Are Museums the Most Trusted Entities in the United States? Exploring the Concepts of

Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion in Museums and Special Libraries

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Abstract

Museums, while proclaiming themselves to be bastions of neutrality, are often rife with anti-Blackness, racist, and anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric. Much of this rhetoric is based on negative stereotypes, systemic racism and sexism, and an underlying ableism. Efforts to diversify are largely lip service, and many best-case scenarios are usually a mere band-aid. This phenomenon is historically well-documented and can be traced back to colonial practices that were meant to justify the brutalization of, and theft from, those deemed culturally different from white Europeans.

From the Doctrine of Discovery to Manifest Destiny, This paper examines the reasons behind this phenomenon and attempts to generate solutions for this concerning trend. Critical race theory and attempts to further it are an important additional step in ensuring that our museum collections and special libraries alike are more equitable, inclusive, and diverse.

White supremacy, a desire to remain "neutral" in the face of oppression, and other such issues compound the efforts made over time, and many philanthropic attempts at leveling the playing field fall short of making any lasting change. In other circumstances, mere lip service is paid to these concerns. For conditions of change to be met, society must learn to bravely discuss and challenge the status quo and celebrate BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ voices within their communities. Marginalized communities must be uplifted and loved for their unique attributes— not merely feared or ignored. Further, artifacts and cultural artworks taken from their native people must be returned. As painful as it may seem to the white narrative, these are the rightful items of the people requesting their presence in their original location. Change happens when

individuals in power take responsibility for their past actions, have a concrete plan in place to involve queer voices and voices of color, and admit that the power dynamic does not work for everyone. The concession that society would benefit from these changes by white males in particular would go a long way to mend severed relations between racial and LGBTQIA+ communities. Much like issues of accessibility, when one person benefits, society as a whole benefits as well, which is why Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) has come to be more often referred to as Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI). It could be argued that barriers to entry for people of color and the LGBTQIA+ community could also be considered accessibility issues. While these issues do not always relate to a disability on the part of the attendees, they represent a barrier to entry that acts as a hamper to cultural enrichment and the discovery of self-identity. No one benefits from behavior. While the white community may think that they are enriching themselves, this could not be further from the truth. Nobody wins when one group of humans is unfairly prioritized over another.

Furthermore, critical race theory (CRT) is essential to understanding the barriers that people of color face, and tangentially this will help those in positions of power to grasp that these issues affect those in the queer and differently-abled communities as well. These issues have marked amounts of overlap, and thus the reason why they are grouped in acronyms like diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) and displayed together.

Introduction

Museums historically have been created and maintained for the benefit of heterosexual white individuals, particularly white men. Meanwhile, white women and their children benefit

most from museum visits. While many strides have been made to level the playing field for people of color in museum studies, both for the general public and museum employees, the number of BIPOC individuals of any gender who retain a job in museum studies remains low. Often, BIPOC individuals largely cannot afford to attend museums, and when they can view museum curations, they do not see themselves in the museum offerings.

Eyewitness accounts of microaggressions, stereotypes, and other identity-based challenges during museum interaction paint a grim picture of the museum attendance of people of color and LGBTQIA+ persons. The intersection of these two groups complicates matters further. The lack of interest on the part of the white majority is disturbing, particularly when there is overlap between these categories. Transphobia, racism, anti-Blackness, and a general sense of ignorance toward those who are remotely different from the "norm" are just a few of a laundry list of concerning issues.

Historically, museums have disproportionately represented white individuals (particularly males) and their cultural values. Wexler (2007) states that between 2000 and 2004, the Museum of Modern Art's solo exhibitions were 80% white males, 30% white females, 7% females of color, and 13% males of color. At the Guggenheim, 78% were white males, 11% were white females, 0% were females of color, and 11% were males of color. At the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 90% of its solo exhibitions belonged to white males, 8.5% to white females, and 1.5% to artists of color. Ultimately, this is a damning portrayal of a presumably diverse population in New York City. If these statistics are sound, it stands to reason that rural and less urban areas that lack diversity represent their BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ populations even less. This is frequently an excuse for not maintaining diversity in sparsely populated areas. The rallying cry of, "But we just don't have those types of people in our community," further outlines the strange mental

gymnastics that museum and library management participate in to justify maintaining the same poor behavior.

