

# Taking the Skeletons Out of The Closet:

## Contested Authority and Human Remains Displays in the Anthropology Museum

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## I. Acknowledgements

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## II. Introduction

### a. Abstract

Museum exhibits, as showcases of what is deemed worth seeing at a period in time, reflect societal biases, political influences, and authority-making processes. The museum's ability to confer social authority is especially important in the communication of scientific meaning through displays of human remains. Exhibits of human remains in anthropological collections have posed numerous contentious issues in representation, with debates centering around who can claim ownership of the body on public display, and the narrative underlying those bodies. Claimants in this debate include descendants of displayed individuals; scientists who assert their right to generate knowledge on behalf of humanity by studying and displaying these bodies; museums who defend their position as stewards of cultural heritage; landowners or nation-states in which these bodies were found; and lawmakers that preside over these bodies, who hold the authority to broker compromise between the other claimants. Through personal interviews with a variety of claimants, this thesis traces anthropological displays of the human body at the Field Museum, starting from the World's Fair of 1893 to repatriations and paleoanthropological exhibits of the current day. This examination aims to ground the global debate in one specific site of contestation. Towards that aim, this thesis culturally contextualizes human remains displays, examines tensions between public spectacle and scientific communication, and discusses how authority is expressed through the medium of the body. These themes reflect how human identities, both social and scientific, are shaped by the bodies on display at the anthropology museum.

### b. Methods

Examining the political, legal, ethical, and cultural struggles in the history of human remains<sup>1</sup> display reveals an ongoing debate over who holds the authority to define the narratives of human origins. This thesis examines the history of human remains display with an extensive focus on the Field Museum, narrated through eight interviews with stakeholders in the ongoing debates

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis frequently refers to **human remains**, meaning the bodies of deceased individuals, regardless of the state of decomposition of those bodies. **See the Glossary for a detailed discussion of terminology used to refer to human remains in this paper, as well as other definitions.**

surrounding the presentation of remains in anthropology. These interviews, situated in the history of the Field Museum, serve not as a singular case study, but as a recurrent point of reference tethering the larger story of human remains display to a specific locus.

Before conducting these interviews, an outline of the study along with a list of proposed interview questions (IRB19-1623) was sent to the University of Chicago Social and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board, and was approved on October 30, 2019. After a literature review, I selected interview subjects involved with the Field Museum, with the intent of seeking out diverging viewpoints surrounding repatriation, paleoartistic displays, exhibition, curation, and bioanthropological research. Interview subjects were contacted via email, to arrange an in-person interview, video conference, or phone interview, according to their preference. They were sent interview questions, selected from the IRB-approved list and tailored to each participant prior to the conversation, so that they could prepare their responses if they felt the need.<sup>2</sup> Interviewees were invited to elaborate on their roles and responsibilities at the Field Museum, and their interactions with displays of human remains. They were also asked more philosophical questions, such as *From your perspective, who owns a dead body?*; *At what point should a hominin, or early human primate ancestor, be considered human?*; and *Do you think that the field of archaeology is making progress in displaying the human body?*

During interviews, these questions were not used as rigid prompts, but rather, were treated as jumping-off points to start productive conversations. Each interview was originally intended to last only half an hour, but often continued for over an hour. The conversations were recorded with the QuickTime video and audio recorder, and either transcribed by hand with the assistance of the google docs voice recorder, or using the application ExpressScribe, for future reference.

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<sup>2</sup> See sample interview questions in the **Appendix**

Alternatively, some experts declined an in-person interview, preferring instead to correspond over email with written responses to the interview questions I had sent beforehand.

Eight perspectives are featured in interviews with the following professionals: Dr. Helen Robbins, current Repatriation Director at the Field Museum; Janet Hong, a Project Manager for several exhibitions featuring human remains at the Field; Dr. Zeray Alemseged, the paleoanthropologist who discovered an *A. afarensis* individual, which is presented as a reconstruction at the Field; Dr. Robert Martin, former curator and biological anthropologist; Jodi Simkin, the Director of Cultural Affairs and Heritage at the Klahoose First Nation, an indigenous<sup>3</sup> group seeking to internationally repatriate the remains of their ancestors from museums like the Field; Dr. Samuel Redman, a historian of anthropology who previously worked on repatriation at the Field Museum; and Élisabeth Daynès and John Gurche, paleoartists whose work is featured at the Field Museum.

Additionally, I intended to include the perspective of an indigenous person who had successfully sought repatriation at the Field Museum. Unfortunately, due to the time constraints of this project and the sensitivity of such an inquiry, I was unable to contact anyone willing to be interviewed for this project from that perspective. The perspectives of those whose families have been immediately impacted by repatriation debates are necessary and are potential avenues for expanding this thesis, because it is imperative to improve on previous historical narratives which failed to adequately integrate indigenous voices. I tried to correct for this absence by integrating

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<sup>3</sup> The term **indigenous** is a complex one, and the concept of indigeneity itself has been the topic of much study.<sup>3</sup> The term gained legal significance in the late twentieth century, and manners of defining the “indigenous person” in reference to their “other” are generally in the context of a colonial history.<sup>3</sup> Here, I will define indigenous peoples as ethnic groups who are the original or earliest-known inhabitants of a certain region, as opposed to groups who have colonized, settled, or come to occupy that region more recently. **For more discussion of how the concept of indigeneity is treated throughout this thesis, please refer to “Indigeneity” in the glossary.**

published perspectives of repatriation activists in different historical eras and in relation to different institutions.

In addition to interviews, this paper also integrates perspectives from historic and modern newspapers, congressional testimony, legal documents, sociological commentators, and metanarratives produced by the Field Museum itself, to further examine these debates. Not all sources referred to throughout the paper are directly related to the Field Museum, but rather, are intended to contextualize and situate the Field within the global history of human remains display, or to present narratives and perspectives surrounding debates that affect the Field Museum. During this process, I visited the archives at the Field Museum, hoping to gain access to documents relevant to exhibits of human remains that were not available online, but the archivist referred me to several collections of clippings which were not inventoried, and he estimated that it would take “several years” of archival research to organize, glean information and interpret these documents. I determined that this was not feasible, for the time being. This obstacle illustrates that the research presented here is far from exhaustive; there is much more to investigate surrounding the history of human remains at museums such as the Field. Further, I was curious about the Field Columbian Exhibition of 1893. However, I was informed that the archives currently do not house related documents because some are located in other institutions, while some did not survive the move from the archive’s previous location at the Palace of Fine Arts on the Midway in 1920, to the current location in Grant Park. I relied on internet archives such as ProQuest, the Chicago Tribune archives, and the Biodiversity Heritage Library. Despite these limitations, focusing on the Field Museum as a site of controversy and discourse allowed for an in-depth investigation of the social and historical movements which continue to impact displays of human remains, and anthropology as a field.

### **c. Overview:** The Field Museum as a Reference Point in Framing Ethical Debates

The history of displaying human remains is long, multifaceted, and often contentious, particularly in the realm of anthropological study. While many groups, from the Chinchorro people of South America to Medieval Christians, displayed the bodies of their dead as religious iconography, this practice gained momentum in the Western scientific context of the late 1800s and has continued as an intellectual, cultural, and social pursuit into the modern day.<sup>4</sup> In Europe, and later North America, collectors ranging from professionals to amateurs began amassing human remains from all corners of the world.<sup>5</sup> Increasingly, they organized them in museums, particularly natural history museums.<sup>6</sup> The display of the human body in anthropology collections of these museums was integral to the construction and promotion of ideas about race, ancestry, and human prehistory.<sup>7</sup> Over the past two centuries, the cultural and scientific milieu surrounding the display of human remains has shifted, in response to ethical, political, cultural, and historical debates. Yet the public's desire to see human remains continues to fill exhibition halls.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout this thesis, the discussion will weave around the exhibition halls of the Field Museum. The Field Museum has played a particularly instrumental role in the integration of public education, as well as public spectacle, into museum anthropology. The Field arose out of the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, where famed anthropologists like Franz Boas, as well as showmen like P.T. Barnum, conceived of a massive anthropological spectacle, bringing bodies and human

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<sup>4</sup> Samuel Redman, "Reconsidering Body Worlds: Why Do We Still Flock to Exhibits of Dead Human Beings?" *The Conversation*, accessed October 27, 2019, <http://theconversation.com/reconsidering-body-worlds-why-do-we-still-flock-to-exhibits-of-dead-human-beings-57024>.

<sup>5</sup> Frank Howarth, "Trends and Influences on Museum Anthropology and the Study of Indigenous Peoples," ICOM, accessed January 14, 2020, <https://icom.museum/en/news/trends-and-influences-on-museum-anthropology-and-the-study-of-indigenous-peoples/>.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Redman, *Bone Rooms* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Redman, Anthropology, the Field Museum, and Human Prehistory, video conference, January 8, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Redman, "Reconsidering Body Worlds."



specimens from all over the world for public display.<sup>9</sup> Some smaller museums which also display human remains, like the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard, or the Penn Museum in Philadelphia, may have a more specific anthropological focus, yet lack the scope and public recognition that the Field Museum possesses.<sup>10</sup> And while the Smithsonian Institution in DC, the American Museum of Natural History in New York, and the British Museum in London may reach a greater number of visitors per year, these institutions were established with grander national aims.<sup>11</sup> The Field, like other large natural history museums, established its objective to spread the “lattice of... research, collections, and anthropological scholarship across space and through time to the far corners of the planet,” according to a centennial curatorial anthology reflecting on the museum’s identity and trajectory.<sup>12</sup> Yet simultaneously, it has also remained fundamentally intertwined with Chicago’s history.<sup>13</sup> Due to this position in relation to the public, Chicago, and the world at large, taking the Field Museum as a specific point of reference grounds the global issue of anthropological display of human remains in a specific time period and locality.

The Field Museum has long been a site of contestation and conversation over the narratives of history and science in displaying human remains. As demonstrated in its centennial publication, the museum has recently begun to reflect on its role in anthropological study, in response to these debates as well as in response to shifts in the role the museum plays in society.<sup>14</sup> For this reason, the Field Museum serves as an excellent location to examine the perspectives of different stakeholders in human remains display, from curators to repatriation specialists to exhibitions managers to

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<sup>9</sup> Scott, “P. T. Barnum’s ‘What the Fair Should Be,’” *Chicago’s 1893 World’s Fair* (blog), December 31, 2017, <https://worldsfairchicago1893.com/2017/12/31/p-t-barnums-what-the-fair-should-be/>.

<sup>10</sup> “Highlights of the Collection,” accessed April 10, 2020, <https://www.peabody.harvard.edu/node/473>.

<sup>11</sup> “The Most Visited Museums in the World,” accessed April 10, 2020, <http://museums.eu/highlight/details/105664>.

<sup>12</sup> Eds. Stephen E. Nash and Gary M. Feinman, *Curators, Collections, and Contexts: Anthropology at the Field Museum, 1893–2002*. Fieldiana, Publication 1525, Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 2003., 7, [https://anthrosource-onlinelibrary-wiley-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1111/j.1548-1379.2011.01116\\_5.x](https://anthrosource-onlinelibrary-wiley-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1111/j.1548-1379.2011.01116_5.x).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 7.

indigenous activists to members of the viewing public. This investigation profiles how one particular institution has reacted to developments in the broader global phenomenon of the anthropological display of human remains.

Globally, displays of human remains in public-facing anthropology have persisted, amidst challenges both from indigenous groups pursuing repatriation<sup>15</sup> of bodies to their descendants, and philosophical commentators objecting to the violation of individual consent and colonialist implications. The challenges posed by these practices have resulted in growing societal unease with these displays of archaeological human remains.<sup>16</sup> Many concerned parties, like Simkin, now believe that displaying them is unethical under any circumstances.<sup>17</sup> However, this perspective has not always been prevalent historically. The practice of human remains display has a long and variegated history among numerous cultural groups. The section *Ethics in Scientific Displays of Human Remains: Transhistoric Wrongs, or Cultural Contingencies?* aims to globally contextualize the practice of anthropological human remains display, demonstrating that there exists no single, unified story linking the bodies that have been presented on public display in museums. It centers around a discussion of how colonial ideals shaped the scientific space of the museum, and the repatriation debates that have arisen in response to this history. This section frequently diverges from the Field Museum to provide a broader framework of understanding for the ethical debates surrounding the bodies on display at our primary site of focus.

Tensions between entertainment and education have recurred throughout the history of human remains display. Outside the anthropology museum, these tensions have been evident in the public dissections in early anatomy schools, to freak shows Egyptian mummy un-wrappings, and

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<sup>15</sup> Repatriation in this context is the process of returning a body to its “owners,” in this case, returning bodies from the museum to their closest living cultural affiliations.

<sup>16</sup> Jodi Simkin, Klahoose and Repatriation, Phone Interview, January 13, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

cabinets of curiosity in the 1800s, to *Body Worlds* in the modern context. This tension carries over to the anthropology museum, as seen in the Field Museum's relationship with public spectacle, both in the aftermath of the World's Fair, and paleoartistic exhibits currently on display. In addition, a prominent project of the physical anthropology found in natural history museums of the past was to taxonomically describe and educate the public in the supposed racial hierarchies of mankind. However, this aim has since been politically and scientifically invalidated, and the educational focus of physical anthropology in the museum has shifted from delineating the "otherness" of modern races of man, to exploring the evolutionary relationships of humans in deep time through paleoart. The section *Museums and Spectacle: Science versus the "Edutainment Extravaganza"* teases apart aspects of these educational tensions, including financial incentives in museum displays, scientific racism<sup>18</sup> in anthropological exhibits, and the changing aims of lifelike hominin models.

These disputes and tensions center around the question: *who has the intellectual control of narratives promoted within the museum?* Closely affiliated is the question: *who owns the dead?* Indeed, these ambiguities have led to what has been termed a "crisis of cultural authority" between scientific institutions such as museums, indigenous groups and other stakeholders, and governing bodies worldwide.<sup>19</sup> The section *Authority and the Construction of Museum Narratives* reflects on the role that museums like the Field play in molding societal beliefs about human nature, ownership, and scientific truth. Within, the landmark debate surrounding the Kennewick Man is analyzed as a case study, and extrapolated as a model to interpret debates surrounding controversies over legal ownership, human identity, and scientific narrative like those at the Field Museum.

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<sup>18</sup> **Scientific racism** is the belief that empirical evidence can support racial discrimination. Certain anthropological methods such as craniometry, racial typography, and ideologies of racial hierarchy were used into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to present some "races" of humans as superior to others. Scientific racism was often harnessed to condone the politics of racial discrimination, though not all "scientific racists" were necessarily "political racists." Currently, craniometry is no longer used to support scientific racism, and plays a role in identifying the bodies of victims in forensic cases. Although ideologies of scientific racism were once regarded as scientifically valid, they are now regarded as pseudoscience.

<sup>19</sup> Tiffany Jenkins, *Contesting Human Remains in Museum Collections: The Crisis of Cultural Authority* (New York, N.Y.: Taylor & Francis, 2011), 6.

### III. Ethics in Scientific Displays of Human Remains: Transhistoric Wrongs, or Cultural Contingencies?

#### a. Modern Ethics and Ancient Traditions

Today, activists and museumgoers alike often express concern over the ethics of displaying human remains. Jodi Simkin, the Director of Cultural Affairs and Heritage at the Klahoose First Nation, believes that under no circumstances should the body of a deceased human be displayed without that individual's consent,<sup>20</sup> as well as the consent of their community.<sup>21</sup> Simkin views herself as a repatriation activist, regularly speaks at conferences and professional events against the practice of collecting human remains, which she considers an ethical violation, and supports indigenous groups seeking to repatriate the remains of their ancestors from museums. This perspective resonates with some museumgoers today, who may feel uneasy about viewing the deceased. A 2014 study of visitor perception of human remains exhibits, which compared the perspectives of viewers at el Museo de las Momias in Guanajuato, Mexico, the Milwaukee Public Museum, and traveling *Body Worlds* exhibits, revealed that many visitors were fascinated by these displays, yet troubled by the ethics behind them.<sup>22</sup> These viewers cited concerns about depriving the deceased of a proper burial, disbelief that informed consent had been obtained, as well as taboos against seeing exhibits that were "ghoulish," "bizarre" "inappropriate for children," and "voyeuristic."<sup>23</sup> Amidst the current unease, yet simultaneous curiosity, with seeing the dead on display, one might assume that displaying the human body has always been considered ethically suspect.

