# Cultural Connections, Conservation, and Chicagoland:
The Road to *Calumet Voices* at the Field Museum of Natural History, 1984–2023

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**Abstract**

Between 2018 and 2023, eighteen regional historical societies, community organizations, and native nations collaboratively co-curated Calumet Voices, National Stories, a traveling exhibition telling the environmental, industrial, and social history of the Calumet region from southeast Chicago to northwest Indiana. The Field Museum in Chicago served as a key partner, and the project has been praised both for focusing attention on the region and for its collaborative curation model. I examine how a large natural history museum came to share authority with unconventional partners, contextualizing the networks that created Calumet Voices within longer institutional and intellectual histories. The Field pivoted between strategies of community engagement, biodiversity conservation, local heritage, and exhibition development to engage with Chicagoland from the 1980s to the present. I trace how the museum built both capacity and motivation to bring Calumet Voices within the scope of its mission. As museums increasingly turn to these techniques to tell stories of environmental justice and diverse communities, Calumet Voices offers a case study to historicize collaborative curation.

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**Introduction**

The *Calumet Voices, National Stories* exhibition has a first display case crowded with objects—dolls, photo scrapbooks, photographs, a marriage record book with thousands of names. Nine nickel-sized badges, each an award commemorating a steelworker's 25th year of service, crowd together on a card, clipped on from multiple sides. Four copies of the same employee manual containing rules and regulations for workers at Carnegie Illinois Steel in different languages line up side by side to testify to the diversity of ethnic languages spoken at the mill in the first decades of the 20th century.[1] The glass case's contents would fit in perfectly with traditions of community history exhibits: artifact-forward, focusing on local history, and crediting its many objects to local volunteer historical societies or even specific families from across the Calumet region at the southern tip of Lake Michigan.[2] It tells racial histories, labor histories, industrial histories, and family histories alike, using objects that narrate the diverse settlement, connection, and growth of this part of the Chicago metropolis.

But instead of being housed in the local historical museum or historic house that observers might expect, *Calumet Voices,* and this case with it, instead sits in an exhibition gallery at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. In another case just feet away, biological and geological specimens narrate a natural history rather than a human one. This history operates on a vastly different timescale, one best told by 430-million-year-old mollusc shells rather than century-old photographs. In the Field Museum writ large, the case of historical artifacts stands out as unusual, a site of Chicago and Calumet histories surrounded by herbarium sheets, fossil

[1] Field Museum, "Calumet Voices/National Stories," https://www.calumetvoices.fieldmuseum.org/exhibits.
[2] Tammy S. Gordon, *Private History in Public: Exhibition and the Settings of Everyday Life*, American Association for State and Local History Book Series (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2010), 23, https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/7916757.

mounts, and anthropological exhibitions grouped by significantly older or more distant cultures, from the Ancient Americas to Aotearoa.

*Calumet Voices*'s interpretive text knits its varied objects together along the lines of space, if not time. After it was buried sometime in the Silurian period, the exhibition's mollusc fossil reemerged into history and into the Field Museum collection in the 1910s, when local engineers dug the Calumet-Saganashkee (Cal-Sag) channel, a shipping canal that reversed the flow of the region's watershed.[3] The channel dramatically altered of the South Chicago landscape, as demanded by the growing metropolis and the economy that fueled it. As the steel industry boomed in the early 1900s, South Chicago mills like Carnegie Illinois floated barges through the Cal-Sag channel to the Calumet River and Lake Michigan, accessing eager markets.[4] The contractors who lifted the fossil from the clay soil of the canal route donated it to the collection of the young natural history museum, then less than three decades old. They may also have shared many experiences with the steelworkers and other original owners of the historical societies' artifacts, in an era when railroads, canals, and industry attracted a diverse working class including white working-class laborers, recent European immigrants, and Black families part of the Great Migration to the Chicago metropolis.

The exhibition goes beyond simply juxtaposing objects of different periods and genres—a scientific specimen sharing exhibition space with a family heirloom—that can be made loosely coherent when united by region and a story of a specific discovery. Beyond individual objects, the cases also testify to dramatically different curatorial styles, with many actors at work within the same exhibition. *Calumet Voices, National Stories* was a collaboratively co-curated exhibition that told the history of the region stretching from southeast

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[3] Field Museum, "Calumet Voices/National Stories."
[4] Mark Bouman, "A Mirror Cracked: Ten Keys to the Landscape of the Calumet Region," *Journal of Geography* 100, no. 3 (May 1, 2001): 106, https://doi.org/10.1080/00221340108978425.

