorado

The Gaan Dancer headdress in our museum is a very sacred item. I went to an Apache dance at the Native American Lifeways Festival in Montrose, Colorado, and they were wearing one similar to it so I approached them about the headdress before NAGPRA became law. The dancers talked a little, and they mentioned to the crowd about how sacred the masks are and what power they have. The masks are very powerful and in a sense dangerous if you do not know how to control the power that's within them.

This is an older Gaan Dancer's headdress. It's a black leather mask with a twisted cottonwood root that fits over the top of your head. Even people who don't know anything about sacred objects, when they see this mask, they have a reverence and also a fear. I remember the most poignant thing that happened when we first got the mask out, when we were doing our periodic inventories of the Native American collection. Several staff people were there and they stepped back, instinctively, not because of any particular reason. But all of them took a step back and I myself, as curator, felt uncomfortable handling it.

We had a Ute medicine man come in, because we have an open door policy for Native Americans interested in looking at the collections. One Southern Ute came in and he went into our collections area and then stopped from going around a corner. He said, "I can't go around that corner." And I said, "Well, why?" And he said, "Because some of our people are there." He'd never been in the museum before, and I thought, well, that was a strange occurrence, because indeed thousand-year-old Fremont human remains were stored on shelves—around the corner.

Larry Cesspooch, a Northern Ute, came up and did a ceremony here in the museum to cleanse the artifacts and then to cleanse me, because as curator I have to handle a lot of things. He wanted to make sure I was safe. He said his sense was that the spirits of the objects in our collections were confused, and he had to assure them that things were alright.

The Apache mask was donated in the late 1970s, and at that time a lot of sacred objects had gotten away from tribes for one reason or another, and I think this may have been one of those that somehow got out of the family. The museum's collection policy was more eclectic then, and the staff realized the scarcity of authentic Native American artifacts. In a way it was a good thing we did preserve it, because almost thirty years later now we can return it. NAGPRA has a good side effect of creating trust between museums and Native American cultures, because in the early days curators would try to get anything they could to round out their collections. And in the rounding out process, they weren't considering the consequences of taking objects away from families or clans.

sacred objects and sacred places

This particular Gaan Dancer's mask is used in the most sacred Apache dance ceremony by the Mescalero crown dancers, and the mask can't be handled by women. The dance is a spiritual representation of the spirit world, so it's really sacred. Because of NAGPRA and because it was the right thing to do, we sent photographs of the mask to all the Apache tribes, and they knew it by the description and the photographs, which verified that this mask had previously been used in a ceremony. It had already acquired a sacredness to it, because it had been used in that connection between the real world and the spirit world.

The mask may date to the turn of the century. We do know it's an earlier version of the ones they use now. Instead of a modern wood frame and a cloth mask, this mask is leather. The paints vary, and it has a lot of patina on it. It looks like it's been around for quite awhile. Even the feathers that are attached to the crown of the mask seem fairly old.

This is a very special mask made even more important because one of the Apache museums burned down, so a lot of their sacred items have been destroyed by fire. The Apache museums committee works by consensus, and by knowing the paint and the design on sacred objects they know what should be returned and to which tribe. In this case, the mask goes to the Mescalero Apaches. They'd asked that it be personally delivered so that we could attend their dance and understand the significance of it, and I think that is a great gesture because when you return it, you come to understand the significance of the sacred object from their side.

We'll come back from the meeting having learned a lot about the Apaches, and we're curious about their interaction with the Utes, too. We want to ask questions about some of the legends concerning the ancient people before the Utes. So the mask will be returned. You try to handle it in a very careful manner. This headdress with the black leather mask and the cottonwood root represents the lightning beings and in that aspect something happened to me.

lightning strikes near the curator

I'm home and I walk out in my backyard to see an afternoon storm. The storm seems a long way off, and I'm walking towards my shed and there's this noise and everything goes pure white. The next thing I know, I'm on the ground, getting up, and a sixty-foot tree over in the next yard is split down the center—a sycamore tree, which is a pretty stout tree. When the lightning hit I was knocked to the ground and couldn't hear for about 20 minutes.