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<sup>20</sup> In this circumstance, **consent** would mean that the person on display voluntarily agreed to have their body presented to the public, and was informed beforehand of how it would be displayed and the implications of that display.

<sup>21</sup> Jodi Simkin, Klahoose and Repatriation, phone interview with author, January 13, 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Amanda Balistreri, "Putting the Dead on Display: An Exploration of Visitor Perceptions and Motivations Regarding Preserved Human Remains in Museums with Particular Emphasis on the Museo de Las Momias de Guanajuato and Body Worlds & the Cycle of Life," 2014, 100.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 223.

Yet ethical objections and taboos surrounding human remains displays have not been continuous across cultures and throughout history. Indeed, while informed consent in scientific research was treated as a new ethical standard in the Nuremberg Code of 1947, displays of human remains were prevalent before Western science as we know it even began.<sup>24</sup> The public display of human remains, for spiritual, religious, or entertainment purposes, has featured prominently in the cultural practices of numerous groups. The intrigue of human remains stems in part from their interconnectedness with mortality; interacting with the dead provides an opportunity for reflection on selfhood, community, and lineages of ancestors across many cultures.<sup>25</sup> The Chinchorro people, living in what is now northern Chile, used complex techniques to mummify and publicly transport their dead during nomadic journeys from 6,000 to 2,000 BCE.<sup>26</sup> These mummies are thought to have been central to the social lives of the Chinchorro as well as sites of communication with ancestors.<sup>27</sup> From the Inca period through the Colonial era (c.1400 to 1821), Andean people also displayed and visited the mummified remains of their ancestors for spiritual reasons.<sup>28</sup> In Europe during the Middle Ages, body parts said to belong to saints or other religious figures were displayed in monasteries, cathedrals, and other Christian religious contexts, acting as a “special locus of access to the divine.”<sup>29</sup> In a less reverent tradition, sideshows in the United States in the 1800s displayed the bodies of people with congenital abnormalities, known as “freaks,” for public entertainment.<sup>30</sup> The human body has been displayed in countless diverse mortuary and ritual

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<sup>24</sup> Joel Sparks, “Timeline of Laws Related to the Protection of Human Subjects,” Office of History, National Institutes of Health, June 2002, [https://history.nih.gov/about/timelines\\_laws\\_human.html](https://history.nih.gov/about/timelines_laws_human.html).

<sup>25</sup> Barra O’Donnabhain and Maria Cecilia Lozada, *Archaeological Human Remains Global Perspectives* (Springer, 2014), 1.

<sup>26</sup> Konrad Spindler et al., *Human Mummies: A Global Survey of Their Status and the Techniques of Conservation* (Springer Science & Business Media, 2013), 136.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum and Paula Gerson, “Body-Part Reliquaries and Body Parts in the Middle Ages,” *Gesta* 36, no. 1 (1997): 4, <https://doi.org/10.2307/767274>.

<sup>30</sup> Rachel Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination* (University of Chicago Press, 2001), 129.

contexts, and the academic treatment and public perception of human remains has been similarly varied.

As evidenced by the acceptance of display of human remains in numerous contexts, ethical controversies in the history of human remains did not arise from an inherent taboo, or transhistorical moral issue, with displaying the human body. Rather, the display of human remains in the anthropology museum became the source of great ethical controversy in the mid to late twentieth century specifically due to the complex interplay between scientific inquiry, colonial dynamics supporting that science, legal processes, and traditional spiritual beliefs.

This ethical debate surrounding human remains display at the anthropology museum is significant on a global scale, because it is never only about a single body, a single exhibition, or a single museum. In this debate, current scientific ideals collide with the previously influential investigative aims of scientific racism and natural history. Cultural ideals of colonialism and national pride conflict with the interests of tribes, families, and ancestors, and the diverse cultural histories of myriad groups. Within institutions like the Field Museum, archaeological human remains have supported numerous scientific narratives, from ancient diseases, to the migrations and lifestyles of past peoples, and human evolution, as well as political narratives of ethnogenesis or national identity.<sup>31</sup> Even within the discipline of anthropology, the study of human remains has developed with different terminologies, methodologies, and associated academic traditions. From physical anthropology<sup>32</sup> to skeletal biology to osteology to biological anthropology, “many

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<sup>31</sup> Barra O'Donnabhain and Maria Cecilia Lozada, *Archaeological Human Remains Global Perspectives*, 1.

<sup>32</sup> The fields in which human remains have been studied, are interdisciplinary, have variegated academic histories, and often refer to themselves using overlapping terminology. It is necessary to define these fields to trace how the “specimens” studied in these disciplines found their way into anthropology museum collections. The anthropological study of human remains encompasses the disciplines **physical anthropology**, **biological anthropology**, **bioarchaeology**, **skeletal biology**, **osteology**, **human osteology**, **osteochondrology**, and **paleoanthropology**, among others. This diversity in terminology is reflective of differences in academic traditions throughout the world and the varying linguistic and cultural landscapes in which the practice of studying the human body has evolved. **Biological** and **physical anthropology** are equivalent terms, and largely approach questions of human evolution and biosocial

bioarchaeologies” have emerged.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, there is no one unified story of human remains display in anthropological contexts. The ethical ground of displaying human bodies in the anthropology museum remains controversial and uncomfortable, because each instance of display is part of a larger network of historical contingencies, and brings the belief systems of numerous diverse groups under scrutiny.

## **b. Cadavers in the Science Museum**

To understand the ethical issues bridging culture and science in human remains displays, we need to first examine the place of human remains in the history of science. Analysis and public display of human remains has been instrumental in establishing the western scientific tradition, first playing a key role in anatomy, medicine, and public education.<sup>34</sup> The display of the human body in Western science can be traced back through the discipline of anatomy, beginning with the popularity of public dissections in medieval Europe. The first public human dissection was performed by Mondino de Liuzzi in 1315 in Bologna, primarily for the education of medical students.<sup>35</sup> These dissections became popular at medical schools throughout Europe, and soon began to interest artists fascinated by the human form and members of the general public drawn in by the spectacle.<sup>36</sup> In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, anatomy theatres gained popularity, allowing for increasingly large crowds to view the cadavers on display.

Human remains have long been displayed in museums for their educational value and intrigue as objects. It is unclear which museum was the first to display human remains to the public.

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variation. All other categories defined here can be considered subdisciplines of biological anthropology. **For more on this history, see “bioarchaeology” in the Glossary.**

<sup>33</sup> Barra O’Donnabhain and María Cecila Lozada, *Archaeological Human Remains Global Perspectives*, 12.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>35</sup> Sanjib Kumar Ghosh, “Human Cadaveric Dissection: A Historical Account from Ancient Greece to the Modern Era,” *Anatomy & Cell Biology* 48, no. 3 (September 2015): 156, <https://doi.org/10.5115/acb.2015.48.3.153>.

<sup>36</sup> Ghosh, “Human Cadaveric Dissection,” 156.

Early anatomy museums, such as the Museum of Human Anatomy of the University of Bologna, est. circa 1288 CE, were more likely to display wax models than cadavers due to difficulty of preservation.<sup>37</sup> Anatomical museums in the early modern period, such as the Mutter Museum at the College of Physicians in Philadelphia, began displaying a greater variety of preserved human remains.<sup>38</sup> These institutions were established for purposes of medical education, yet also integrated the voyeuristic aspect of the sideshow tradition, displaying the bodies of people with rare medical conditions in a manner similar to that of the “freak show.”<sup>39</sup> Although the freak show is no longer widespread, the public’s fascination with anatomical specimens continues into the present day. This is best demonstrated by the ongoing popularity of the *Body Worlds* exhibitions,<sup>40</sup> which display plastinated, dissected human remains to over 48 million visitors in over 140 cities worldwide since 1995.<sup>41</sup>

### c. Anthropology as Natural History

The anthropology museum shared common intellectual ground with, and later diverged from, the medical museum to play an increasingly major role in scientific research in the early modern period. The anthropology museum developed out of a western scientific tradition similar to the medical museum.<sup>42</sup> Both institutions, in their displays of the human body, attempted to educate the viewer by presenting scientific narratives. However, biological anthropologists were initially focused not on medical knowledge, but racial classification. Museum anthropology predates the

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<sup>37</sup> Venkatesh Vishwanath Kamath et al., “The Origin of Anatomy Museums,” 2014, 64.

<sup>38</sup> “Collections,” accessed January 12, 2020, <http://muttermuseum.org/collections/>.

<sup>39</sup> Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A.*, 135.

<sup>40</sup> The ethical issues associated with human remains displays at the *Body Worlds* exhibits will be further discussed in section III.

<sup>41</sup> “The Philosophy behind BODY WORLDS: About the Mission, Concept & Effects,” Körperwelten, accessed January 7, 2020, <https://bodyworlds.com/about/philosophy/>.

<sup>42</sup> Anita Herle, “Anthropology Museums and Museum Anthropology,” *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, October 6, 2016, <http://www.anthroencyclopedia.com/entry/anthropology-museums-and-museum-anthropology>.



establishment of the Boasian four-field method of anthropology<sup>43</sup> within academia in the 1920s.<sup>44</sup> Anthropological museum collections began as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century; many started as private “cabinets of curiosities,” small-scale displays of human remains, artifacts, and natural materials amassed by wealthy collectors to “tell stories about the wonders and oddities of the natural world” and the human’s place in it.<sup>45</sup> Other collections were haphazardly and opportunistically accumulated from bones donated by amateur collectors and enthusiasts.<sup>46</sup> By the late 1500s, some of these “cabinets” occupied entire buildings.<sup>47</sup>

The Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology at Oxford was likely the first “cabinet of curiosity” to become converted to a museum as we now know it; in 1683 it was a “building used for the presentation and illustration of objects.”<sup>48</sup> It later came to house ethnological materials in the 1820s.<sup>49</sup> The first dedicated anthropology and archaeology museum was the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology (PMAE), founded in 1866.<sup>50</sup> Since then, museums featuring anthropological materials proliferated throughout the world. Of those who housed human remains,

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<sup>43</sup> The Four-Field Approach refers to Anthropology’s disciplinary division into physical, sociocultural, archaeological, and linguistic studies. This approach is often attributed to pioneering anthropologist Franz Boas’s influence on the discipline, but historian of anthropology Dan Hicks destabilizes that notion, pointing to anthropologist Augustus Pitt-Rivers’s earlier diagrams delineating the fields of anthropology. Hicks further elaborates on the history of Anthropology in relation to the anthropology museum, in

<sup>44</sup> Adam Kuper, “Anthropology: Scope of the Discipline,” in *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (American Cancer Society, 2017), 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118924396.wbiea1591>.

<sup>45</sup> “Cabinet of Curiosities,” British Library, accessed January 13, 2020, <https://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item107648.html>.

<sup>46</sup> Redman, *Bone Rooms*, 19.

<sup>47</sup> Stephen E. Nash and Gary M. Feinman, Eds. “Curators, Collections, and Contexts: Anthropology at the Field Museum, 1893–2002. Fieldiana, Publication 1525, Anthropology, New Series, No. 36. Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, Wiley Online Library, 2003, 12.

<sup>48</sup> Don D. Fowler, “A Natural History of Man: Reflections on Anthropology, Museums, and Science,” n.d., 13.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Alaka Wali, Rosa Cabrera, and Jennifer Anderson, “Museum Anthropology,” *Oxford Bibliographies*, May 6, 2016, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199766567/obo-9780199766567-0053.xml>.

their primary focus was collection and study, while the display of human remains came as an afterthought.

Many natural history museums, devoted to the observation and description of the natural world, came to boast anthropology departments with massive collections of human remains.<sup>51</sup> The integration of humans and anthropological materials in natural history museums has its root in an ideology of western civilization, prominent not only in science but in art and literature, known as primitivism. This belief held that prior to the emergence of “organized society,” humans were “natural beings” living primitively in nature and living in accordance with “natural laws” of society.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, anthropological displays of “primitive man” had their place among the botanical, geologic, and zoological exhibits.<sup>53</sup> Further, so-called savages, those found living in tribal societies, were assumed to be psychologically the same as our earliest human ancestors. They were in a “primitive” stage of societal development, so could function as proxies for “original humanity,” revealing truths about the origins of our species.<sup>54</sup> There was a pervasive fear that these savages, so crucial to understanding our human origins, were rapidly vanishing. Therefore, collecting the artifacts and bodies of these people was seen as the duty of the scientist, accounting for the massive accumulation of human remains in museums.<sup>55</sup> A central assumption of primitivism was that “the good” is inherently “the natural.” So by contrast, members of “highly evolved, complex societies,” i.e., Western-influenced cultures, perceived their “modern” lifestyles, though nonetheless superior, as conversely “artificial, corrupt and alienating.”<sup>56</sup> Studying and thereby possessing the essence of

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<sup>51</sup> Joshua J. Tewksbury et al., “Natural History’s Place in Science and Society,” *BioScience* 64, no. 4 (April 1, 2014): 300–310, <https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/biu032>.

<sup>52</sup> Fowler, “A Natural History of Man,” 15.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

“natural folk” through seeing them in museums, was therefore essential to the “alienated folk of high civilizations.”<sup>57</sup>

This theoretical underpinning of natural history is illustrated by the specific context of Chicago and the Field Museum. Exhibitions and publicity at the Field Museum reflected primitivism and other ideologies of the late nineteenth century. Their messaging contained ideas of “subjugation of the natural world in the name of Progress” and implied the inferior place of “natural man” in the hierarchy of civilization.<sup>58</sup> While the Field Museum displayed “primitive man” to a “civilized” audience, ideas about the myriad successes of “civilized man” were traditionally displayed via institutions of “high art” like the Art Institute. After 1933, the progress of civilization via technology was portrayed at the Museum of Science and Industry.<sup>59</sup> This paradigm remained prevalent in museum narratives until first indigenous groups in the 1960s, followed by academic critics in the 1970s, decried both the implications of the exhibits, and the symbolism of the natural history and anthropology museum as institutions.<sup>60</sup>

#### **d. Museum Anthropology and Colonialism**

Worldwide, colonial ideas and power structures influenced how archaeological human remains were initially displayed in museums. European colonial powers routinely plundered the graves of their colonized subjects, and brought the mummies, skulls, limbs, shrunken heads, and anatomical specimens back to Europe for study and display as “curiosities.”<sup>61</sup> In most colonial settings, museum researchers and curators were “transfixed by the issue of race” and furthered

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<sup>57</sup> Don D. Fowler, “A Natural History of Man: Reflections on Anthropology, Museums, and Science,” 15.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>61</sup> Redman, *Bone Rooms*, 11.

narratives that exoticized indigenous groups or painted them as inferior.<sup>62</sup> For instance, during the formation of Argentina at the turn of the nineteenth century, the European background of the country was stressed as the formation of the identity of the nation, at the expense of indigenous populations. Towards those ends, Argentinian museums collected and displayed the remains of indigenous peoples with the aim of documenting the “Otherness” of this population.<sup>63</sup> Even scientists at museums in non-European countries took on investigative projects surrounding race; researchers at the National Museum in Brazil in the 1920s took influence from the eugenics movement and the French and German traditions of craniometrics in their investigations of the African component of the Brazilian population.<sup>64</sup> From an academic perspective, human bones in museums were considered objects. Human remains were exhibited as “curiosities of scientific interest,” generally with little regard for the concerns or beliefs of the indigenous people involved.<sup>65</sup>

### ***Race and the Race for Specimen Collection in the United States***

The most established academic tradition of biological anthropology, and consequently, anthropology museum collections today is in the USA.<sup>66</sup> The development of this discipline owes much to the tradition of collecting bodies for anthropological science in the “bone rooms” of museums throughout the United States.<sup>67</sup> By 1776, Western European museums and collections had been amassing the bodies of colonial subjects, both living and deceased, for centuries.<sup>68</sup> In the early 1800s, American museum professionals noted that the Old World possessed “vastly superior and

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<sup>62</sup> O'Donnabhain and Lozada, *Archaeological Human Remains*, 7.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>66</sup> Redman, *Bone Rooms*.