The BIPOC population can scarcely find their culture(s) accurately represented in museum environments, which is understandably discouraging and socially damaging. As an LGBTQIA+ white person, I would be remiss to attend a museum environment where I did not feel at least tangentially represented. It is therefore understandable and even expected that people of color and members of the LGBTQIA+ community purposely avoid museum environments.

Cities like Los Angeles, New York City, Chicago, Atlanta, and others should be leading the charge in inclusiveness, and the fact that these figures have remained unchanged for years is horrific. London and other large international cities are sadly not much better at including those who do not fit into the heteronormative white category and have failed to return artifacts and cultural artwork that rightfully belongs to the people of its origin. Fernando (2020) references a statement by a British protestor during the worldwide George Floyd protests of that year: "If you dislike looting, you'll hate the British Museum!"

Issues in BIPOC Museum Curation and Attendance

The first issue plaguing the average museum regards the percentage of people of color working in managerial positions. Dervishi (2023) provides statistics stating that as of 2022, 80% of administrators and conservators were white. This is despite recent strides to hire and retain more people of color from diverse backgrounds. Creating an equitable environment for diverse individuals involves more than money being tossed at an issue as a band-aid, states Dervishi

(2023). Strategic plans, an overhaul of museum policies, and feedback from the community at large would do much to improve these tenuous situations, Dervishi (2023) goes on to state.

"80 percent of some key roles — such as director roles and those in conservation — are held by white people and the percentage of Black and Indigenous staff hasn't changed over the past eight years", says Dervishi (2023). This statistic of roughly 80 percent whiteness is dismayingly repeated across multiple papers. It would seem that museums and their ilk only benefit straight cis white men and their wives and children, which creates a power imbalance that rattles the very fabric of society.

Kohl and Halter (2021) discuss the concept of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the need to bring this type of discussion into the museum environment. "Museums as an institution are complicit in perpetuating views that are unjust by assembling and propagating dominant narratives", state Kohl and Halter (2021). By refusing to draw attention to these subjects of white supremacy and continuing to perpetuate the status quo, museums effectively cancel out and mute diverse voices, and continue to uplift those that are primarily white and male.

It is all too easy for white museum curators to gloss over these issues and bury their heads in the sand, ignoring such issues entirely in the name of supposed "neutrality" and "peaceful dialogue". However, it remains clear that this can often be a politically correct excuse for disengaging in constructive conversation. Kohl and Halter (2021) continue by saying: "Museums at their best are places that can offer a space for critical reflection and conversation. However, at their worst, museums are a reminder of the power and privilege they choose to perpetuate." According to Ng et. al. (2017), "Diversity and inclusion work can be shallow and tokenizing – with the potential to re-inscribe and perpetuate white supremacy and oppression, even if the intention is to challenge it."

Without mindful curation, museums carelessly feed into the white male gaze over and over, thus enriching white supremacy and muffling diverse voices. It is easy to maintain the status quo and pay lip service to diversity by attempting more BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ hires. However, if these groups do not see themselves represented within the museum regularly, employment of these individuals is not sustainable. Given this information, it is easy to understand why the museum landscape has thus far failed to make lasting changes. Often, even if attempts at changes are made, the workload work given to employees of color in managerial positions is physically impossible. These individuals are then expected to make these organization-level changes entirely solo.

Heaton (2014) reports that Black and African Americans make up 13% of the national population but account for only 3% of museum attendees. Much of this can be attributed to income inequality and lack of free time during museum hours, although lack of representation and frequent microaggressions also play a role. When discussing the typical museum-going persona, Heaton (2014) states that the research shows this "typical persona" to be a "horse-owning, foreign vacation-taking, daily fine diner. She's an outdoor activity enjoyer—a broadband-connected connoisseur of the arts." This assessment does not describe the average BIPOC or LGBTQIA+ attendee, who is often in much more dire straights, both financially and culturally.