Chicago through northwest Indiana at four different host sites within the network of curators. Between 2019 and 2023, it traveled to Pullman National Monument, the Gary Public Library and Cultural Center, the Porter County Museum, and the Field Museum in Chicago. Led by the Calumet Heritage Partnership (CHP) and the Field Museum, the exhibition series became a key case study in collaborative curation—as the exhibition traveled, each host site and up to seven co-curating organizations showcased different collections materials and created their own thematic focus.[5]

Instead of simply lending artifacts to the natural history museum, eighteen regional historical societies, archives, community organizations, and at times individuals are listed on the exhibition's credit panel as collaborators and co-curators in their own right. Small historical societies like the lenders of many of the first vitrine's objects are not often invited to co-curate exhibitions at large nationally-recognized natural history museums like the Field. Likewise, museums like the Field rarely are seen hosting exhibits on local or family histories alongside their taxidermy and *T. rex*es. *Calumet Voices*'s leaders have emphasized that telling this collaborative, multiracial history of southeast Chicago and northwest Indiana is no small task.[6] Exhibit developers, Field anthropologists, and CHP board members were challenged by the need to work against the Field's institutional history, including collecting and curating practices that have served specific theories of racial anthropology, like an essentialist "Hall of Races" and the violent extraction of remains and objects from local indigenous people.[7] The project has been

[5] Field Museum, "Calumet Voices/National Stories."
[6] Madeleine Tudor et al., "Showcasing Calumet Voices/National Stories Through Collaborative Exhibitions," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=am6g24jfw8c.
[7] Susanne Belovari, "Professional Minutia and Their Consequences: Provenance, Context, Original Identification, and Anthropology at the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Illinois," *Archival Science* 13, no. 2 (June 1, 2013): 143–93, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-013-9202-0.

touted as innovative both for focusing public attention on an understudied historical region but also for its collaborative curation model.[8]

The two cases reveal a push and pull between these actors and their different curation and design practices in a collaborative process more complex than simply including history in a natural history museum. With nearly twenty different objects competing for space inside, the historical societies' case resembles the "community attics or storehouses" full of objects that celebrate a "willingness to include every possible example of the same idea" that has often been unflatteringly described as typical of small community history institutions.[9] And while their cabinet of curiosity precursors may have looked similar, today's natural history museums like the Field have increasingly turned instead to professional, minimalist casework, in which just a few objects are selected and interpreted for specific educational outcomes.[10] But when Field social scientist and exhibition curator Madeleine Tudor looks at the cases now, she says, "the Field Museum cases almost look sparse."[11] Their coexistence, though, was not guaranteed. Tudor recalls the co-curators presenting their dense case layouts at design preview/review meetings in front of the Field's staff designers, noting that "it would never fly here if we wanted to load up a case like that."[12] Despite the stated norms of the museum, the crowded case remains in the final product, with neither the historical society nor the natural history museum's curatorial style predominating. The pair of display cases testifies to a genuine sharing of authority between the Field and its much smaller collaborator institutions, a hard-won achievement. Pulled from Field

[8] Alaka Wali and Madeleine Tudor, "Crossing the Line: Participatory Action Research in a Museum Setting," in *Public Anthropology in a Borderless World*, ed. Sam Beck and Carl A. Maida, Studies in Public and Applied Anthropology, volume 8 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015).
[9] Amy K. Levin and Joshua G. Adair, eds., *Defining Memory: Local Museums and the Construction of History in America's Changing Communities*, Second edition, American Association for State and Local History Book Series (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 19.
[10] Gordon, *Private History in Public*, ix.
[11] Madeleine Tudor, in-person interview with the author, Field Museum, Chicago, November 29, 2023.
[12] Tudor.

Museum casework stock, sent to collaborating host sites, filled with historical objects, and finally returned to the Field to sit alongside very different neighbors, these cases are a microcosm of the exhibit's authority negotiations.

Understanding the development of *Calumet Voices* and how the Field Museum came to accept and even welcome this case within its exhibition requires an acknowledgement that public history projects have histories worth telling. In the 1980s, US history and natural history museums were developing a "new museology," seeing themselves less as elite shapers of the citizenry through scientific education and increasingly as social agents within their communities, who could increase cultural understanding and even promote social justice.[13] The Field Museum engaged in outreach in the Calumet along ecological lines decades before *Calumet Voices*, pairing community work with its more traditional conservation efforts. The museum pivoted towards contemporary, community-based urban anthropology projects of the kind that would build capacity for collaborative co-curation on *Calumet Voices*.