<sup>67</sup> Samuel Redman, "Anthropology, the Field Museum, and Human Prehistory". Video conference with the author, January 8 2020.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

more significant relics,” which to some, connoted European cultural superiority.<sup>69</sup> As a result, nascent museums in the US aimed to “catch up” with their European scientific competitors, and “began collecting bodies...with heretofore unseen zeal.”<sup>70</sup> As well as seeking out foreign remains, museums looked to make antiquities out of the “red Indian” in the American West.<sup>71</sup> The tradition of collecting human remains in the US traces back around 250 years; Thomas Jefferson was involved in the exhumation of native American graves.<sup>72</sup> This practice grew in prevalence following the Civil War, and increased with vigor during the westward expansion.<sup>73</sup> Most of the collected bodies belonged to nonwhite individuals, and were studied to investigate scientific theories surrounding race.<sup>74</sup> As a result, the vast majority of the human remains in natural history museums in the US, as many as ninety percent, are Native American. Due to a racialized focus on excavating Pre-Columbian graves rather than historical (i.e., of European heritage) gravesites, “museums now curate the results of two centuries’ worth of scientific racism.”<sup>75</sup>

During this race to procure human remains, natural history museums came to view acquiring collections of skeletons as a wise investment towards the emerging discipline of physical anthropology.<sup>76</sup> This attitude towards collection was influenced by the prolific craniologist Samuel Morton, who amassed around 900 skulls in the mid-1800s representing the “Ethiopian, Native American, Caucasian, Malay, and Mongolian” races, and produced numerous studies on brain size which were highly-regarded at the time<sup>77</sup> and framed future debates in physical anthropology.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Redman, *Bone Rooms*, 20.  
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<sup>71</sup> Redman, “Anthropology, the Field Museum, and Human Prehistory,” 21.

<sup>72</sup> “Jefferson’s Excavation of an Indian Burial Mound | Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello,” accessed February 24, 2020, <https://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/jeffersons-excavation-indian-burial-mound>.

<sup>73</sup> Redman, *Bone Rooms*, 17.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>75</sup> “Natural History Museum - The Skeletons in the Closet - SAPIENS,” accessed February 25, 2020, <https://www.sapiens.org/column/curiosities/natural-history-museum-human-remains/>.

<sup>76</sup> Redman, *Bone Rooms*, 17.

<sup>77</sup> Morton’s studies are now regarded as unsystematic, pseudoscientific, and racist.

<sup>78</sup> “Natural History Museum - The Skeletons in the Closet - SAPIENS.”

Eager to produce their own “racial taxonomies,” curators opportunistically obtained remains from distant contacts, acquaintances, and other sources of poorly-verified provenance.<sup>79</sup> Before 1890, there was very little systematic research or field investigation in the excavation or acquisition process.<sup>80</sup> Professional archaeologists in the American West excavated indigenous gravesites, but were far outnumbered by amateurs who independently collected remains and sent them to museums in the late 1800s.<sup>81</sup> Looting and grave-robbing were widespread on the part of amateurs throughout the American West,<sup>82</sup> and even professional archaeologists and anthropologists admitted to thievery. Franz Boas, who shipped bodies from indigenous gravesites in Canada into the US under falsified invoices, famously lamented, “It is most unpleasant work to steal bones from a grave, but... someone has to do it.”<sup>83</sup> Facilitated by the newly-reliable postal network in the US, mysterious packages containing vague descriptions of bones would arrive at museums.<sup>84</sup> Knowing the supposed “racial origin” of a bone was often enough to allow its admission into a collection, even without its individual identity or associated cultural affiliation.

#### **e. Not Simply “The Scientist” versus “The Native:” Repatriation in Legal, Ethical, and Cultural Debates**

Movements for the repatriation of human remains from museums to their living descendants, and the reburial of those remains, began in the 1970s as indigenous groups worldwide sought to challenge the prevailing notion of the indigenous body as an object for study. These demands for

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<sup>79</sup> Redman, *Bone Rooms*, 17.

<sup>80</sup> Donald Collier and Harry S. Tschopik, “The Role of Museums in American Anthropology,” *Fieldiana. Anthropology*, no. 36 (2003): 23.

<sup>81</sup> Redman, *Bone Rooms*, 18.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>83</sup> Julian Smith, “Who Owns the Dead?,” *Archaeology Magazine: A Publication of the Archaeological Institute of America*, February 2011, Archaeology Magazine Archive, <https://archive.archaeology.org/1101/departments/insider.html>.

<sup>84</sup> Redman, *Bone Rooms*, 18.

repatriation were particularly vociferous among native groups in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the USA. Many Native American groups had long objected to museum's use of their ancestor's bodies, as it violated traditional burial practices, but social and legal disenfranchisement prevented their voices from being heard.<sup>85</sup> It was only in the wake of Civil Rights movements in the 1960s that repatriation arguments gained social currency.<sup>86</sup> Repatriation activists contended that museum display violated their rights to spiritually care for their ancestors, that displays were shrouded in legacies of colonialism and racism, and that the dead never gave consent for their remains to be treated in this manner.<sup>87</sup> This activism was not purely verbal — indigenous protesters also chained themselves to museum display cases, enacted citizen's arrests of bioarchaeologists studying ancestral bones, and picketed archaeological sites.<sup>88</sup>

Indigenous repatriation movements were highly persuasive in swaying social perceptions of the display of the human body, as well as effective in enacting legal protections. As a result of repatriation movements, in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, museum policy and legislation now recognizes the rights of indigenous descendants to their ancestor's remains, although this is not codified in a single national law.<sup>89</sup> In the United States, after the 1989 passage of the National Museum of the American Indian Act (NMAIA) and the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), all human remains in the United States, while still in federal "control" in the museum context, were deemed the property of the tribes. Museums receiving federal funds were required to inventory their collections of human remains and associated funerary

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<sup>85</sup> Chip Colwell, "Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits: Inside the Fight to Reclaim Native America's Culture," 5, accessed January 20, 2020, <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook?sid=9ee6448d-9fb3-4e6c-a7c9-9e6d2e8e9efc%40sdc-v-sessmgr02&vid=0&format=EB>.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Chip Colwell, "The Long Ethical Arc of Displaying Human Remains," *Atlas Obscura*, 52:00 500, <http://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/displaying-native-american-remains>.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Cressida Fforde, Paul Turnbull, and Jane Hubert, eds., *The Dead and Their Possessions: Repatriation in Principle, Policy and Practice* (Routledge, 2002), 3.

materials, and consult with indigenous groups to return the remains to their descendants or otherwise reach agreement on their disposal.<sup>90</sup> Starting on May 14, 2010, NAGPRA section 10.11 required museums to explicitly offer to initiate consultation with tribes to transfer remains to their descendants.<sup>91</sup> This amendment was regarded by some as a “victory” in the centuries-long struggle of Native peoples to “protect our dead... from the ‘collecting’ of generations of scientists.”<sup>92</sup> Due to both increased social awareness of the ethical problems associated with displaying human remains, as well as increased legal protections achieved by repatriation movements, the display of colonial-era indigenous remains is no longer commonplace or socially acceptable in North American and Australasian museums.

### ***NAGPRA at the Field***

Beginning in the 1960s, and progressing through the 1970s, indigenous rights movements in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States began to advocate for the repatriation of the remains of their ancestors housed in museums like the Field.<sup>93</sup> The rhetoric used in indigenous activism in this era focused on righting the wrongs of past colonialism worldwide.<sup>94</sup> The case for repatriation took a three-pronged approach, with arguments centered around the issues of spirituality, racism, and consent.<sup>95</sup> Activists argued that museums violated their religious freedom by preventing them from practicing their traditional ways of caring for their ancestors, that the history of museum collection of indigenous people was steeped in racism, and that the people displayed in museum exhibits never consented to have their remains treated in this manner.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> “NPS Archeology Program: The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA),” accessed November 29, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/archeology/tools/laws/nagpra.htm>.

<sup>91</sup> Clayton W. Dumont, “Contesting Scientists’ Narrations of NAGPRA’s Legislative History: Rule 10.11 and the Recovery of ‘Culturally Unidentifiable’ Ancestors,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 26, no. 1 (May 25, 2011): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1353/wic.2011.0009>.

<sup>92</sup> Dumont, “Contesting Scientists’ Narrations of NAGPRA’s Legislative History,” 5.

<sup>93</sup> Jenkins, *Contesting Human Remains in Museum Collections: The Crisis of Cultural Authority*, 12.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>95</sup> Colwell, “The Long Ethical Arc of Displaying Human Remains.”

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*



In 1989, Susan Shown Harjo, a Cheyenne and Creek director of the National Congress of American Indians, articulated the repatriation issue to the public in the Los Angeles Times, making the case for legal protection against the use of American Indian remains in museums. She wrote:

What if museums, universities and government agencies could put your dead relatives on display or keep them in boxes to be cut up and otherwise studied? What if you believed that the spirits of the dead could not rest until their human remains were placed in a sacred area? The ordinary American would say there ought to be a law -- and there is, for ordinary Americans. The problem for American Indians is that there are too many laws of the kind that make us the archeological property of the United States and too few of the kind that protect us from such insults.<sup>97</sup>

Harjo's argument urged Congress to enact legislation that would prevent museums from treating human remains as artifacts. Compellingly, she noted the 1.5 million living Native Americans are outnumbered by the dead stored in museums, educational institutions, federal agencies, and private collections. The emotional valence of repatriation concerns and the persuasive rhetoric from Harjo and other activists helped sway public opinion, and ultimately, earn the support of American lawmakers.

On October 26, 1990, John McCain voiced support of NAGPRA before the Senate, HR 5237, which was passed by voice vote.<sup>98</sup> The bill, which had been proposed in the House by Democratic Arizona Representative Morris K. Udall, received great bipartisan support, passing unanimously in the House the following day.<sup>99</sup> The bill was supported by a diverse coalition of stakeholders including numerous American Indian tribes, the American Civil Liberties Union, eighteen separate religious denominations, the Society of American Archaeology, and the American

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<sup>97</sup> Susan Shown Harjo, "Last Rites for Indian Dead : Treating Remains Like Artifacts Is Intolerable," Los Angeles Times, September 16, 1989, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-09-16-me-21-story.html>.

<sup>98</sup> C. Timothy McKeown, "Implementing a 'True Compromise': The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act after Ten Years," in *The Dead and Their Possessions: Repatriation in Principle, Policy and Practice* (Routledge, 2002), 108.

<sup>99</sup> Morris K. Udall, "H.R.5237 - 101st Congress (1989-1990): Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act," webpage, November 16, 1990, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/house-bill/5237>.

Association of Museums.<sup>100</sup> Framed as civil rights legislation, McCain wrote that the passage of the bill had been “charged with high emotions in both the Native American community and the museum community.”<sup>101</sup> He concluded that “this bill represents a true compromise.”

The unanimous passage of NAGPRA signaled that displaying American Indian remains in museums was no longer socially acceptable, and further, was no longer legal in government-funded exhibitions. At the Field Museum, NAGPRA saw many artifacts going off display in the Native North America Hall. This hall, first opened in the 1950s under the name *Indians before Columbus*, had long been a repository of cultural items from numerous American Indian groups.<sup>102</sup> In a 1991 article in the Chicago Tribune, then- Field Museum Vice President Jonathan Haas attested that no Native American remains had been displayed at the Field Museum since 1989, and “few were before that.”<sup>103</sup> However, NAGPRA also required that museums repatriate associated funerary artifacts. Indeed, a journalist reported that a “visitor to the museum these days will find... some interesting absences,” as “artifact removal forms litter the exhibits” and display cases are left empty.<sup>104</sup> NAGPRA prompted the Field Museum to consult with the Hopi, Iroquois, Pawnee, Blackfeet, and Blood groups, among others, on the “appropriateness of its exhibits.”<sup>105</sup> Even with the changes NAGPRA brought, the over-six-decades-old displays in the Native North America Hall remained “outdated, “misrepresentative,” and “frozen in time,” according to viewers.<sup>106</sup> This will be changing soon, as the Field Museum plans to reopen a modernized version of the exhibit in 2021

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<sup>100</sup> Steve Johnson, “Museum’s Blackfeet Remains to Go Home,” [chicagotribune.com](https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1991-10-20-9104040573-story.html), accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1991-10-20-9104040573-story.html>.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Lauren Frost, “What Is the Field Museum Changing About Its Native North America Hall? ‘Everything,’” WBEZ, accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.wbez.org/shows/wbez-news/changing-the-narrative-in-the-field-museums-native-north-america-hall/4646fd66-8839-43fc-9c8c-f6eafa8dd3c8>.

<sup>103</sup> Steve Johnson, “Museum’s Blackfeet Remains to go Home,” [chicagotribune.com](https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1991-10-20-9104040573-story.html), accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1991-10-20-9104040573-story.html>.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Steve Johnson, “A First Look at the New ‘Mummies’ at the Field Museum,” [chicagotribune.com](https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/museums/ct-ent-mummies-field-museum-0315-story.html), accessed March 3, 2020, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/museums/ct-ent-mummies-field-museum-0315-story.html>.

<sup>106</sup> Frost, “What Is the Field Museum Changing About Its Native North America Hall?”

with greater collaboration between museum curators and Native people.<sup>107</sup> In the meantime, the hall has recently featured multimedia ledger-style “art interventions” superimposed over existing displays by Chicago-based Kanza artist Chris Pappan, who seeks to bridge the gap between the older colonialist narrative and the upcoming narrative which plans to integrate indigenous voices.<sup>108</sup>

NAGPRA, and the associated National Museum of the American Indian Act, remain the most significant pieces of legislation worldwide surrounding repatriation, yet as is often the case with compromises, many points of contention and implementation remain unresolved.<sup>109</sup> Thirty years after NAGPRA became law, 189,415 human remains have been reported to the commission.<sup>110</sup> Yet as of September 2018, 122,338 remains are still moldering in archives, “pending consultation and/or notice.”<sup>111</sup> Further, only twenty percent of all museums subject to NAGPRA have “resolved all Native American remains under their control.”<sup>112</sup>

The reasons for the continuation of repatriation disputes in the United States are multifaceted, but legacies of mismanagement of bodies as well as the difficulty of culturally identifying remains contribute to the drawn-out nature of the project.<sup>113</sup> Sections 5-7 of the statute require that agencies and museums which receive funding from federal sources take an intensive inventory of their holdings of Native American human remains and funerary objects. Museums are required to consult with native organizations to either return the remains and objects to the indigenous groups who can demonstrate their lineage or cultural affiliation to the remains, or

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<sup>107</sup> Frost, “What Is the Field Museum Changing About Its Native North America Hall?”

<sup>108</sup> Allison C. Meier, “An Artist Addresses the Field Museum’s Problematic Native American Hall,” Chicago magazine, accessed March 8, 2020, <http://www.chicagomag.com/arts-culture/January-2019/Chris-Pappan-Field-Museum-Native-American-Halls/>.

<sup>109</sup> Fforde, Turnbull, and Hubert, *The Dead and Their Possessions: Repatriation in Principle, Policy and Practice*, 7.

<sup>110</sup> “Program Reports - Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (U.S. National Park Service),” 4, accessed November 29, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nagpra/reports.htm>.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> “Program Reports - Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (U.S. National Park Service),” 3.

<sup>113</sup> “NPS Archeology Program: The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).”

dispose of the remains according to the wishes of the tribe.<sup>114</sup> Yet museums often did not keep track of the identities of the remains in their collections; tracing the historical cultural affiliations of these remains to modern federally-recognized tribes is a bioarchaeological<sup>115</sup> puzzle on a massive scale.<sup>116</sup>

Following the passage of NAGPRA, the work of repatriating remains began, yet not every museum had sufficient funding to comply with the deadlines for these tasks set forth by NAGPRA. For instance, PMAE faced a slow repatriation process because it had vast stores of human remains that had never been inventoried, an “unprofessional state of affairs.”<sup>117</sup> Further, disagreements from Native American groups have arisen about which of them are more closely culturally affiliated to specific remains, and disputes have arisen about what should be done with unaffiliated remains. Some indigenous people consider that unprovenanced material should be reburied in the general area of its origin, whereas others argue that when provenance is unknown, the remains should be retained by the museum.<sup>118</sup> This situation of uncertainty is also prevalent in countries like Australia, where inventories have been insufficient and repatriation claims may be disputed.<sup>119</sup> The situation at the PMAE, and other similar museums, highlights that repatriation requires detailed archival and sometimes bioanthropological research to determine provenance or cultural affiliation. Descendants in some cases may choose to keep remains in museums, and returning remains may result in dissension rather than harmony among the group receiving them.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> “Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (U.S. National Park Service),” accessed November 4, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nagpra/index.htm>.