It is also very telling that despite museums being primarily representative of white men, white women and their children are the primary attendees and managerial employees of these environments. Critical Race Theory (CRT) seeks to illuminate and draw attention to the fact that, not only were people of color historically barred from museum environments, but that despite legal action to end this manner of oppression, a social and cultural form of segregation still exists

(Moore, 2021). Fernando (2020) echoes the sentiment that museums see themselves as neutral and apolitical. After the George Floyd protests in 2020, there were many calls to overhaul the museum experience. Whether or not these changes have been made remains to be seen, however, based on the other information referenced so far, it doesn't seem that much lasting change has been made. Many members of museum management worldwide are content to bask in the status quo, unbothered by the plight of others different from them.

Attempts to address racism in the museum environment can often be met with (unfortunately anticipated) pushback. In the Medium article by Michelle Jordan Antonisse (2017), Antonisse states that themes of blackness can strike the wrong tone with white viewers, creating an environment of criticism and racism even within an otherwise progressive exhibit. For example, a museum display of paintings depicting people of color conducting stereotypically "white" activities (golfing, tennis, sailing, and other leisure activities known to be popular at country clubs) was met with inappropriate commentary. Quotes Antonisse (2017): "In one such conversation during a professional development workshop, a teacher stated that the figures looked like 'new money' and seemed uncomfortable in a bourgeois space. Her comment suggested the figures were ostentatiously over-performing their economic status, and without family ties to wealth."

Furthermore, white students and teachers can often perpetuate racism and white supremacy even in an environment designed to raise black voices. Heller (2017) describes a scenario where white students are asked to assess mannequins with patterned skin, automatically assumed to be black. "They look like thugs," one student is reported to have said. Other students described the mannequins as potential drug dealers. A white museum facilitator in Heller's (2017) article is reported to have stated that because she is supposed to be a neutral educator, she

cannot, in good conscience, critically address these comments. This, to me, seems like a cop-out to avoid difficult discourse. Much like the awkwardness that a parental figure feels for sharing the "sex talk" with their children, I suspect that white curators and museum managers are reticent to discuss a subject that makes them supremely uncomfortable.

To say that these sorts of microaggressions are insulting and tiring for students of color is an understatement, so it is no wonder that they would opt to stay out of environments of this type. By refusing to acknowledge critical race theory (CRT) and confront white students on their bias, we perpetuate the status quo ever further, in the name of appearing "neutral". It is not mentioned during this portion of the paper whether white students are introduced to students of color and forced to confront actual students who are different from them, but the concept is sound nonetheless. It stands to reason that if white students were asked to examine their actions critically and to adjust their behavior for the sake of students of color they might begin to understand the struggles that their peers face. However, much to their detriment, they are rarely asked to try, and both parties suffer in predictable ways.

Alger et. al. (2024) describe a podcast in which the participants discuss the concept of "Museum Hue", aka the stereotypical color of museum curators and other employees. Other topics include incarceration, an important aspect of museum attendance, as many incarcerated individuals do not have access to reading materials, let alone curated museum experiences (Austin, 2023). This further perpetuates the gap between white male museum experiences and the experiences of people of color. While people of color make up about 30 percent of the United States population, they account for 60 percent of those imprisoned (Southern Coalition for Social Justice, 2024). If, amongst people of color, such a large proportion of society is incarcerated, on

Medicaid, et. cetera, how are they meant to stand up against able-bodied white cis men and women?

Caragher and Bryant (2023) discuss the hiring and retention practices within the library profession. As museums are sometimes considered special libraries, this discussion is relevant and essential to furthering diversity in both realms. They report that lower-paid positions that do not require the MLIS have more BIPOC employees than positions that require the MLIS. Additionally, their survey questions the presence of racism in the workplace, and whether it is considered appropriate to speak up about said racism in libraries. Typically, this behavior is frowned upon as trouble-making, leading many employees, particularly those of color, to remain silent or to move on to more inclusive environments. This dismissal also overlaps with the hiring practices of rural libraries and small museum environments; there is always a small library system to cite that they simply "could not find anyone" because their small township lacks diversity. While the libraries studied were public and academic libraries only, it is safe to assume that this sort of rhetoric bleeds over into the museum environment. The overall library environment as an international institution is another place where much lip service is paid to diversity and inclusion, but little change has been made until recently. Caragher and Bryant (2023) also emphasize that there are reports of many executive meetings in public and academic libraries where diversity and inclusion are suggested as a boon to the library and are met with hesitation, silence, or excuses.