Interestingly enough, the neighbors cut out the center trunk and the tree is still alive. It's split down to the base of the trunk, which is about 12 feet off the ground, but it's alive, and I am reminded of the Gaan Dancers and the association with the spirit world. I've been told that Indians believe if you're hit by lightning, then it's probably a sign that you're cursed by the power object that you've handled, but if it hits nearby, you're empowered. Probably my empowerment is to return the

native americans and museums

mask to the group where it belongs. I hope we can return it, especially since we had the Northern Ute tribal member do the cleansing ceremony. He felt like the spirits were lost and this is one we can get back home.³¹

Crow Tribe Family Heirlooms in Museums,
Related by Janine Pease Windy Boy, President,
Little Big Horn College, Crow Agency, Montana

One of my great-grandfathers died in the 1930s, and he was buried and only three weeks later our family members found his war shirt that he was wearing upon burial—in a museum. It seems that now that wouldn't happen, but actually things are happening as we speak. There is a trader who has been living in our community waiting for the right moment to acquire a very important medicine bundle that has to do with our sacred tobacco society. The young woman that is caring for it is someone who has been in and out of work. She has had a lot of family losses because she's a woman who's about forty and that is when you start losing your parents. He's just like a vulture waiting for her to have too many crises in her life and be [forced] to sell this medicine bundle for three or four thousand dollars.

Museums have an assumption that objects are not living, that they're just so much inanimate matter, but objects are a vital part of our culture. They have a nature to them and they have a spirit to them. Let's say you have a medicine bundle that has rocks in it. To one person they're simply rocks. They're so much matter. They're so much mineral, and they could be stepped on or they could be thrown across the river with no sentiment involved. But for us these rocks have a vital character. And it's not just a rock that is separated or alienated from the people; it is a rock that we know that we have been familiar with, that we understand and interact with and in some respects even have dialogue with.

Museumologists will say unless you have humidity control or you have security and perhaps a number of conditions, you don't have the right to repatriate sacred objects. But there are many things that are being preserved in contemporary Indian society. They're under the utmost care, under daily care of their stewards or the owners whom those objects live with. So [these objects] are perfectly preserved and cared for and have survived for centuries or certainly lifetimes in wonderful repair, and if they need repair, we have the artists who probably made them in the first place. We don't have certified museums and we don't have lots of money, but we care deeply for these objects. Why would we want to repatriate them if we wanted to destroy them?

The ones who wish to repatriate wish also to involve these objects in ceremonies. It requires a very special understanding of the place held by the object in community functions. There are some ceremonies that

cannot happen unless certain medicine bundles are present and their power and their personage is a part of the community that undertakes the ceremony. Now I'm not a member of [those societies], but I understand that you don't have the ceremony unless that bundle is also present among the persons there, and it's thought of as a person, as a life. Now if the bundle is gone, then the function of that society is broken and the value that society brought, the relationships that it made among the people, the songs, the stories, the history, the cohesiveness of that group of people, the family nature of that society is broken, and that is a human tragedy.

A lot of stuff was swindled, and we've been so impoverished that in order to actually put food on our table my grandpa sold baby cradles that were in our family for absolutely years just in order to feed us. My father was a little boy at the time. And we know now that [those cradles were] sold to the Denver Art Museum, which doesn't understand that we don't have a baby cradle anymore and that my kid didn't get to be in the same baby cradle as all the rest of the babies in our family. They don't understand that. They don't understand my feelings as a mother not to see him beautifully put in that baby cradle. They look at the cradle as a piece of art, something that should be observed for its aesthetic beauty, its design qualities. For me, it's all those things, but it is also my connection to the fact that my father was in that baby cradle and I would also like to have had my son in that cradle.³²

3

Sacred Places and Sacred Landscapes

It is difficult to verbalize in another language, for another culture, exactly what makes a place sacred, but I'll do what I can. There are spirits that dwell in certain places that may be beneficial to a fast and helpful in other ways to the individual and to The People when one fasts and prays there. Other things that make a place sacred are what our grandfathers and their grandfathers before us have put there, or how the Great Spirit has shaped the rocks, or the ancientness of the grandfather trees, or the power of the plants. Our brothers, the animals know these places and come to these places.

—HAWK LITTLE JOHN, Cherokee

When we hear the voice of our ancestors speak of the struggle of Native Americans to retain their homeland, clearly we understand that it was not only a struggle for land, but a religious battle to retain its sacred character.

—GARY NILES KIMBLE, Gros Ventre

For traditional native peoples, the landscape includes not only the physical world of rocks, trees, mountains, and plains but also the spirit world. Indigenous Native American worship depends on a detailed and particular sense of place that goes back in language and in stories for centuries, whereas Protestant Christianity has been evangelical, transportable, Bible-based, and not rooted to a particular landscape. Europeans abandoned their cemeteries and cathedrals as they set sail for America. They crossed the water and then crossed the continent and reconstructed their religious communities by building new churches. In contrast, Native Americans felt obligated to protect and defend the graves of their ancestors and the sacred locations where the Great Spirit resides and communicates with them—locations such as Mount Graham in Arizona, Bear Butte and Harney Peak in South Dakota, and Big Sheep Mountain in Colorado. Centuries spent living in the Great Basin or on the Great Plains brought about a deep love and understanding of the landscape, and Indians believed themselves inseparable from the land and sky. They found the Great Creator, and he spoke to them in