<sup>115</sup> See “Bioarchaeological Disciplines” in glossary.

<sup>116</sup> “Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (U.S. National Park Service).”

<sup>117</sup> Fforde, Turnbull, and Hubert, *The Dead and Their Possessions: Repatriation in Principle, Policy and Practice*, 6.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Fforde, Turnbull, and Hubert, *The Dead and Their Possessions*, 7.

The Field Museum has experienced similar difficulties staying on a timely schedule with regards to the NAGPRA inventory project, according to Field Museum repatriation director Dr. Helen Robbins.<sup>121</sup> Luckily, the Field already had a large inventory done in the 1980s, but for “different purposes” than the NAGPRA project. In the old inventory, it was sufficient for “scientific purposes” to have labels like “at minimum one individual with extra femurs,” but for NAGPRA, that might be many people.<sup>122</sup> Robbins wryly comments on the widespread inventory problems found across institutions: “when you have a skeleton that consists of five different people from five different races all jumbled up... in a damp<sup>123</sup> box, that’s, well, not very good” when tribes ask for their relatives to be repatriated.<sup>124</sup> When Robbins started working on the collection in November 2002, it became apparent that there was much more work to be done than had previously been thought. The repatriation project was estimated to be done within three years, but Robbins has been working for seventeen years and it is still not finished. At first, she was working alone, but recently she has been working with a part-time bioarchaeologist and an assistant to do the intensive research required to fulfill repatriation claims.

Although the Field Museum has received over twenty-two different federal NAGPRA grants for repatriation, according to Robbins, one of the most high-profile repatriation incidents was actually paid for by the Field Museum itself. In 2008, Inuit leaders in Labrador, Canada learned that the Field still housed the skeletal remains of 22 people who had been excavated from marked graves in the Moravian village of Zoar in 1928, and requested their repatriation.<sup>125</sup> This was an international repatriation request, so NAGPRA did not mandate it and the federal government could

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<sup>121</sup> Helen Robbins, “Repatriation at the Field Museum,” in-person interview by author, 22 November 2019.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> The Field Museum specifically never stored remains in damp conditions, but Robbins notes that she witnessed numerous state repositories housing remains in damp cardboard boxes in basements.

<sup>124</sup> Helen Robbins, “Repatriation at the Field Museum ”

<sup>125</sup> William Mullen, “Field Museum to Return Inuit Remains,” [chicagotribune.com](http://chicagotribune.com), accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2010-07-19-ct-met-inuit-remains-repatriated-20100719-story.html>.

not provide funding. Yet the museum agreed to fund the repatriation, an “expensive endeavor” including renting a plane and a longliner for the transfer to Labrador, because “it was very plain that the Field Museum was in the wrong.”<sup>126</sup> In 2011, the bodies were finally returned, and the Field Museum presented a formal apology letter to the Inuit group signed by the Chairman of the Board, which Robbins is “pretty sure no other institution has ever done for a specific [indigenous] group.”<sup>127</sup> In response, the Labrador Inuit sent the Field Museum a letter of forgiveness, which was “very generous because they did not need to do that...I was honored.” In 2017, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, an organization representing the rights and interests of the Inuit people, gave the Inuit Cultural Repatriation Award to both the Field Museum and the Nunatsiavut Government for both institution’s commitment to fostering “reconciliation” and an “ongoing positive relationship.”<sup>128</sup>

### ***Divergent Views in Repatriation Debates***

However, not all anthropologists share Robbins’s commitment to collaborating on repatriation with indigenous people. Some believe that the actions of past anthropologists have been unfairly vilified, and that the spiritual beliefs of modern-day indigenous people have been given too much legitimacy in NAGPRA legislation. Physical anthropologist Dr. Elizabeth Weiss of San Jose State University<sup>129</sup> recounts her experience of feeling like a pariah for her livelihood of studying dead bodies upon attending an emotionally charged post-NAGPRA discussion at an archaeology conference:

Weren’t we innocent until proven guilty? No, we were guilty for the sins of others; those anthropologists of the past who studied race differences, the Europeans who came and took

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<sup>126</sup> Helen Robbins, Repatriation at the Field Museum.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Nunatsiaq News, “National Inuit Org Honours Return of Stolen Nunatsiavut Remains,” *Nunatsiaq News* (blog), September 26, 2017, [https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/65674national\\_inuit\\_org\\_honours\\_return\\_of\\_stolen\\_nunatsiavut\\_remains/](https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/65674national_inuit_org_honours_return_of_stolen_nunatsiavut_remains/).

<sup>129</sup> Weiss is currently an anthropology professor at SJSU. She completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, and has published almost three dozen studies in numerous physical anthropology and archaeology journals. She has no affiliation with the Field Museum, and I have never interviewed her. Featuring her perspectives in this paper does not imply that researchers affiliated with the Field Museum share these views, it is meant to draw attention to the full range of perspectives within museum physical anthropology as a field.

the land, and any other historical group who displaced the minorities. I realized this when another Native American spoke up and said that I didn't know how it felt to be a victim and, therefore, shouldn't be voicing my opinion. According to them, I did not come from an oppressed or victimized social group. An anthropologist then spoke the unthinkable comparing me to a Nazi while tears were running down her cheeks. She said she never wanted to touch another skeleton in her life.<sup>130</sup>

This experience inspired Weiss to devote a chapter in her book, *Reburying the past: The Effects of Repatriation and Reburial on Scientific Inquiry*, towards making the case for “Anthropologists as the Good Guys.”<sup>131</sup> She argues that modern criticisms of past archaeological collection practices judge the past through today's morals.<sup>132</sup> Further, she argues that NAGPRA gives too much credence to Native American cultural traditions and oral histories in determining repatriation, as she asserts that “the oral traditions of alien abductions in New Mexico” are just as valid as “the creation myths of the Native Americans.”<sup>133</sup> Weiss objects to NAGPRA positing Native beliefs as paradigmatically equal to science in explaining reality, claiming that the spirituality grounding many repatriation claims is fundamentally a less legitimate form of knowledge production than science.

In counterpoint to the Labrador Inuit, not all indigenous people are eager for reconciliation. Native sociologist Clayton W. Dumont Jr.<sup>134</sup> condemns archaeologists' and anthropologists' critiques of NAGPRA amendment 10.11 as hypocritical, and argues that they are guilty of historical revisionism.<sup>135</sup> Amendment 10.11 shifts the onus onto museums to initiate the repatriation of bodies.<sup>136</sup> Dumont frames the passage of this legislation as a legal “victory in the centuries-long

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<sup>130</sup> Elizabeth Weiss, *Reburying the Past: The Effects of Repatriation and Reburial on Scientific Inquiry* (Nova Science Publishers, 2008), 2.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>134</sup> Dumont is an Associate Professor of Sociology at San Francisco State University and studies the sociological history of science from a poststructuralist perspective. He is not affiliated with the Field Museum but is a commentator on the actions of museums like the Field.

<sup>135</sup> Dumont, “Contesting Scientists' Narrations of NAGPRA's Legislative History.”

<sup>136</sup> Prior, repatriation claims relied on requests from indigenous groups.

struggle of Native peoples to protect our dead... from scientists,” contending that critiques of section 10.11 reveal the extent to which museum archaeologists have used their “colonial prerogative” to paint a self-serving rosy narrative of cooperation between museums and Native people.<sup>137</sup> He argues that although museums emphasize their relationships with indigenous people, their actions and words suggest their persistent prioritization of the “scientific” and objectifying perspective of seeing “our dead as data,” indicating that museums continue in “masquerading the colonizer’s needs as everyone else’s.”<sup>138</sup> Dumont observes the way scientific professional organizations “did their best to weaken” the amendment before it left Congress, then cynically calculated that it was “politically astute to ‘get on board,’ lest they have to cease their incessant declarations of respect and admiration for Native peoples” as evidence of the insincerity of museum’s relationships with indigenous groups.<sup>139</sup> He warns the wily scientists that “their tenacity will be matched, step for step, by Native peoples – and then some” in the ongoing fight over native bodies.<sup>140</sup>

Yet to some, the reluctance of museums to display human remains in the wake of NAGPRA may in itself constitute an exercise of colonial power if it censors indigenous groups’ interests to display their own dead. In some contexts outside North America, where NAGPRA should have no jurisdiction, bodies are nonetheless being removed from display, to the confusion and frustration of certain indigenous groups. In the case of the town of Xaltocan in central Mexico, a museum established, curated and run by indigenous community members<sup>141</sup> chose to focus heavily on

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<sup>137</sup> Dumont, “Contesting Scientists’ Narrations of NAGPRA’s Legislative History,” 32.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>141</sup> Canadian and Mexican archaeologists also contributed to the establishment of the museum,



displays of human remains.<sup>142</sup> Even though the display conformed to the ethical guidelines espoused by the Vermillion and Tamaki Makau-rau Accords on Human Remains,<sup>143</sup> the displays were “criticized and censored” by North American academics who had been taught to believe displaying human remains is unequivocally wrong post-NAGPRA. North American archaeologist collaborators refused to include photographs of the museum displays in their publication, despite assurances that the community had given permission. The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) insisted that any photos of human remains submitted to their journal be pixelated or removed.<sup>144</sup> Upon learning of this censorship, Mexican members of the community were baffled, as they viewed the displays in the museum as an extension of their Mesoamerican beliefs and practices such as *Dia de los Muertos* making them “accustomed to coexist with death.” As one community

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<sup>142</sup> Lisa Overholtzer and Juan R. Argueta, “Letting Skeletons out of the Closet: The Ethics of Displaying Ancient Mexican Human Remains,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 24, no. 5 (May 28, 2018): 517, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2017.1390486>.

<sup>143</sup> The following ethical guidelines of the **Vermillion Accord**, an agreement for museum displays developed in concert with indigenous people (<https://worldarch.org/code-of-ethics/>) were adopted by the World Archaeological Congress in 1989:

- i. Respect for the mortal remains of the dead shall be accorded to all, irrespective of origin, race, religion, nationality, custom and tradition.
- ii. Respect for the wishes of the dead concerning disposition shall be accorded whenever possible, reasonable and lawful, when they are known or can be reasonably inferred.
- iii. Respect for the wishes of the local community and of relatives or guardians of the dead shall be accorded whenever possible, reasonable and lawful.
- iv. Respect for the scientific research value of skeletal, mummified and other human remains (including fossil hominids) shall be accorded when such value is demonstrated to exist.
- v. Agreement on the disposition of fossil, skeletal, mummified and other remains shall be reached by negotiation on the basis of mutual respect for the legitimate concerns of communities for the proper disposition of their ancestors, as well as the legitimate concerns of science and education.
- vi. The express recognition that the concerns of various ethnic groups, as well as those of science are legitimate and to be respected, will permit acceptable agreements to be reached and honoured.

These were updated in 2005 to include the ethical guidelines of **the Tamaki Makau-rau Accord**:

- i. Permission should be obtained from the affected community or communities.
- ii. Should permission be refused that decision is final and should be respected.
- iii. Should permission be granted, any conditions to which that permission is subject should be complied with in full.
- iv. All display should be culturally appropriate.
- v. Permission can be withdrawn or amended at any stage and such decisions should be respected.
- vi. Regular consultation with the affected community should ensure that the display remains culturally appropriate.

<sup>144</sup> Overholtzer and Argueta, “Letting Skeletons out of the Closet,” 518.

member said, “when we unearth the bones, we don’t get scared because they’re a part of us.”<sup>145</sup> In light of this ethnographic information, Canadian and Mexican archaeologists Overholtzer and Argueta make the case that the SAA’s censorship amounts to the imposition of the judgments of North American authorities on native Mesoamericans, and thus, is a perpetuation of colonial practice.<sup>146</sup> They argue that organizations like the SAA should not homogenize or ban representations of indigenous remains, but instead, should use ethnographic research to determine ethics of display in different cultural contexts.

As seen in the Field Museum, and countless other museums worldwide, the repatriation movement and legislation like NAGPRA has fundamentally shifted the ways that the public, museum scientists, and indigenous people construct their relationships with human remains and museum displays. Repatriation remains a multifaceted cultural debate, and even thirty years after the passage of NAGPRA, questions of how human remains should be displayed in museums remain contentious.

### ***“Asking the Question”: Displaying Remains While Engaging with Ethical Debates***

Given the ethical debates referenced over the previous pages, it is tempting to wonder what the trajectory of display of human remains in museums will look like going forward. For Dr. Helen Robbins, the most important consideration surrounding human remains is that museum professionals “first ask the question.”<sup>147</sup> By “asking the question,” Robbins means engaging with the histories behind those bodies, and reflecting that inquiry into the decisions that a curator or exhibitions manager might make in their display. “Questions” that might be asked could include did you have a right to display the body? How did the body get into the museum? Who are those

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 523.

<sup>146</sup> Overholtzer and Argueta, “Letting Skeletons out of the Closet,” 525.

<sup>147</sup> Helen Robbins, “Repatriation at the Field Museum.”

people? Do their descendants want us to display them? Why do we continue to display our bodies in these ways? Who stands to benefit from these displays?

Most stakeholders in these ethical debates stress the importance of consulting with cultural groups before presenting a display. For instance, the displays of Tibetan flutes made of human femurs at the Field do not ethically trouble Robbins or Hong, because in addition to these flutes being a celebrated part of Tibetan spirituality, the Dalai Lama was involved with the opening of this exhibit.<sup>148</sup> But at the same time, Robbins believes it is important to recognize that some groups may not be so willing to allow scientists to study their remains, for reasons that are deeply historically embedded. In some instances, this reluctance to be displayed may have more to do with the realities of colonial history than current spiritual practices. Robbins paraphrases concerns she has heard from Tasmanian repatriation claimants:

You guys [the scientists] came here, you murdered us, you tried to destroy us, you stole our generations by putting us in boarding schools and now you want to do science on the remains of human beings you murdered and took away... are you freaking out of your mind? Right... that's not about science, that's about genocide. So I was trying to express... complex arcs of belief and history and how complicated it is for everybody... I think the history of museum collections is complicated because history and science are intertwined in these ways and sometimes indigenous groups are against the science because of the history not because of the cultural beliefs.<sup>149</sup>

Respecting the historical grounding of many of the positions in repatriation debates is an important aspect of proper cultural consultations.

However, Simkin stresses that this consultation should lead to museums taking action towards repatriation, not further hesitation. She says, “A lot of institutions are almost paralyzed by not wanting to do the wrong thing, but doing the wrong thing is the same as doing nothing.”<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> “Dalai Lama to Visit Chicago as Part of Exhibit | Uncategorized | Nwitemes.Com,” accessed March 18, 2020, [https://www.nwitemes.com/uncategorized/dalai-lama-to-visit-chicago-as-part-of-exhibit/article\\_ff9563d3-a62d-5ec4-a61f-ae341351c621.html](https://www.nwitemes.com/uncategorized/dalai-lama-to-visit-chicago-as-part-of-exhibit/article_ff9563d3-a62d-5ec4-a61f-ae341351c621.html).

<sup>149</sup> Robbins, “Repatriation at the Field Museum.”

<sup>150</sup> Jodi Simkin, “Klahoose and Repatriation.”

When consulting with museums, Simkin makes it clear that the aim should be to work collaboratively. She stresses that it is important to refrain from vilifying museum workers. While the people in museums today are not responsible for the past actions of those who took and displayed human remains without consent, if they do not collaborate with indigenous repatriation claimants and other concerned parties, they are complicit.<sup>151</sup> Further, she stresses the importance of involving indigenous people in museum narratives. Often indigenous people are still not seen in leadership positions within museums, but she remains hopeful that the “conversation is changing” between the scientific community, the “cultural heritage sector,” and the indigenous community.<sup>152</sup>

Former curator Robert Martin speaks on the necessity to “find an appropriate balance” between the “feelings of the population” from which human remains have been taken, and the “legitimate interests of research” both at the Field Museum and worldwide.<sup>153</sup> His concern is that insistence on repatriation, with following reburial, hinders scientific research. Simkin, likewise, feels that not every indigenous community is necessarily opposed to scientific research, as there may be some who are curious about that aspect of their history. Certainly, the answer is not to remove all items associated with funerary traditions from display, as that would create insular communities, negating the “opportunity for intercultural dialogue” that museums present. The display of human remains in anthropology museums must be a continuing conversation.