They go on to state that within affirmative action laws, there is more of a focus on highlighting differences rather than addressing oppression. Since, as of 2024, many affirmation action laws have been dismantled, it is frustrating to think that even this previous stopgap is no

longer available. Given the information stated by Heller (2017), it is likely that speaking up on these issues is not deemed appropriate.

Motto (2016) describes a workplace environment for several women of color that is riddled with hostility and microaggressions. Talk of volunteers of color being "too ghetto" to work in certain areas of the museum seems extremely counterproductive to a diverse and inclusive workplace environment, let alone an educational one. These same young adults are described later in the document as "louder" and "disinterested". One can only assume that any potential disinterest stems from a lack of representation in the first place and the sensory stress of microaggressions in the second place. Being immersed in an environment of continual ignorance is exhausting, and eventually, unbearable. It is no wonder that many choose this route over remaining in the fight for equity.

Critical Race Theory also extends to times of social protest. Unfortunately, the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic did not have the jarring or lasting effect on race issues that it should have. While many organizations were quick to condemn the actions that led to George Floyd's death and expressed support for the subsequent protests that followed, little meaningful action was taken. "Sadly, but unsurprisingly, statements we examined addressed major social issues on a surface level. Of the more than 1000 institutions accredited by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) 47% made no statement on social media or their website regarding George Floyd's murder and the public outcry of racism that the murder highlighted. This sends a strong message of silent indifference or, at best, lack of knowledge or skill in how to address this important societal crisis," says Chevalier, et. al. (2023). This "silent indifference" remains a theme throughout these many studies. Solano (2022) takes it a step further, suggesting that this indifference is created on purpose. "Unfortunately, the United States has historically been

dominated by cis, white, straight, able-bodied men in positions of power and the collections and artists showcased in art museums reflect the ideologies of this group," states Solano.

Bonebrake (2021) outlines the motivations for BIPOC families in visiting and attending museum exhibitions and discusses the tension between BIPOC society and what museums seem to think of the BIPOC community, based on the disconnect between the two. The cost of admission is listed as one of the many barriers to entry. On a personal level, I have experienced many eyewitness accounts of local people of color never having attended a museum in their area due to their inability to afford to pay entry fees. This amounts to the fact that the average museum is essentially displaying artwork and other assets and artifacts belonging to people of color that they are then barred from seeing.

Between museum employees of color facing constant microaggressions from upper management, and museum attendees of color being misrepresented in the work on display, this paints a frustrating and even traumatic picture of what the museum experience is like for BIPOC members of our society. Additionally, if the work in question has been stolen or misappropriated historically, and was not returned to the country of origin, this siphons wealth from the countries that would otherwise have their cultural work on display in its original homeland. Palmer (2023) states that even well-known items such as the Rosetta Stone, which originates in Africa, remain firmly anchored in the British Museum in London. Historic levels of theft based on a manufactured social construct (racism) have gone on for hundreds of years. Large corporate entities like Hobby Lobby have seen fit to loot stolen (PBS, 2021) clay tablets and other artifacts of similar value, and have only returned them due to pursuit of legal action. Then, the primarily-white museum community selfishly clings to items that do not belong to them and shrugs their collective shoulders. The purchase and sale of these items are very lucrative, and the corporate

overtones of this behavior only accentuate that fact. If every country had its prized creations and antiquities returned, what a rich and lovely world to travel in! Going to India or Turkey would take on a whole new meaning, in addition to other notable countries worldwide that are currently undervalued due to their varying levels of colonial occupation.