While acknowledging the challenges faced today by public historians (as well as community activists, exhibition developers, biologists, activists, and anthropologists who do public history) when it comes to sharing authority and co-curating, this thesis seeks to critically question the novelty of *Calumet Voices*'s networks of collaboration, to understand how and why the Field came to welcome its co-curators and their objects in *Calumet Voices*. I argue for *Calumet Voices*'s place in a longer continuity of the Field's institutional history of work with Calumet communities. But beyond the specific institutional context, the exhibit represents part of a longer intellectual history that links Chicago to the Calumet and public history to the environment. As museums turn to collaborative curation to tell histories of environmental justice

[13] Nunzia Borrelli and Peter Davis, "Developing Capacity Building: Reflections on Chicago's Field Museum, USA," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 28, no. 5 (December 1, 2013): 455–66, https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2013.850826.

and diverse communities, it is more and more important to understand that these collaborative relationships are not new. Rather than simply being a source of prestige or economic resources for public historical projects, natural history museums like the Field bring their own strategies and histories of community engagement.

Historiography

To understand the exhibit's historical storytelling within the context of its home at a natural history museum and the institutional histories of its collaborating curators, I draw on urban environmental histories of Chicagoland; the history of science in science museums; and genealogies of public history and heritage institutions. Like the *Calumet Voices* curators themselves, these historiographical threads are unlikely collaborators.

Chicago's relationship to its surroundings, including the Calumet, looms large in urban environmental history, which has highlighted the city as uniquely situated as both a "gateway" linking natural resources to the metropolis and as a "shock city" that disruptively embodied new development fueled by these resources. Historians have argued that Chicago's geographic access to far-reaching Midwestern networks of resource extraction and transportation uniquely enabled its rise, but have continued to complicate a nature/city binary not just between Chicago and its environs, but within the city's "natural" green spaces.[14] Within the Field's anthropological and conservation work in the region, museum staff have extensively drawn on works like William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis* to explain the "paradox" of biodiversity and deindustrialization centered in the region.

Urban environmental historians have brought Cronon's framework into the 21st century by focusing on the postindustrial transition and the ways that people in Chicago, the Calumet,

[14] William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991).

and beyond have navigated the increasingly racialized and class-based dimensions of urban space and access to the "natural environment."[15]

At the same time, intellectual historians have gone beyond Cronon's literal focus on infrastructure to understand Chicago networks more broadly. Elizabeth Grennan Browning combines *Nature's Metropolis* with sociological use of the South Side by the Chicago School as a site for academic experimentation in *Nature's Laboratory*.[16] She links the ways in which Chicago institutions metaphorized and studied "nature" to their efforts to control nature through industrial development and urban populations through sociological development. Moving beyond frameworks that treat the social and environmental landscape of Chicago as paradoxical, Browning's environmental intellectual history tracks the way that conservation metaphors and methods were applied to the social challenges of labor activism and deindustrialization in Chicago and the Calumet. While Browning focuses on social science as done by universities, I argue that her study has relevance for museum anthropology and conservation biology. These material and intellectual linkages between Chicago and the Calumet—as a resource, as a laboratory, or as a research subject—contextualize the more recent networks of sponsorship, curation, and support in *Calumet Voices*.

I combine this intellectual history about the study of environment in the Chicago context with the history of science in natural history museums. Genealogies of natural history museums have chosen various starting points. Humanists assembled natural specimens and antiquities together into cabinets of curiosity as early as the Renaissance, but scholars have located the origins of the museum as an institution in the rise of imperial national collections and the job of

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[15] William C. Barnett, Kathleen A. Brosnan, and Ann Durkin Keating, eds., *City of Lake and Prairie: Chicago's Environmental History*, History of the Urban Environment (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020).
[16] Elizabeth Grennan Browning, *Nature's Laboratory: Environmental Thought and Labor Radicalism in Chicago, 1886-1937* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2022).