#### **f. Beyond Repatriation: Addressing Human Remains Displays in Post-Colonial Contexts**

Today, indigenous and scientific communities in the Americas are increasingly collaborating to present narratives of human remains that move beyond colonial ideals. In Mexico, some bioarchaeologists are using osteological specimens as a “venue for cultural reassertion of the

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<sup>151</sup> Jodi Simkin, “Klahoose and Repatriation.”

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Robert Martin, “Human Remains Curation at the Field Museum,” February 7, 2020.

modern Maya.”<sup>154</sup> The Maya Museum in Mérida has been designed to “reach out to indigenous visitors” and includes 3D facial reconstructions of the skull of Bernardino Cen, a Maya Caste war hero as well as reconstructions of other pre-Hispanic people integrated with narratives of everyday life in Maya society.<sup>155</sup> However, this exhibit is not necessarily curated from an indigenous perspective. Archaeologists Tiesler and Cucina assure the reader that “all narratives are grounded in archaeologically retrieved skeletal information,” but this may not necessarily be the type of narrative indigenous people would prefer to feature.<sup>156</sup> In Canada, where very few indigenous remains are now displayed, institutions such as the Royal British Columbian Museum, which once exhibited the remains of first nations people are now making concerted efforts to consult with native peoples about the narratives that their museums are showcasing.<sup>157</sup> Further, many Canadian museums, such as the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, co-curate displays with members of indigenous communities.<sup>158</sup> These initiatives represent a shift in museum display policy towards accommodating narratives centered around the history of aboriginal peoples, rather than sustaining colonial narratives.

Despite the wide-ranging influences of the repatriation movement, certain indigenous communities in the Americas, such as many Maya-speaking groups in Yucatan and Guatemala, have not sought to have the bodies of their ancestors repatriated. Some bioarchaeologists ascribe this difference to the imposition of European modes of thought on indigenous populations.<sup>159</sup> Spanish colonists forced the assimilation of the Maya as a means to forge a new, “Christianized” colonial society through cultural repression and destruction of native heritage. As a result of this

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<sup>154</sup> Vera Tiesler and Andrea Cucina, “Past, Present and Future Perspectives in Maya Bioarchaeology: A View from Yucatan, Mexico,” in *Archaeological Human Remains Global Perspectives* (Springer, 2014), 171.

<sup>155</sup> Tiesler and Cucina, “Human Remains Curation at the Field Museum,” 171.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>157</sup> Jodi Simkin, “Klahoose and Repatriation.”

<sup>158</sup> Anita Herle, “Museums and First Peoples in Canada,” *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, no. 6 (1994): 46.

<sup>159</sup> Barra O’Donnabhain and María Cecilia Lozada, *Archaeological Human Remains Global Perspectives*, 176.

assimilation, some modern-day Maya speakers do not see themselves as culturally affiliated with pre-Hispanic human remains. A similar mentality is evident in some modern Peruvians who show indifference to the display of human remains; bodies on display are seen as belonging to “*indigenas*,” while some Peruvians today identify more with their Spanish cultural heritage.<sup>160</sup>

Repatriation claims, contrary to the prognostications of some physical anthropologists, have not eliminated the practice of displaying human remains; with the exception of Native American or Australasian aboriginal bodies, museums around the world can be found exhibiting these remains.<sup>161</sup> Egyptian mummies provide a case in point, as these bodies frequently tour museums worldwide. Western fascination with Egyptian mummies can be traced to Napoleon’s conquest of North Africa in 1798, and was kept alive through the Victorian era with public mummy unwrappings in England.<sup>162</sup> This fascination is still apparent in modern-day displays of Egyptian mummies, such as the one at the Field Museum, where CT scans allow the public to digitally, if no longer physically, unwrap these specimens.<sup>163</sup> The practice of displaying Egyptian mummies continues largely without ethical censure, because the Islamic communities of modern Egypt do not claim cultural continuity with the pharaohs whose bodies lay in the display halls of museums worldwide in the same way that Native Americans or Australian Aboriginals relate to their ancestors. And while European archaeologists certainly plundered ancient Egyptian gravesites for colonialist purposes, some scholars, such as anthropologist Chip Colwell, argue that their treatment of Egyptian mummies “glorified ancient Egypt” rather than dehumanized unnamed bones of native peoples.<sup>164</sup> Indeed, the modern Egyptian government depends on the tourism industry that the

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<sup>160</sup> María Cecilia Lozada, Peru and Bioarchaeology, In-Person Interview, November 6, 2019.

<sup>161</sup> Herle, “Museums and First Peoples in Canada” 45.

<sup>162</sup> Colwell, “The Long Ethical Arc of Displaying Human Remains.”

<sup>163</sup> “Inside Ancient Egypt,” Text, Field Museum, November 11, 2010, <https://www.fieldmuseum.org/exhibitions/inside-ancient-egypt>.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

excavation of ancient tombs and the global exhibition of mummies brings, and so it appears that pharaohs will continue to be on display for years to come.<sup>165</sup>

The major demands for the repatriation of ancient Egyptian artifacts, sometimes including bodies, to Egypt are nationalist rather than ethical. These arguments maintain that it is the prerogative of Egyptians to display their own cultural heritage in their own national museums, but do not question the ethical basis for human remains being on display, as in other repatriation claims. Egyptian museums display human remains that have been repatriated from European museums, in highly explicit ways; repatriation activists from other cultural contexts would find the same methods troubling if applied to remains related to their own heritage.<sup>166</sup> The 2018 opening of the Grand Egyptian Museum, which presented the funerary remains associated with King Tutankhamun's tomb in their entirety, aimed to depict Tutankhamun's grave in an "incredibly realistic manner" that "enable[d] visitors to experience the tomb just as it was."<sup>167</sup> The exhibit even featured "intimate glimpses into his life" such as the bodies of Tutankhamun's two stillborn daughters.<sup>168</sup> This display is distinctive in that it is intended to "welcome guests from all over the world," but it is primarily geared for the "new Egyptian generations to [have] pride in their ancient culture."<sup>169</sup>

The Ethiopian government acted on similarly nationalist principles when displaying the fossilized bones of a female *Australopithecus afarensis* individual, says Zeray Alemseged, the paleoanthropologist who discovered this specimen.<sup>170</sup> This early human ancestor who lived around 3.3 million years ago was received with great pride by Ethiopian government officials, so much so

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<sup>165</sup> "Egypt Uncovers Chamber of Mummies, Sees Life for Tourism," *Reuters*, May 13, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-archaeology-discovery-idUSKBN1890F8>.

<sup>166</sup> Jodi Simkin, *Klahoose and Repatriation*.

<sup>167</sup> Allison Keyes, "For the First Time, All 5,000 Objects Found Inside King Tut's Tomb Will Be Displayed Together," *Smithsonian Magazine*, accessed January 23, 2020, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/grand-egyptian-museum-next-big-thing-180961333/>.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> Alemseged, "Selam and Ethiopian Nationalism," in-person interview by the author, November 13, 2019.

that Alemseged was asked to meet with US President Obama as a national representative.<sup>171</sup> Today, “Selam,” along with her fellow *A. afarensis* fossil Lucy, resides in the National Museum of Ethiopia in Addis Ababa. Together, the fossils in the exhibit trace the story of the biological and cultural evolution of the Ethiopian people.<sup>172</sup> From colonialist to nationalist motivations, the ideologies and narratives underlying the display of human remains have shifted, but the cultural and scientific imperatives to display those remains have not wavered.

The practice of displaying human remains long predates the anthropology museum, and has played a role in the spiritual, religious, and entertainment practices of numerous human groups over time. Scientific inquiry into human evolution and history, arising in conjunction with colonialist ideals of racial superiority, later put human bodies from colonized communities on display in the museum context. These bodies were taken from all over the world, and displayed publicly in institutions like the Field Museum. In the 1960s, ethical concerns surrounding spirituality and ancestral connection to the dead, as well as concerns with the consent of the deceased to be displayed, resurfaced with the repatriation movement. In the wake of this movement, the colonialist nature of anthropological museum collection has come to the forefront of discussion. Museums are starting to acknowledge that when the viewer sees a body on display, they are seeing more than an object for study; visitors are witnessing an individual as well as hundreds of years of scientific history, cultural specificity, and colonial influence.

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<sup>171</sup> Alemseged, "Selam and Ethiopian Nationalism."

<sup>172</sup> "The National Museum of Ethiopia in Addis Ababa," accessed January 30, 2020, [https://independent-travellers.com/ethiopia/addis\\_ababa/national\\_museum/](https://independent-travellers.com/ethiopia/addis_ababa/national_museum/).



## IV. Museums and Spectacle: Science versus the “Edutainment Extravaganza”

The previous section illustrated the recurrence of tensions between entertainment and education in the display of human remains. From public dissections in early anatomy schools, to the freak shows, Egyptian mummy un-wrappings, and cabinets of curiosity in the 1800s, to *Body Worlds* in the modern context, there have been numerous instances of intersection between spectacle and science in the history of human remains display. In the context of the anthropology museum, these tensions between entertainment and education are especially prominent, as museums like the Field navigate the threshold between these two modes of public engagement. Investigating this tension points to a dilemma over what the museum should be: a place for the sophisticated elite to engage in serious science, or a place that caters to popular interests?

### a. Public Participation in Gilded Age Archaeology

In the late nineteenth century in the United States, the scientific community contributed to and fed off of the public’s persistent curiosity with racial distinctions. Museums encouraged members of the public to “collect” human remains<sup>173</sup> and donate them to museums, promoting an atmosphere where public enthusiasm for collection<sup>174</sup> contributed to the science of the day. Drawing on the long precedent of displaying human remains, archaeological discoveries such as mummies discovered in 1875 in the Aleutian Islands were publicly displayed as of “momentous interest,” both to the “scientific world” and to the average citizen.<sup>175</sup> These human remains, and others like them,

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<sup>173</sup> For an extended narrative about amateur collectors/ grave robbers’ contributions to anthropology museums, refer to Redman’s history in *Bone Rooms* of how Native bodies killed in American military conflicts with Native peoples, as well as other buried native remains, were added to the collections of the Army Medical Museum, which were later transferred to the Smithsonian between 1900 and 1904 (p.35, p. 53)

<sup>174</sup> In 2020, this “collection” might be more commonly characterized as “grave-robbing”

<sup>175</sup> “Alaskan Mummies; What Capt. Hennig Found in the Aleutian Islands- The New York Times,” accessed February 25, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/1875/01/18/archives/alaskan-mummies-what-capt-hennig-found-in-the-aleutian-islands-an.html>.

received great newspaper attention and were displayed in popular exhibitions, most notably the first World's Fair in the United States, the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.<sup>176</sup> Semi-fictionalized accounts of Southwest prehistory such as *The Delight Makers, Some Strange Corners of Our Country*, and *The Land of the Cliff Dweller* enjoyed great popularity in the 1890s, further fueling interest in the mummies of the southwest.<sup>177</sup> In this context, human remains became a significant attraction, presented as “scientific commodities” and “tools for solving riddles connected to race and time.”<sup>178</sup> The public read about scientific specimens in newspapers and fiction, which strengthened their eagerness to see the bodies in person.

However, the “scientific” display of human remains sometimes had a tenuous connection to scientific research. Showmen and entrepreneurs such as P.T. Barnum sought to cash in on scientific cachet by presenting historical and pseudoscientific ideas about human remains in dramatized contexts.<sup>179</sup> In the *North American Review*, Barnum proposed an exhibition of the mummy of the Egyptian pharaoh Rameses II; Rameses was a villain in the Old Testament, so Barnum believed that Americans would rush to “know the countenance of the despot.”<sup>180</sup> He also sought to profit off the “marvel” that was the science of embalming, proposing to purchase the “corpse of the King” for a sum of \$100,000. He hoped the crowds of paying customers at the World's Columbian Exhibition would eagerly bring him an excellent return on investment.<sup>181</sup> Barnum's proposal integrated attention-grabbing headlines, and a heady mixture of showmanship mixed with snippets of education intended to draw in large crowds with morbid curiosity.<sup>182</sup> Although Barnum died before

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<sup>176</sup> Redman, *Bone Rooms*, 18.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>180</sup> Scott, “P. T. Barnum's ‘What the Fair Should Be,’” *Chicago's 1893 World's Fair* (blog), December 31, 2017, <https://worldsfairchicago1893.com/2017/12/31/p-t-barnums-what-the-fair-should-be/>.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Redman, *Bone Rooms*, 36.

the fair, numerous other exhibitions of Egyptian mummies throughout the nineteenth century became highly profitable enterprises.<sup>183</sup>

When archaeological discoveries of human remains were found closer to home, rather than the glamorous but distant Egyptian Kings, small townships took the opportunity to display them publicly, before they headed to anthropological museums in large metropolitan areas.<sup>184</sup> Around 1904, a Forest Service employee found a small mummified body in Gila country, Arizona. The body was displayed in the drug store window of a nearby town for “a couple of days” before it was sent on to the Smithsonian.<sup>185</sup> In 1892 Durango, Colorado, newspapers boasted of free local exhibitions of mummies of remarkable caliber, containing “ten mummified bodies and eighteen or more skulls some with hair on them in a good state of preservation.”<sup>186</sup> One gloated, “it is questionable, indeed, wether [sic] the Smithsonian Institute in Washington possesses so complete and varied a collection of relics of an extinct race.”<sup>187</sup> These exhibitions also emphasized the scientific value of their content, arguing they provide “abundant food for study and investigation.”<sup>188</sup> In Gilded Age America, contributing to the science behind displays of human remains was often a source of regional pride.

#### **b. The World’s Columbian Exhibition: The Field Museum as a “Memory of the Fair”**

Returning to the much larger stage of the World’s Columbian Exposition, the 1893 fair in Chicago was one of the most significant cultural events in the development of American

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<sup>183</sup> SJ Wolfe and Robert Singerman, *Mummies in Nineteenth Century America: Ancient Egyptians as Artifacts* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009).

<sup>184</sup> Redman, *Bone Rooms*, 43.

<sup>185</sup> Redman, 43, see note p. 304.

<sup>186</sup> “Relics of an Extinct Race: Magnificent Collection of Mr. McLoyd’s Now on Free Exhibition in This City,” April 1892.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

anthropology museums. In the years leading up to the fair, Frederic Ward Putnam, a curator at the Peabody Museum at Harvard, and influential anthropologist Franz Boas organized as many as one hundred collectors to amass objects and bodies for display.<sup>189</sup> In addition, the fair featured indigenous people from around the world, coaxed into attendance as part of anthropological “exhibits” primarily by independent entrepreneurs.<sup>190</sup> The indigenous people in the displays were marketed as “savages,” and asked to reconstruct traditional villages and dress styles, sometimes accompanied by human skeletal remains and mummies. These exhibits introduced an unprecedented number of visitors to the emerging fields of physical anthropology and archaeology, as newspaper recordings boasted of the vast multitude of attendees, “peerless in history,” exceeding 713,646 in a single day.<sup>191</sup> Exhibits at the fair underscored ideas of racial hierarchies in scientific terms, using the skeletons and living human beings on display as evidence for racial classification theories.<sup>192</sup> In these displays of both living and deceased bodies, the portrayal of indigenous people as primitive reinforced race as a “classifiable and seemingly static lens for fairgoers to interpret humanity.”<sup>193</sup>

Following the Exposition, the state of Illinois chartered a new natural history museum to house the artifacts left in the wake of the 1893 fair, the Columbian Museum of Chicago. Local business magnate Marshall Fields donated one million dollars towards the collection, and so the museum was soon renamed the Field Columbian Museum, in his honor.<sup>194</sup> The name continued to evolve, becoming the Field Museum of Natural History in 1905, renamed the Chicago Natural

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<sup>189</sup> Redman, *Bone Rooms*, 44.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> “Chicago Tribune 10 Oct 1893 Record Columbian Expo Attendance Previous Day. - Newspapers.Com,” accessed February 25, 2020, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/24430301/chicago-tribune-10-oct-1893record/>.

<sup>192</sup> Redman, *Bone Rooms*, 45.

<sup>193</sup> Redman, 45.

<sup>194</sup> “Museum History,” accessed February 25, 2020, <https://www.fieldmuseum.org/about/history>.