Furthermore, the cost of these facilities is frequently a barrier to entry. While there are services available such as the Museums for All (n.d.) program, this is, once again, the smallest of bandaids on a huge bullet wound that is hemorrhaging opportunities that would normally be taken for granted by the cis-white population. According to Medicaid's (2020) website data, 61 percent of Medicaid recipients are children of color.

While I am sure that the Museums for All program does indeed benefit this segment of the population, there are so many other barriers to entry that this seems the least of one's worries. Transportation, lack of assistive tools to travel with, and other complications are forever lurking in the minds of the black, disabled, indigenous, and queer. The cis white community is essentially playing the world's largest game of keep-away, all while pretending to be neutral. It is no wonder that people of color greet this issue with weariness, frustration, and an overall lack of joy for the museum experience. What white women experience as a perpetual carnival of delights must seem like torture to the average black woman and by extension, her children. This can be illustrated by Bonebrake (2021) describing patrons of color as having said, "This is what white families do on a Sunday." What other value is there to people of color attending a museum setting, other than to feel a sense of belonging and importance that whites have stripped away? The pain of seeing stolen artifact after stolen artifact must surely outweigh the social gain from visiting these institutions, especially when paired with anti-Black and racist rhetoric on the part of white onlookers.

The first colonies in what is now the United States and elsewhere brought waves of social constructs that divided social class and wealth by race, and white Europeans quickly applied this new "law" to the BIPOC communities at every new place they "discovered".

"The 'doctrine of discovery' is a set of papal bulls issued in the 1400s, in which the then-pope gave official Catholic blessing to Portuguese and Spanish monarchs wishing to claim land they'd 'discovered,' as well as all of that land's resources and people." writes Malchick, (2024). Palmer (2023) outlines how the entire city of Benin was looted and raided by the British and all but destroyed. The only remaining items from this civilization are located in the British Museum, and if they were returned to Benin City, which has since been rebuilt without any of the antiquities that have been aforementioned, tourism and local pride of this area would surely flourish.

Later, in the United States, Manifest Destiny, largely enacted by James Polk, the 11th President of the United States, posited that white Americans were divinely ordained to settle the entire continent of North America (Khan Academy, n.d.), and made several key actions to secure land from Indigenous populations of the Americas, including Canada via obtaining what was once known as the Oregon Territory (Pinheiro, 2016). The entire history of the United States is riddled with the oppression of BIPOC individuals, and to date, the United States has yet to make any sort of reparations for these atrocities. Impossibly large figures of wealth and income have been lost by people of color to the white population over the years. (NAACP, 2019). There is an utter lack of acknowledgment of this fact in many American institutions and only a mere passing mention in others. I was lucky to have interviewed Marissa Ball of the Library of Congress recently, who admitted that she and her team, thankfully, did not sugarcoat or gloss over difficult parts of history and that they were open and honest about all parts of American history for the

sake of their diverse users (Ball, 2024).

Canada itself is not immune to the effects of racial prejudice. While some radical small groups and institutions have participated in leveling the playing field, larger Canadian organizations have partly or fully failed to do so.

"Colonial museums, meaning those museums who have not diversified their staffing, or diversified their permanent gallery storytelling, or forged meaningful and longstanding relationships and partnerships with racialized communities, or continue to work from collections based on colonial theft, have much to learn from smaller racialized-led institutions to generate more inclusive representations of Canada. This is because racialized people have very different perspectives on what matters, and to whom it matters. Therefore, rather than seeking to educate those excluded on why they should love the museums from which they have been excluded, we need to centre the stories they tell, and how, and to whom, they tell these stories. Only through this process can we transform the colonial foundations upon which museums were built and continue to reside," (Sandhra, 2022).

In terms of American institutions that have provided a positive experience for white and BIPOC users alike, the Denver Art Museum (n.d.) has developed a Central Creative Zone with an Artist-in-Residence space, where Indigenous art and craft-making practices are taught. The Denver Art Museum has the most comprehensive collection of Indigenous artworks in the region and has an Indigenous Advisory Committee that helps to collect, preserve, and source these items. This is something that other museums would do well to replicate, and it seems mind-blowing that so few museums and libraries operate this way.