History Museum in 1943, later reverting to the Field Museum in 1966.<sup>195</sup> At its opening, the *Chicago Times* lauded the exhibition for being “like a memory of the fair.”<sup>196</sup> Its anthropology collection was especially groundbreaking, curated by “America’s most influential anthropologist” at the time, Franz Boas.<sup>197</sup> Since its establishment during the world’s fair, the museum’s collection continued to grow, surpassing the available space in the Palace of Fine Art structure in Hyde Park.<sup>198</sup> In 1921, the Field Museum moved to its current location Grant Park. Thereafter, the museum has only increased in cultural and scientific prominence. The anthropology collection alone has grown to over 1.5 million artifacts.<sup>199</sup> And the museum currently employs more than 150 researchers who go on expeditions worldwide, conveying their findings about human culture through publications, exhibitions, and public programs.<sup>200</sup> Now one of the world’s most established institutions of natural history, surpassed only by the Smithsonian and possibly the American Museum in “size, influence, and prestige,” the Field Museum has been a site of developing narratives in the arc of museum anthropology, and communicating those narratives to the public.<sup>201</sup>

### **c. An Obligation to Educate: Visitor Engagement at the Field**

In its early decades, the “museum men” at the Field felt an obligation to educate the public, yet they did not make a point of specifically catering to that audience.<sup>202</sup> Early programs, popular

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<sup>195</sup> Ed Yastrow and Stephen E. Nash, eds., “Henry Field, Collections, and Exhibit Development, 1926-1941,” in *Curators, Collections, and Contexts: Anthropology at the Field Museum, 1893-2002* (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 2003), 7.

<sup>196</sup> Steven Conn, “Field Museum,” Chicago Historical Society, accessed February 25, 2020, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/450.html>.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> This is now the site of the Museum of Science and Industry.

<sup>199</sup> “Collection And Research,” accessed February 25, 2020, <https://www.fieldmuseum.org/science/research>.

<sup>200</sup> “Collection & Research FAQs,” Field Museum, accessed February 25, 2020, <https://www.fieldmuseum.org/science/research>.

<sup>201</sup> Conn, “Field Museum.”

<sup>202</sup> Donald Collier and Harry S. Jr Tschopik, “The Role of Museums in American Anthropology,” in *Curators, Collections, and Contexts: Anthropology at the Field Museum, 1893–2002*, 2003, 25.

lectures, and publications served educational purposes, but museum exhibits were displayed with a maximum of specimens and a minimum of interpretation.<sup>203</sup> These exhibits were more like open storage, with chronological and geographical labels; viewers were meant to use an “empirical approach” to study the exhibits and draw their own conclusions.<sup>204</sup> The museum’s curators made little attempt at differentiating between the professional or public viewer, with “no concessions to the limits of interest and attention span of the average visitor.”<sup>205</sup>

This lack of concern for viewer engagement is in direct contrast to the approach exhibitions managers at the Field Museum use today. Capturing the interest of the viewing public is paramount. Current exhibitions project manager Janet Hong, who has worked on several exhibitions containing human remains during her 17 years at the Field, explains the modern museum’s public-centric approach. Hong draws on “a whole field of studies of public behavior, for instance in shopping malls, or amusement parks, that tries to encourage certain behaviors” in designing exhibits.<sup>206</sup> While a shopping mall might be trying to elicit a purchase, the Field Museum uses those same principles to prompt viewers to learn something onsite, talk amongst themselves, and engage in future research about a particular concept. The Field Museum pays great attention to the “flow” of the exhibit, and generally “resorts to an Aristotelian narrative structure with a beginning, middle and end,” attempting to anticipate viewer’s reception and reactions to the presentation throughout. Exhibition managers use a “star object” as the starting point of their production; they try to identify an artifact that will “have an immediate attraction” for visitors. In many cases, that could be an element with emotional resonance, such as the Egyptian mummy on permanent display. However,

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<sup>203</sup> Collier and Tschopik, “The Role of Museums in American Anthropology,” 25.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Janet Hong, “Exhibitions Today at the Field Museum,” December 24, 2019.

in the case of human remains, Hong is careful to emphasize that a significant amount of cultural consultation goes into the decisions regarding the display of such an “object.”

Now, the Field Museum draws a sharp distinction between academic and public uses of the collections. Long gone are the days of “open storage,” where amateurs and academics alike viewed the same collections without interpretive guidance. According to Curator of Biological Anthropology from 2001 to 2013 Dr. Robert Martin, human remains are kept in a separate locked room, and access is granted only to “bona fide research workers,” who must submit a research proposal for approval before their visit.<sup>207</sup> Who can see human remains at the Field Museum, which bodies can be displayed there, and for what reasons, has shifted with an increase in museum professionalization as well as an increase in societal awareness of the ethical issues associated with human remains display. This shift indicates a more careful control of the narratives in public exhibitions at the Field. Due to the increasing role exhibitions staff and curators play in guiding the public’s engagement with science, it is increasingly critical to examine the perspectives of those who create the displays, and the motives behind which bodies are displayed, and which are absent.

#### **d. Money, Mummies, and “Edutainment Extravaganzas”**

The public’s growing influence within the Field Museum raises another issue of ethical ambiguity with regards to the display of human remains and potential financial motives in presentation. Field Museum curator Donald Collier, in the 1940s, reflected that “most museums are becoming increasingly dependent upon public support,” and acknowledged that museums have vested financial interests in their collections and exhibits.<sup>208</sup> He elaborated that a major challenge of museum displays is something of a negative feedback loop due to the time lag between the planning

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<sup>207</sup> Robert Martin, “Human Remains Curation at the Field Museum,” email correspondence, February 7, 2020.

<sup>208</sup> Collier and Tschopik, “The Role of Museums in American Anthropology,” 27.

and execution of exhibits. There is a high cost to renew exhibits, which rapidly become obsolete, in turn failing to draw an audience after the novelty wears off, resulting in lesser profits and a consistent lack of money within the museum.<sup>209</sup> Consequently, “exhibits can never pay for themselves.”<sup>210</sup> Hong corroborates this perspective from a modern standpoint, saying “our exhibits don’t make money, they don’t make a profit,” which is why the museum must be supported from the donations of philanthropic foundations, federal support, and fundraising campaigns.<sup>211</sup>

Human remains exhibits, such as the 2012 *Opening the Vault: Mummies* which displayed the remains of over 20 mummified individuals from Peru and Egypt, can be a major popular draw, as noted by Robbins.<sup>212</sup> Human remains are undeniably “star objects,” garnering public engagement. The “Mummies” exhibit alone registered over 165,000 viewers in 2 months, charging \$29 per (adult) head.<sup>213</sup> The exhibit toured nationally, and was presumed by journalists to seriously “bolster the bottom line” of the Field Museum’s coffers.<sup>214</sup> Though ultimately the Field Museum does not currently -- and may have never -- profited significantly from the display of human remains, the museum is dependent upon the good opinion, support, and engagement of the public, donors, and lawmakers for its survival. It is undeniable that viewing mummies is massively popular, and therefore contributes to the museum’s financial wellbeing.

Curator Dr. Robert Martin dismisses it as “immaterial” whether a display is freely available, or accessible only after an admission fee is paid, so long as the display is “respectful and educational.”<sup>215</sup> Yet there has long been a tension between educationally-driven and entertainment- or profit-driven exhibition styles in museum display. To tease apart this issue, Hong differentiates

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<sup>209</sup> Collier and Tschopik, “The Role of Museums in American Anthropology,” 27.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>211</sup> Janet Hong, “Exhibitions Today at the Field Museum.”

<sup>212</sup> Helen Robbins, “Repatriation at the Field Museum,” November 22, 2019.

<sup>213</sup> Johnson, “A First Look at the New ‘Mummies’ at the Field Museum.”

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Robert Martin, “Human Remains Curation at the Field Museum,” February 7, 2020.



between two models of exhibition: the principled educational museum versus the “edutainment extravaganza,” much akin to a sideshow.<sup>216</sup>

Hong suggests that the World’s Columbian Exposition, with its sensationalism and showmanship, was a clear example of an “edutainment extravaganza.” However, the Field Museum itself was a clear successor of the 1893 World’s Fair, blurring those distinctions. The very same bodies from the World’s Fair were dredged from the Field Museum archives for display during the *Opening the Vault: Mummies* exhibit, albeit in a scientifically-focused manner with revelations about new CT-Scanning technology for non-invasive mummy visualizations.<sup>217</sup> Although *Mummies* was exceptionally well-received by the viewing public, some activists and indigenous repatriation specialists were frustrated by the display. Jodi Simkin, the Director of Cultural Affairs and Heritage at the Klahoose First Nation, an indigenous group in Canada which seeks to repatriate the remains of their ancestors from museums internationally, said on the topic:

Mummies are big business in the museum industry. We take great pains to bring traveling exhibits like *Mummies* from the Field Museum, which as you probably know allows a 3-dimensional look inside the mummies, and the belongings that accompanied them. This was a temporary exhibit that toured, visiting I think four or five major communities -- that, to me, is *horrific!* And I mean, I get it, I get that people have an interest in that, but the idea that we have exhumed someone’s remains, and put them on display... that just doesn’t sit well with me. I think, if that were my ancestor, or my relation, how devastating that would be...we have to steer away from that. And yet at the same time, we have great prestige associated with those kinds of exhibits.<sup>218</sup>

Simkin believes that no deceased person should be displayed without their consent, regardless of when that person lived or the political situation surrounding the display. Simkin’s reaction to *Mummies* reveals that what to some perspectives seems unambiguously “respectful and educational,” to others may be “horrific,” and the subtle boundaries between respectable museum practice and “edutainment extravaganza” shift with the tides of public opinion.

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<sup>216</sup> Janet Hong, Exhibitions Today at the Field Museum.

<sup>217</sup> Johnson, “A First Look at the New ‘Mummies’ at the Field Museum.”

<sup>218</sup> Jodi Simkin, Klahoose and Repatriation.

The most glaring instance of an “edutainment extravaganza,” as Hong mentions, is the ever-popular series of *Body Worlds* exhibitions that have toured worldwide since 1995, recently breaking 50 million visitors and making it the “most successful traveling exhibition of all time.”<sup>219</sup> *Body Worlds* features the plastinated bodies of deceased people, most of them donors. These presentations add a “gloss of scientization to the dead,” while encouraging visitors to emotionally engage with health education aims and the concept of death.<sup>220</sup> Though *Body Worlds* is anatomically- rather than anthropologically-focused, plastination, a process patented in 1977 where body fats and fluids are replaced by plastic, is certainly a modern mummification process.<sup>221</sup> And to a greater extent than *Mummies* via the Field Museum, this exhibit has been featured in numerous science and natural history museums worldwide. From a business standpoint, *Body Worlds* as a concept has managed to conquer both the museum and popular entertainment market, selling tickets not only in accredited museums but also in spinoffs at places like the Luxor Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. Before showing the exhibit, museum administrators voiced concerns that the public would be scandalized by seeing real human bodies on display, but contrary to their expectations, *Body Worlds* revealed an “almost insatiable thirst” for seeing the dead “scientized.”<sup>222</sup>

Controversially, in 2004, *Body Worlds* was implicated in a scandal over the sourcing of the bodies in its exhibits. On 22 Jan 2004, German anatomist Gunther von Hagens, the anatomist responsible for the showcases, agreed to return seven plastinated corpses to China, admitting that those and other bodies used in his exhibitions of human remains “might have” come from executed prisoners.<sup>223</sup> Von Hagens ran a plastination center in China, and at least two corpses out of the 647

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<sup>219</sup> “The Philosophy behind BODY WORLDS.”

<sup>220</sup> Redman, “Reconsidering Body Worlds.”

<sup>221</sup> “The Philosophy behind BODY WORLDS.”

<sup>222</sup> Redman, “Reconsidering Body Worlds.”

<sup>223</sup> Luke Harding, “Von Hagens Forced to Return Corpses to China,” *The Guardian*, January 23, 2004, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/jan/23/arts.china>.

in storage were revealed to "have bullet holes in their skulls."<sup>224</sup> When newspaper Der Spiegel leaked the correspondence between von Hagens and his Chinese lab manager, it was revealed that those corpses corresponded to systematic executions of Falun Gong prisoners. Lending credibility to the charge, Von Hagens's plastination center was close to three prison camps which house political detainees and Falun Gong practitioners, where dissidents are executed by shots to the head. Von Hagens was also accused of buying the remains of prisoners, homeless, and mentally ill people in Russia. However, he maintained that "all the people who appear in his exhibition had signed releases prior to their death."<sup>225</sup> This controversy places into question the role of profit in sourcing bodies for exhibit and raises ethical concerns over how consent for exhibition can be obtained. As discussed in previous sections of this paper, historical museum displays were in many cases sourced through colonialist enterprises and efforts that are often seen now as "grave robbery." Controversies surrounding *Body Worlds* demonstrate that ethical dilemmas over the sourcing of human remains are far from a problem of the past.

This discussion of the role of money in popular public exhibitions is not intended to imply that to showcase mummified remains, with its associated financial benefits, is inherently wrong or morally suspect. Rather, investigating the lingering controversies associated with this practice can be productive in revealing ethical debates, where the edges of contemporary public opinion lie, and how these conversations have shifted over time. As historian of human remains collection Samuel Redman says, "follow the money and there's usually an interesting answer."<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Harding, "Von Hagens Forced to Return Corpses to China."

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Redman, "Anthropology, the Field Museum, and Human Prehistory."

#### **e. Paleoart at the Field: Scientific Narrative, Race, and Representations of Humanity**

A rapidly evolving way in which human remains have interacted with the public at the Field has not been through the physical presentation of bones and flesh, but through the representation of the bodies of long-deceased individuals via sculptural art. These displays seldom contain the actual human remains they are based upon, and as such, do not involve the same ethical considerations as the displays previously discussed. Yet they occupy a similar conceptual space, as they embody, capture, and present the essence of humanity to support a scientific narrative in flux. The ideas of scientific racism and primitivism, which previously made the anthropological collection and display of the physical remains of indigenous people socially acceptable, are reflected in this sculptural art.<sup>227</sup> Displays like the Hall of the Races of Mankind, at the Field from 1934 to 1968, make explicit a facet of past educational aims of anthropology in the natural history museum: to educate the public in racial theory.<sup>228</sup> Yet the changes in sculptural portrayals of humans at the Field Museum over time reveal shifts in anthropological narrative. The discipline has moved from a fixation on racial differentiations in modern humans seen in the Hall of Races of Mankind, to later displays of evolutionary lineage among prehistoric humans. Illustrating this trend, the Field Museum displayed a notable exhibit of human “paleoart,” or artistic representations of prehistory, even before the term was coined in the late 1890s: the Hall of Prehistoric Man, a popular public exhibition from 1933 to 1988.<sup>229</sup> The integration of paleoart and public education continues with the reconstruction of *A. afarensis* Selam, currently on display in the Evolving Planet exhibit.<sup>230</sup>

The Hall of the Races of Mankind was conceived when Henry Field<sup>231</sup> approached sculptor Malvina Hoffman<sup>232</sup> in the late 1920s to produce “morphologically accurate and emotionally

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<sup>227</sup> “Looking at Ourselves: Rethinking the Sculptures of Malvina Hoffman | Field Museum,” accessed April 21, 2020, <https://www.fieldmuseum.org/exhibitions/looking-ourselves-rethinking-sculptures-malvina-hoffman>.

<sup>228</sup> Ed Yastrow and Stephen E. Nash, “Henry Field, Collections, and Exhibit Development, 1926-1941,” in *Curators, Collections, and Contexts: Anthropology at the Field Museum*, 2003, 130.

expressive” life-sized figures representing the “155 racial types.”<sup>233</sup> The plan was winnowed down to 20 full-length figures, 27 life-size busts, and 100 life-size heads. For the fee of \$109,000 plus travel expenses, Hoffman would travel the world to scientifically observe all the “human types” featured in her work.<sup>234</sup> The wildly popular sculptures, unveiled in 1934, did not focus on the remains of individuals, but worked from living populations, striving to capture the likeness or essence of each race. The exhibit was displayed until 1968, by which time the “concept of race had become anathema to anthropologists.”<sup>235</sup> Though not strictly depicting human prehistory, this exhibit was part of the previous narrative of “primitivism,” demonstrating how certain races were more representative of “original man” than others, and thus, represented a static narrative vision of racial hierarchy. Today, the exhibit has been reconfigured and given a new narrative, as *Looking at Ourselves: Rethinking the Sculptures of Malvina Hoffman*.<sup>236</sup> Curators now encourage the viewer to consider the individuality of the subjects: they searched Hoffman’s notes for names, and where those were unspecified, did their best to ascribe each sculpture to an ethnic group within the exhibit.<sup>237</sup>

The Hall of Prehistoric Man, featuring real bones of prehistoric humans like the 15,000-year-old Magdalenian Girl side by side with life-size models of human ancestors, portrayed an early concept of evolution that conflated biological evolution, cultural “advances” towards European

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<sup>229</sup> Ansón, Marco, Fernández, Manuel H., and Ramos, Pedro A. S., “Paleoart: Term and Conditions (A Survey among Paleontologists),” accessed March 9, 2020, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275408446\\_Paleoart\\_Term\\_and\\_Conditions\\_A\\_survey\\_among\\_paleontologists](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275408446_Paleoart_Term_and_Conditions_A_survey_among_paleontologists).

<sup>230</sup> Ed Yastrow and Stephen E. Nash, “Henry Field, Collections, and Exhibit Development, 1926-1941,” p. 49 in *Curators, Collections, and Contexts: Anthropology at the Field Museum*, 2003, 135.

<sup>231</sup> Nephew to museum benefactor Marshall Field, and former curator of anthropology at the Field.

<sup>232</sup> For a nuanced and fascinating analysis of Hoffman’s contributions to the Field Museum’s racial typologies, see Tracy Lang Teslow’s “Reifying Race: Science and art in Races of Mankind at the Field Museum of Natural History,” in *The Politics of Display: Museums, Science, Culture*.

<sup>233</sup> Yastrow and Nash, “Henry Field, Collections, and Exhibit Development,” 131.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>236</sup> “Looking at Ourselves: Rethinking the Sculptures of Malvina Hoffman.”

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

society, and technological “progress.”<sup>238</sup> In the late 1920s, Henry Field approached sculptor Fredrick C. Blaschke to begin modeling realistic paleoart of known prehistoric humans, stressing that they capture the daily rituals of past people to illustrate societal along with evolutionary progress. Starting with *Homo erectus*, the earliest-known human ancestor at the time, these model hominids were arranged in dioramas featuring real tools obtained from archaeological contexts.<sup>239</sup> This exhibit was finished shortly after the acquisition of the skeleton of the Magdalenian Girl, then thought to be the only prehistoric skeleton in the United States.<sup>240</sup> Upon drawing an audience of 22,000 on a preview opening day to see “miss Cro-Magnon,” the Museum Director could “hardly believe his eyes.”<sup>241</sup> Field remarked that this was the “first exhibit to capture the public and press imagination” so thoroughly, and thus, encouraged the President and Board of Trustees to financially support the ongoing lifelike murals.<sup>242</sup> Once installed in 1933, this exhibit remained virtually unchanged for 55 years.<sup>243</sup> By 1988, however, it became clear that the exhibit was dated; certain cultural and chronological terms were “no longer in favor,” and some countries had been renamed, so the exhibit was dismantled permanently.

The modern successor of this paleoart exhibit is the replica of Selam, a juvenile *A. afarensis* specimen, found at Dikika, Ethiopia in 2000 by paleoanthropologist Zeray Alemseged. Selam’s bones are currently on display in Ethiopia, but in collaboration with French paleoartist Élisabeth Daynès, Zeray worked to create a lifelike reconstruction of what Selam might have looked like when she lived 3.3 million years ago. Élisabeth elaborated on this process, saying her sculptural work is the result of “uninterrupted dialogue” with scientists, anatomists, anthropologists,

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<sup>238</sup> Yastrow and Nash, “Henry Field, Collections, and Exhibit Development,” 135.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>240</sup> Yastrow and Nash, “Henry Field, Collections, and Exhibit Development,” 137.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

paleopathologists, and paleogeneticists to provide the most lifelike vision of the individual possible.<sup>244</sup> She begins her work with the original cranium and bones, ensuring that these remains are as complete as possible, then making a detailed cast. If the remains are fragmented, she works with laboratories like Zeray's to digitally reconstruct the bones, then "materializes it" using stereo laser lithography.<sup>245</sup> From the fossil, she uses forensic techniques to put together an "identity card" of the subject, comprising, among other factors, the age at death, sex, pathologies, diet, and living conditions of the hominid. Daynès uses this information, as well as references to other hominids, to inform her vision of the individual as she "fleshes out" its body, although she acknowledges the more the paleoartist "moves away" from the bone structure, the more the likeness becomes subjective and interpretive.

Daynès and Alemseged place great theoretical importance behind the depiction of prehistoric humans, and their presentation to the public. Daynès's representations of prehistoric man viscerally demonstrate to modern audiences that in the past, "many different humanities coexisted."<sup>246</sup> Each reconstruction is a "synthesis of knowledge on the origins of man."<sup>247</sup> She tries to make these representations as scientifically accurate as possible, but even more so, she seeks to create a "face-to-face meeting between these individuals and the public," so they can experience the incredible feeling of looking into the eyes of someone who lived millions of years ago.<sup>248</sup> The precision and details she puts into creating a human likeness serve to generate "empathy and understanding" to guide the public to "be sensitive to the human family" and "question our origins."<sup>249</sup> Alemseged believes that displaying paleoart allows visitors to "communicate with their

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<sup>244</sup> Élisabeth Daynès, "Paleoart and Selam," Email correspondence, March 9, 2020.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Élisabeth Daynès, "Paleoart and Selam,"

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

ancestors,” giving them an “enriched passion” and prompting scientific curiosity. He notes that people naturally point to themselves, then their family and friends, in photographs, so presenting Selam as a human encourages the viewer to relate themselves to her as a part of the story of human evolution. From there, he says, people can envision our situation as a species within deep time, and understand the place of homo sapiens within the broader biodiversity of our planet.<sup>250</sup>

Paleoart at the Field Museum has helped to construct scientific narratives of how humans relate to each other and their place on Earth. The Hall of the Races of Mankind displayed racial archetypes in the form of realistic bodies, for the viewer to envision themselves in comparison. The Hall of Prehistoric Man used the bodies of hominins to create a racially-influenced narrative of progression of human society. Evolving Planet uses Selam and Lucy to present humanity as a small part of a long human evolutionary lineage. Tracing the shifts in these narratives sheds light on changing perspectives in what forms of knowledge are deemed suitable to educate the public.

#### **f. The Role of Remains in Science Education**

A primary objective of human remains exhibits in museums has been to satisfy human’s longstanding curiosity about our histories, our mortalities, our origins, and our identities. This curiosity is what has driven the persistent popularity of these displays.<sup>251</sup> It might be easy to dismiss the desire to see the remains of the dead as something morbid, perverse, or voyeuristic, but as Hong says, “I don’t think people should be denigrated for being titillated by things they don’t know.”<sup>252</sup> “Even to the most nihilistic isolationist human being,” says Robbins, “contemplation is important, [as is] that knowledge [the viewer] can get from the human body about who [their ancestors] were,

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<sup>250</sup> Alemseged, “Selam and Ethiopian Nationalism.”

<sup>251</sup> Redman, Anthropology, the Field Museum, and Human Prehistory.

<sup>252</sup> Janet Hong, Exhibitions Today at the Field Museum, video conference, December 24, 2019.



or what they did.”<sup>253</sup> Seeing the human body displayed in an anthropological setting provides a unique opportunity for the viewer to reflect on their humanity, an opportunity which many museumgoers crave.

In fact, paleoanthropologist Alemseged says that evoking the viewer’s “scientific curiosity” and their “nostalgic curiosity” through displaying human remains can be used as a tool to make museumgoers think.<sup>254</sup> When we think about ourselves, Alemseged says, “we are dealing with a very symbolic species; *Homo sapiens* love to imagine,” so the best way to encourage reflection is to have viewers look at “something that’s part of them.” To Alemseged, displaying human remains harnesses the psychological mechanism of humans to relate themselves to the things they see, in order to convey a scientific message to “present the public with the data that they need to understand where they come from.” But Robbins also stresses the responsibility of the museum to emphasize scientific accuracy, musing “If you portray an *Australopithecus* riding around on a Tasmanian devil... that’s unethical.”<sup>255</sup> Gurche takes this farther, emphasizing that the museum has an obligation to the public to demonstrate that evolution is more than a “fantasy” concocted by some scientist, but rather, a concept that can be witnessed through the viewer’s own experience. Alemseged believes that communicating a scientific understanding of where we come from could not only foster personal relationships with the past, but also be critical to the survival of our species, because understanding how we relate to the broader biodiversity, and environment of the planet will ultimately impact the questions we ask and decisions we make going forward.

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<sup>253</sup> Helen Robbins, Repatriation at the Field Museum.

<sup>254</sup> Alemseged, “Selam and Ethiopian Nationalism.”

<sup>255</sup> Helen Robbins, “Repatriation at the Field Museum.”

## **V. Authority and the Construction of Museum Narratives**

A unifying theme throughout sections II and III is the ongoing controversy over who defines the narrative in human remains display, and who has the power to make decisions for, and to own, these bodies. As established in section II, debates surrounding the ownership of human remains have intense emotional and historical resonance, impacting numerous parties. To understand the authority-making process within the museum, this section returns to the repatriation debate with the case study of Kennewick Man. This case makes explicit the roles of ownership that claimants stake in debates over human remains display, and exposes the “crisis of cultural authority” within the museum, to consider the ways museum narratives are under contention.

### **a. Ownership in Scientific Research**

The growing power of the repatriation movement has sparked intense debates surrounding ownership of human remains in scientific research. The most consequential dispute of this sort centers around Kennewick Man, or The Ancient One, a drawn-out battle in the courts between scientists and indigenous groups over the rights to the body of a 9,000-year-old prehistoric Paleoamerican man found in Kennewick, Washington in 1996.<sup>256</sup> The Umatilla people and a coalition of other tribes, citing their cultural beliefs, laid claim to the remains for reburial under NAGPRA. While the owners of the land, United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) agreed with the Umatilla, archaeologists James Chatters and Douglas Owsley, backed by the Smithsonian, filed a lawsuit arguing for the right of scientists to study Kennewick Man.<sup>257</sup> The scientists argued that the ancient bones were at best distantly related to modern Native Americans, and had features

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<sup>256</sup> “Kennewick Man Skeletal Find May Revolutionize Continent’s History,” ScienceDaily, accessed March 9, 2020, <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2006/04/060425183740.htm>.

<sup>257</sup> Douglas Preston, “The Kennewick Man Finally Freed to Share His Secrets,” Smithsonian Magazine, accessed March 9, 2020, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/kennewick-man-finally-freed-share-his-secrets-180952462/>.

resembling the Ainu, indicating common ancestry with seafaring peoples of coastal Asia.<sup>258</sup> The court ruled in 2002 that Kennewick Man was not directly related to any living tribe, ordering USACE make the specimen available to scientists for analysis.<sup>259</sup> In the early 2000s, studies found that meaningful results regarding Kennewick Man's origins could not be obtained via aDNA. Chatters and Owsley used cranial measurements to release, in 2014, a hypothesis that Kennewick Man was related to the seafarers of the Pacific Rim, upturning the previous theory that inhabitants of the Americas arrived via the Bering Land Bridge.<sup>260</sup> However, some scientists challenged this study, as it was not peer-reviewed and utilized antiquated techniques.<sup>261</sup> In 2015, new DNA sequencing methods allowed for updated analysis, showing the presence of mitochondrial haplogroup X2a and Y-chromosome haplogroup Q-M3, found almost exclusively among modern Native Americans.<sup>262</sup> As a result, the remains were ultimately returned to the tribes for reburial on February 17, 2017.<sup>263</sup>

The past cases of repatriation, and particularly the case of Kennewick Man, are revealing in that they distinguish five key claimant groups which recur in numerous other disputes over the ownership of human remains. One is the direct descendants of the individual, such as indigenous groups claiming ancestry or cultural affiliation with the deceased under NAGPRA. A second claimant group is the scientists (archaeologists, anthropologists, geneticists, etc.) who assert their right to study the body to generate knowledge on behalf of all mankind, as with Chatters and Owsley. A third is museums, like the Smithsonian, that affiliate themselves with scientific authority,

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<sup>258</sup> Preston, "The Kennewick Man Finally Freed to Share His Secrets."

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> John Stang, "Burke Archaeologist Challenges Smithsonian over Kennewick Man," Crosscut, November 1, 2012, <https://crosscut.com/2012/11/kennewick-man-critique>.

<sup>262</sup> Morten Rasmussen et al., "The Ancestry and Affiliations of Kennewick Man," *Nature* 523, no. 7561 (July 23, 2015): 455–58, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature14625>.

<sup>263</sup> "Tribes Lay Remains of Kennewick Man to Rest," The Spokesman-Review, February 20, 2017, <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2017/feb/20/tribes-lay-remains-of-kennewick-man-to-rest/>.

lay claim to storing and curating remains, and draw on their institutional and cultural prestige to safeguard those remains. A fourth claimant might be the landowners where the body was found; or more generally, the nation-state to which the body belongs (i.e. the USACE or the US). A final claimant is the lawmakers and courts of the nation to which the body belongs, who have the authority to broker a compromise between other parties.

Generalizing the problem of ownership beyond Kennewick Man, stakeholder's interpretations of "who can own a dead body" vary depending on the claimant group, as well as individual perspective. When asked whether they think that the Field Museum owns the bodies it displays, interview subjects offer differing opinions. When asked if it is theoretically possible to own a human body, Hong, perhaps most affiliated with the museum, confidently replies "yeah," and if the Field Museum owns the bodies it displays, responds definitively, "yes, I do." Robbins, situated between the constraints of the descendants, the scientists, the museum, and the legalities of NAGPRA, takes a more relativistic perspective. She says that "legally the Field Museum does own some bodies... but I think if you ask certain lawyers they will say you cannot own human remains, certainly in Britain under the Human Tissue Act."<sup>264</sup> She elaborates, "in anthropology, certain issues like consent factor in... but maybe the question is not *can* you own a body, but *should* you..."<sup>265</sup> Robbins also acknowledges the theoretical ambiguity of the issue, especially when across different social contexts, ultimately "ownership is just so socially contingent, I really don't think anybody *knows* [if you can own a body]." Simkin, who works with descendants directly, frames this less as an issue of ownership, and more of an issue of belonging: human remains belong at "home" with

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<sup>264</sup> The Human Tissue Act is British legislation from 2004 that regulates removal, storage and use of human tissue, defined as "material that has come from a human body and consists of, or includes, human cells." It creates a new offence of DNA 'theft,' making it unlawful to possess human tissue with the intention of analyzing its DNA, without the consent of the person from whom the tissue came. HTA makes it lawful to take minimum steps to preserve the organs of a deceased person for use in transplantation while determining the wishes of the deceased, or, in the absence of their known wishes, obtaining consent from someone in a qualifying relationship.

<https://www.hta.gov.uk/policies/human-tissue-act-2004>

<sup>265</sup> Helen Robbins, "Repatriation at the Field Museum."

their native communities, and she sees herself as having a profound responsibility to bring these people “who can’t do anything for themselves” back to their relatives so the community can “heal.”<sup>266</sup> Alemseged, as a scientist who navigates political constraints to bring his research to the public, comments that in one sense the Ethiopian government can be said to own the narrative of Selam,<sup>267</sup> a prehistoric individual on display, but in another sense, all of humanity can claim ownership of the story of human evolution illustrated by Selam. From this discussion of claimant status, it seems there is no definitive answer as to which party ultimately owns the body on display, but rather, must be understood as a matter of perspective.

## **b. Crises of Cultural Authority**

These battles over the ownership of museum narrative in human remains display have been so contentious because they are ultimately perspective-based. As sociologist and cultural commentator Tiffany Jenkins argues, the continuous scrutiny and criticism of the museum over the past 50 years has destabilized its legitimacy as an institution.<sup>268</sup> Museums’ traditional source of “cultural authority” stems from their ability to frame and affirm the pursuit of truth, and define what is historically and culturally significant.<sup>269</sup> Adopting ideas of the French revolution, the museum both in Europe and the United States was reconceptualized in the eighteenth century, from artifacts chosen randomly by wealthy collectors, to “rational” public presentations of space and artifacts within a narrative of progress.<sup>270</sup> Museums were “repositories and narrators” of official nationalism.<sup>271</sup> Museum theorist Tony Bennet suggests that opening the museum to the wider public

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<sup>266</sup> Jodi Simkin, “Klahoose and Repatriation.”