Denver Art Museum (n.d.) reports on its web page regarding the Indigenous art collection: "Artworks from this gallery are a part of the Denver Art Museum's Indigenous Arts

of North America collection. The DAM was one of the first art museums in the nation to collect Indigenous Arts from North America. As early as 1925, the DAM recognized and valued the fine aesthetic qualities of Native arts, when many other institutions only valued them as anthropological material. Today, the collection consists of over 18,000 objects by artists from over 250 Indigenous nations."

The Denver Art Museum (n.d.) page also further discusses the link between colonialism and its museum, and describes its attempts to make amends:

"The Denver Art Museum is located on the homeland of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Ute people, along with many people from other Indigenous nations that call this place home. Museums have benefited from the displacement of Indigenous people and the removal and historical misrepresentation of their arts, often resulting in deep harm to originating communities," and goes on to describe how the Denver Art Museum and the local Indigenous population are intimately linked, for better or worse. If only every museum in the nation– and even the world – could stop and take notes from an establishment such as the Denver Art Museum and face the issues of racism and colonialization head-on. In particular, the British Museum could be more actively involved in these types of opportunities, as I have thus far not heard of any concessions of this type on their part. Despite the British Museum being free and open to the public, this does not mean much in the grand scheme if the items in question are not relinquished to the countries of origin. The Denver Art Museum acknowledges that the items belong to the Indigenous peoples of the Americas and does its best to share and promote this information for all populations, including BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ individuals. Therefore, is this as difficult a task as it is made out to be?

Issues in LGBTQIA Museum Curation and Attendance

In addition to this troubling concept of implicit bias and racism amongst museum curators and collections, there is also an increasing need to recognize members of the queer community in museum curation. Often, LGBTQIA+ erasure can be just as concerning as the erasure of BIPOC voices, particularly as these ideals intersect. Queer voices of color have little chance of being heard under the circumstances outlined thus far, and it is no wonder that the stereotype of the affluent white woman as the average museum attendee exists. To produce equitable museum curation, Bryant (2023) suggests that these objects must be understood as everchanging.

"Collecting queer means understanding the museum as fluid; as not just capable of change, but constantly susceptible to and inviting of it. To view the museum as otherwise—as concrete, stable, and righteous places protecting objects from society in posterity—ignores how people have used and needed objects since time immemorial." (Bryant, 2023). To present items from the BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities without the context of the everyday lives of these groups ultimately divorces reality from museum curation and creates an environment in which the cishet and white reappropriate items for their own, and silence the marginalized in the process.

There is also a narrative in place regarding terminology for the LGBTQIA+ community, namely the use of the word "queer" to describe the LGBTQIA+ umbrella succinctly. Reid and Sandell (n.d.) state that continually tacking on additional letters to the community's acronym ultimately results in what is referred to as "alphabet soup", and that the use of "queer" as a catch-all phrase is perfectly acceptable, at least in their view. As a queer person, I am cautious to only

use this phrase regarding myself or other people who have labeled themselves as queer and do not tend to credit it toward others who have not claimed themselves as such.

Dirk (2018) describes the museum-visiting process as hostile to LGBTQIA+ people. Issues of environmental accessibility, such as making gender-neutral bathrooms inaccessible, or focusing on the comfort of cis gay and lesbian individuals and no other members of the larger queer community are outlined in Dirk's (2018) thesis. A person interviewed in Dirk's study echoes the experiences and struggles of BIPOC museum employees:

"I think in all my experiences policy is the lag. The things that I have seen work have been because of people, and often they are people with individual commitments who are willing to support projects or looking for ways to bring in their own ideas of inclusion into their labors. Whether that's – I guess despite the fact that that's not a formal mandate to do so," quotes Dirk.

This pattern of neglect and willful ignorance on the part of museum management in terms of fostering diversity is a damning portrayal of museum studies, and it seems like the museum system, in the United States and elsewhere, would do well to not only re-brand but also reform their lazy and assumptive views on their self-worth as an entity. An institution is not a boon to society simply because upper management dictates it as such, and it is clear that the self-perception of museum studies misaligns with the ultimate reality of the situation. How can we hope to maintain a perception of trust and learning in museums, libraries, and other cultural institutions if any entire subsection of society is willfully missing?