<sup>267</sup> An *Australopithecus Afarensis* individual whose remains are on display in Ethiopia, but whose paleoart reconstruction is on display at the Field Museum

<sup>268</sup> Jenkins, *Contesting Human Remains in Museum Collections: The Crisis of Cultural Authority*, 54.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

was a “regulating mechanism” of the state to civilize the working class through exposure to the “pedagogical mores of middle class culture.”<sup>272</sup> Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu emphasizes that museums produce a dominant ideology as state-sponsored cultural institutions, contributing to capitalist society, civic ritual, reproduction of structural inequalities, and ideals of nationhood.<sup>273</sup> However, ideas grounded in postmodern thought, postcolonial studies, and cultural relativism have brought the authority of the museum as an institution into question, and this debate has manifested in the representations of human remains on display within museums.<sup>274</sup> Because the ongoing debates over human remains display have demonstrated fundamental subjectivities in the construction of museum narrative, museums can no longer claim the uncontested objectivity which was once their source of authority.

Philosophical movements, including postmodernism, the “science wars,” feminism, Foucauldian “biopolitics,” and postcolonial theory, all left their mark on human remains displays. The advent of postmodern thinking, which is skeptical of the ideas of “truth” and “progress” previously emphasized in museums like the Field, has shifted the cultural dialogue surrounding displays of human remains.<sup>275</sup> Until the “science wars” of the 1980s, most literature on museums contained reports about exhibitions, with only marginal commentary on the social and educational role of museums.<sup>276</sup> This changed dramatically during the “science wars” where intellectuals critiqued the notion that museums present value-neutral facts, arguing that their narratives are inherently political.<sup>277</sup> Feminist framings of the body as an inherently politicized space, as well as Foucauldian reflections on the way power is exerted by institutions of authority over the body, also

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<sup>272</sup> Tony Bennet, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>273</sup> Jenkins, *Contesting Human Remains in Museum Collections: The Crisis of Cultural Authority*, 57.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>275</sup> Jenkins, *Contesting Human Remains in Museum Collections*, 63.

<sup>276</sup> Nick Merriman, *Beyond the Glass Case: The Past, the Heritage and the Public* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991).

<sup>277</sup> Jenkins, *Contesting Human Remains in Museum Collections*, 63.

called attention to the political ramifications of human remains on display.<sup>278</sup> Further, arguments surrounding human remains display and repatriation took influence from postcolonial theories, which viewed the intersection of culture and science in the museum as no longer universal, but rather a “damaging reflection of the prejudices of European cultures.”<sup>279</sup>

As seen in the social and political successes of the repatriation movement, as well as shifts towards the evolutionary, rather than the racialized “progress-based” narrative in paleoart, the theoretical atmosphere of the museum has fundamentally changed. In spaces where ideals of racial science were once presented as fact, museums have now become sites of contestation surrounding the construction of national histories and representation of cultural groups. Although some museum professionals have not necessarily embraced a sense of cultural relativism or relinquished their claims to position of authority, they have increasingly focused their efforts around the “politics of recognition,” seeking to work with and recognize the cultures of people they portray rather than a singular narrative of truth.<sup>280</sup> At the Field Museum, this approach is evident in the current efforts to rework the Native North America hall featuring indigenous voices and artwork, as well as increased efforts to consult with descendants. To reiterate Robbin’s philosophy, museums like the Field are now increasingly focus on “first asking the questions” so they can display human remains with greater sensitivity and intentionality.<sup>281</sup> These essential questions include: “Who is impacted by the way this science is portrayed?” “Have we consulted with the people represented by this narrative?” And to reflect, “What is the intention and purpose behind these exhibits, and what is ultimately being conveyed to the viewer?”

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<sup>278</sup> Jenkins, *Contesting Human Remains in Museum Collections*, 117.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>281</sup> Helen Robbins, "Repatriation at the Field Museum."

## VI. Concluding Reflections: Deep Time, Ancestors, and Human Relationships

Museum exhibits, whether they are intended to educate, titillate, entertain, or provoke, serve as reflections of what is viewed as worthy of display at a period in time. As a result, analyzing the political, cultural, and ethical backdrops of museum displays has the potential to reveal the biases, influences, and authority-making processes that exist in societies. Museums could be regarded as microcosms of society, but more specifically, they play an important role in disseminating what is seen as truth, which ideas are groundbreaking, and whose perspectives are given more weight. The Field Museum is only a single locus in the complex network of anthropological collections and displays over time, but focusing on its historical trajectory has allowed for the examination of the many micro-histories within each exhibit. This thesis has teased apart, contextualized, and given voice to numerous points of view throughout the history of human remains display, to investigate how museum narratives are constructed, challenged, and changed.

The viewer's relationship to the body on display shifts with the distance in time, in ancestry, and in humanity. The farther back in time, the less the viewer relates to or empathizes with the body on view. The rhetorical argument "how would you feel if *your* grandmother's grave were opened" and her remains put on display, presented by Cheyenne spiritual leader Bill Tall Bull to the US Senate, holds less sway when the person in question is not *anyone's* grandmother, but instead, a very distant ancestor.<sup>282</sup> Cultural differences in terms of how one perceives ancestry may come into play. The Umatilla People laid claim to a prehistoric man as an "Ancient One" based on their spiritual connection to their ancestor, while that belief was not shared by the scientific community. The controversy of Kennewick Man reveals the perception of ancestry as a cultural, and sometimes individual, sentiment.<sup>283</sup> And this relationship is not strictly chronological. Remains that are not as

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<sup>282</sup> Stan Hoig, Paul Rosier, and Ada Elizabeth Deer, *The Cheyenne* (Infobase Publishing, 2009), 100.

<sup>283</sup> Rasmussen et al., "The Ancestry and Affiliations of Kennewick Man."



old as Kennewick Man, like the mummies of ancient Egyptians or Peruvians, are still allowed to remain on display for historical and political reasons.<sup>284</sup> Robbins relates anecdotes of Native Americans visiting the Field to repatriate their ancestors, yet ironically having no qualms about seeing Egyptian mummies.<sup>285</sup> Nonetheless, the emotional gravity of seeing the fossil of a hominin that lived millions of years ago, in contrast with the body of a grandparent, is undeniably weakened.

A philosophically charged consequence of human remains displays is challenging the ways that we relate to deep time and our ancestors. Newer methods of displaying human remains seek to expand the challenge to those relationships. John Gurche, whose work is featured at the Field Museum, makes three-dimensional reconstructions of hominins and believes the distinction we draw between “human” and “non-human” when thinking of early hominin ancestors is an artificially hard line; these ancestors are “gradually becoming human.”<sup>286</sup> He notes the “irony” that while early anthropological displays objectified the bones of more recently-deceased humans, his project seeks to *personify* the bones of prehistoric hominins.<sup>287</sup> He seeks to imbue the bones of these proto-humans with something that is, if not distinctly humanity, *beingness*. In his view, obtaining the utmost level of realism based on biomechanical and anatomical knowledge brings to life a being that is not simply a “fantasy,” as it would be if he were to make an artistic representation without scientific accuracy.<sup>288</sup> In parallel to the collectors of yore who felt a responsibility to collect the remains of “savages” before those tribes went extinct, Gurche feels a responsibility through his artwork to preserve the fossils of prehistoric hominins for future generations: “We’re not necessarily going to find another Lucy in the next generation, you know?”<sup>289</sup> But perhaps unlike

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<sup>284</sup> See “Human Remains and the Anthropology Museum” earlier in this chapter for a detailed discussion.

<sup>285</sup> Helen Robbins, “Repatriation at the Field Museum.”

<sup>286</sup> John Gurche, “Humanity and Paleoart,” Phone interview, January 11, 2020.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> John Gurche, “Humanity and Paleoart.”

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

collectors who sought institutional ownership of remains, Gurche believes they conceptually belong to all humanity. Although museums may be most qualified to maintain physical stewardship of these fossilized bones, paleoart encourages the viewer to relate to the exhibited individuals as living, breathing beings, and to share the stewardship that comes with that relationship.

Tracing displays of human remains reveals the history of how individuals, organizations, and governments jockey for the scientific authority to present, construct, and define what it means to be human. And that narrative is ever-changing. This project asks what it means to own a body, and what it means to lay claim to one's ancestors. How the viewer relates to the dead, as their ancestor or their heritage, situates their life in relation to time and space. And how the presenter displays the dead – as scientific specimen or cultural being – has the power to promote and shape future worldviews. The ways the dead are displayed reflect on both the presenters and the viewers themselves, and their place in both the past and the present world. This research examines how the attempt to pin down “what is a human” is a moving target, and helps put the ongoing quest to define human nature in perspective.

## VII. Glossary: A Discussion of Terms

### Human Remains

This thesis frequently refers to **human remains**, meaning the bodies of deceased individuals, regardless of the state of decomposition of those bodies. Mummies, skeletons, and fossilized bones, may all be considered human remains. The terms **cadaver** and **corpse** also refer to human remains. **Cadaver** is generally reserved for medical contexts (i.e. dissections or autopsies). **Corpse** is often a legal term, and generally refers to a recently-dead body; I more frequently use the term “human remains” because it refers to what ultimately “remains” after a person dies. In this paper, the term **skeleton** refers to bones of human individuals that do not have any preserved tissue remaining, while a **fossil** is the remains of a prehistoric organism preserved through geologic processes. In this instance, I am primarily referring to fossilized bones or skeletons. Mummification is also a form in which human remains are found; **mummies** are simply human remains that have additional soft tissue preservation in addition to bone (which decays less far less rapidly after death). A **body** or **human body** does not necessarily refer here to a deceased individual, but it could encompass any of the previously mentioned types of human remains, as well as a living individual (i.e., a skeleton might be referred to simply as a “body”).

### Bioarchaeology

The subfield of **bioarchaeology** considers questions of cultural history and allows for the reconstruction of past human activities. In the United States, bioarchaeology was influentially defined in 1977 by Jan Buikstra as using human remains to generate and solve anthropological questions about past human groups, as opposed to the more descriptive studies that had previously been conducted. In the UK, bioarchaeology may refer to the archaeological study of any biological materials (including non-human animals and plants). **Skeletal biology** also concentrates on the study of genetically modern human bones found in archaeological contexts, to understand the lives of past peoples. The term **oste archaeology**, the study of bones found in archaeological contexts, is used roughly equivalently in the UK. Note that in Europe, archaeology and anthropology are considered different fields, while the two are pedagogically linked in American contexts. **Osteology** refers more broadly to the study of bones, not necessarily in an archaeological context, and can be closely related to anatomy and forensic applications. **Paleoanthropology** refers to the study of the evolution of primates and hominids from the fossil record.

The fields of **forensic anthropology**, **primatology**, and **human biology** are also subfields of biological anthropology, but because these do not often fall under the category of “display of human remains in the anthropology museum,” will be less relevant to this paper. **Forensic anthropology** uses the study of human remains of the recently deceased to assist in the identification of individuals, primarily for criminal and legal cases; hence, their subjects are unlikely to wind up displayed in a museum. **Primatology** studies primarily non-humans, including prosimians, monkeys, and apes to elucidate primate’s evolutionary relationships. My project focuses solely on human displays. **Human biology** concentrates on human development and genetics from an interdisciplinary perspective and is closely affiliated with medicine; for this reason it will not be considered strictly “anthropological.”

## Indigeneity

The term **indigenous** is complex, and the concept of indigeneity itself has been the topic of much study. The term gained legal significance in the late twentieth century, and manners of defining the “indigenous person” in reference to their “other” are generally in the context of a colonial history. Here, I define indigenous peoples as ethnic groups comprised of the original or earliest-known inhabitants of a certain region, as opposed to groups that colonized, settled, or occupied the region more recently. Some might critique the concept of indigeneity for being more sociological and historical than biological, in that all humans are equally “indigenous to somewhere.” Indeed, the case of Kennewick man and other repatriation cases bring into question what it means to be biologically “indigenous.” The terms **indigenous peoples**, **Tribal Peoples**, **Native Peoples**, **Aboriginal** (referring to indigenous people generally, or especially in Australasia), **Pre-Columbian** (referring to a group, especially South American, pre-contact with Spanish colonizers), **First Nations** (in Canada), **Native American**, **Amerindian**, **American Indian**, **Indian** (esp. in the United States), **Indígena** (in Spanish-speaking South America), **povos nativos**, **índio** (In Brazil), **Scheduled Tribes** (in India), among others have been used to refer to indigenous groups. Every group’s relationship to their legal status, terminology, or identity as “indigenous” is distinct, and often relates to how they see themselves within networks of historical power differentials and marginalization. Similarly, each individual conceives of their own identity as an indigenous person differently. Consequently, it would lose nuance to describe every relationship with indigeneity in this paper under a single, unified term. And it is also difficult to always use the terms that “indigenous people would prefer,” because indigenous groups are not monolithic; in many cases, preferences between, for example, “Native American” or “American Indian” may come down to an individual’s relationships with those labels. For this reason, I strive to refer to specific tribal names throughout this paper, but when that is not possible, I use the terms that best suit the context or are referenced in the source I am citing.

## VIII. Appendix: Sample Interview Questions

NB: Not all questions were asked at every interview. Questions were tailored to individual subject's personal interests and/or research. Participants were reminded of their right to not answer any question, whether it made them uncomfortable or they otherwise did not wish to answer. Participants reserved the right to be cited anonymously, if they desired.

1. Your background/ research is relevant to my topic of study because [explain why I have contacted this person]. Can you please elaborate on your research/work?
2. Please elaborate on your training for the role you currently have.
  - a. how long have you worked in this position?
3. What have been your responsibilities with human remains?
  - a. How have human remains been used at your place of work/what are the current protocols in place?
  - b. Has any event changed the way you approach your responsibilities?
  - c. What ethical concerns were associated with your treatment of human remains?
  - d. Have you ever reflected on or questioned the way the remains you were working with in a professional environment were being treated?
  - e. Was there ever a time when you disagreed with aspects of a museum or department protocol concerning the display or treatment of human remains?
4. How has NAGPRA affected the display of human remains in the museum studies field, in your professional experience? How has this impacted your work?
5. In your opinion, under which conditions can (or should) a human body be ethically displayed? Why/why not? Are there any codes that a museum must follow?
6. Why is the display of human remains important today, aside from the fascination of seeing a body?
7. [for Field Museum interviewees] What are the differences in the treatment of different kinds of remains at the Field Museum ? (i.e., between Native American skeletons vs Selam vs dinosaurs vs Egyptian mummies vs Peruvian modified skulls)
  - a. Are the protocols for modern human remains different than those used for fossils?
  - b. Should these protocols be different?
8. Whose bodies can be displayed?
  - a. Is it less ethical to display the bodies of certain individuals rather than others?
  - b. What are the ethical decisions involved when you display different types of bodies? Which categories of individuals are less/more ethical to display?
  - c. Should the remains of humans be treated differently than those of animals?
    - i. How?
    - ii. Why?
  - d. At what point is a hominin (early human primate ancestor) a human? At what point do "human" ethical concerns in display apply to hominin skeletons?
9. What reasons, goals, or aims can justify the display of human remains?
10. From your perspective, who owns a dead body?
  - a. Who owns the bodies and/or human remains you have personally worked with?
  - b. Is it possible for the living to own the bodies of the deceased?
11. To what extent should we consider the wishes of the subject of display's relatives when making decisions regarding their display?

12. Do you think that the field of museum studies [and/or anthropology, and/or archaeology] is making progress in the way it is displaying the human body? Why/why not?
13. Do you think that displaying the human body to the public advances science? Why/why not?
  - a. Should human remains be displayed to the public, or only to experts?
14. In your opinion, under what conditions is it ethical to charge money to see an exhibit that features human remains? Why?
15. [Exhibitions] What factors do you consider when making a display of human remains? Explain the process
16. What, in your opinion, is the future of the display of human remains?
  - a. Is the display of human remains still relevant in current anthropological study?
  - b. Under what conditions should human remains be displayed, going forward?

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