Suggestions for Improvement

These issues could be addressed partly with more funding, although it should not be considered the primary catalyst for change in special library and museum environments. Further, the construction and maintenance of BIPOC-specific and LGBTQIA+-themed museum environments are vital, and access to these so-called environments must be free or low-cost, at worst offered on a sliding scale. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) or Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI) training must include a zero-tolerance policy for those unwilling to discuss difficult issues as educators. Excuses of neutrality and impartiality should not be accepted as valid reasons to skirt these subjects.

To combat the white male gaze, museum environments must accentuate and celebrate BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and female (particularly black) voices. Further, these exhibitions must reflect the values of these groups in a non-discriminatory way, and encourage marginalized communities to take pride in their identity and culture. These environments should no longer pay lip service or offer band-aids constructed of philanthropic donations. Instead, interactive environments in which those of color and white cishet populations cooperate open-mindedly and have proper discourse with one another are vital.

Ultimately, BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ faculty and staff need to be involved in final museum decision-making, regardless of managerial status, as they already work tirelessly to change the status quo as a general rule. Ignoring this fact is arguably against the principles of user experience, as the BIPOC queer populations would theoretically use museums and libraries more if they felt welcome and cherished in these spaces. Receiving lip service from management and lazy leadership on their part will no longer suffice. Without a serious discussion with one's

community, progress can not be expected any time soon. The 80 percent of white people need to concede to the 60 percent of black people who could sorely use this concession without fear of missing out on some imagined sense of privilege.

Much as the Denver Art Museum collects and shares Indigenous artworks with the public, they are coming close to redistributing the items of interest without disbanding the concept of the entire museum. This seems a better compromise than most, and it is clear that their organization actively works to improve relations with Indigenous people. Indigenous people and people of color can enjoy the museum in equal measure with white individuals and their resident artists bring together artists from all walks of life, which is sure to start a positive discord between races, particularly as it pertains to praising the Indigenous population. This is a vital and much-needed step towards any museum becoming an equitable place for everyone and should be replicated wherever possible.

Perhaps every museum in the world will one day conform to this much-desired behavior, and healing can finally begin for the museum and the special library communities. The true richness of any society's culture is not in its monetary value but in its anthropological, cultural, and spiritual aspects. One cannot seek to know history and truly understand the plight of others in humanity without understanding this.

Conclusion

While efforts have ostensibly been made to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) or diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) in museum studies, lasting change has yet to be achieved. To improve diversity in museums, we must first provide a) enriching

experiences that represent the BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ populations that have been historically ignored, b) extensive plans for the hiring and retention of queer individuals and people of color that are then followed through on aggressively, and c) Allow for loud and emphatic discourse on these topics as well as the explicit discouragement of ignorance and racism during the process. This involves an active and consistent effort to involve and raise diverse voices and provide enriching museum experiences that represent and celebrate diversity.

With mindfulness and effort, the landscape of museum studies can change for the better. White supremacy must be stamped out, BIPOC voices must be uplifted, and stereotypical museum views of "neutrality" must be challenged loudly and repeatedly until these issues are addressed in libraries, museums, and other cultural institutions. Change cannot be expected or maintained until those maintaining the status quo become brave enough to question it. No societal change is without cost, and those in power must be willing to pay the price for a healthy and equitable society. Museums are a vital aspect of this sweeping potential for change. There is no greater feeling than the sense of belonging, and evening the inequities that fuel this topic would surely foster belonging in all. Reparations are about more than lost income, though this is a large part of the equation, as racism was developed as a social construct by white Europeans to steal and re-distribute property, artifacts, and assets, and still goes on today. It is not up for debate whether these things were done, but rather, it should be more thoroughly discussed as to what we as a society plan to do about it. The answer should not be silence or awkwardly grumbled excuses. Our goal and end game should be to embrace all around us for their differences and provide an equitable means to speak of one's existence. All should be welcome at the table of life, and the path to brotherhood is paved with mindfulness, dedication, and care for others locally and abroad.

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