the museum naturalist in the mid-nineteenth century.[17] For a later, more American origin point, the turn of the 19th century in the US pulls in education and display through World's Fairs and expositions, the "New Museum Idea" of the museum as an educational institution, and the use of the diorama.[18] Originally conceived as a memorial and repository for artifacts and specimens from the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, the Field Museum inherited the "exhibitionary complexes" (structuring its taxonomy and display focus) of its parent fair along with its connection. At the same time, the Field's institutional self-conception connected to the role the Fair played in Chicago and Chicagoland's identity formation: as a sophisticated global center, not an industrial frontier town, and within a national cultural landscape that commemorated Columbus and anthropologically essentialized non-white peoples.[19]

Beyond origin stories, historians have outlined ways natural history museums created relationships between "the field" (the site of fieldwork) and "the museum" through collecting specimens, organizing them for display, and mobilizing networks of scientific and artistic labor to amass collections and scientific prestige.[20] As museum leaders have increasingly conceived of their institutions as educational institutions rather than just collections into the later 20th and 21st centuries, though, these epistemological relationships have continued to be relevant. Recent Field Museum efforts to anthropologically survey Calumet communities, rapidly inventory

[17] On cabinets of curiosity as museums, see Paula Findlen, "Containment: Objects, Places, Museums," *Thresholds*, no. 11 (1995): 7; On imperial museums, see H. Glenn Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003).
[18] Karen A. Rader, *Life on Display: Revolutionizing U.s. Museums of Science and Natural History in the Twentieth Century* (The University of Chicago Press, 2014).
[19] For the place of the Columbian Exposition within museum studies, see Robert W. Rydell, "World Fairs and Museums," in *A Companion to Museum Studies* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2006), 135–51, https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470996836.ch9; for the Fair's place in Chicagoan and national cultures, see Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
[20] Dorinda Outram, "New Spaces in Natural History," in *Cultures of Natural History*, ed. Nicholas Jardine, James A. Secord, and E. C. Spary (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Samuel J. M. M. Alberti, "Museum Nature," in *Worlds of Natural History*, ed. H. A. Curry et al. (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 348–62.

biodiversity in Calumet ecosystems, and work with Calumet heritage institutions are situated within these networks to contextualize collaborative curation within these longer histories of museum labor and science.[21] While histories of science focused on science museums have generally focused on material specimens—biological and geological—I argue for understanding museum anthropology and even curation as a similar pattern of collecting intellectually.

Finally, to understand the *Calumet Voices* exhibit as a work of public history, I converse with genealogies of the field. While some scholars trace public history's roots to an academic career crisis in the 1970s that led aspiring PhDs to broaden the scope of potential historical careers, others have rightfully argued that public history has a much longer of history of practice in the form of local, nonprofessional historical societies—of the sort collaborating on *Calumet Voices*.[22] Scholars overcoming academic history's traditional disdain for the amateur local historian have suggested that local history museums play a unique role—often founded as a way to shore up community identity at a point of temporal transition, they offer insight into those key transitional periods and "community" self-conception, though facing challenges in responding to the needs of diverse localities and connecting their histories to national relevance.[23] For example, these challenges include racial and environmental histories' revisions to dominant Calumet narratives of its industrial and labor heritage in recent public history projects.[24]

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[21] Alaka Wali et al., "New Methodologies for Interdisciplinary Research and Action in an Urban Ecosystem in Chicago," *Conservation Ecology* 7, no. 3 (January 9, 2003), https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-00568-070302.

[22] For a conception of public history as led by academic historians working outside the academy, see Robert Kelley, "Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects," *The Public Historian* 1, no. 1 (1978): 16–28, https://doi.org/10.2307/3377666; for refutations that focus increasingly on public history as done by and for community members, see Ronald J. Grele, "Whose Public? Whose History? What Is the Goal of a Public Historian?," *The Public Historian* 3, no. 1 (1981): 40–48, https://doi.org/10.2307/3377160; Benjamin Filene, "Passionate Histories: 'Outsider' History-Makers and What They Teach Us," *The Public Historian* 34, no. 1 (2012): 11–33, https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2012.34.1.11.

[23] Levin and Adair, *Defining Memory*, 249.

[24] For examples of competing labor and racial histories in the Calumet, see recent public history projects around industrial heritage of Black Pullman porters and non-Black factory workers in Janice L. Reiff and Susan E. Hirsch, "Pullman and Its Public: Image and Aim in Making and Interpreting History," *The Public Historian* 11, no. 4 (1989): 99–112, https://doi.org/10.2307/3378069; and on the Chicago Labor Trail in Jeffrey Helgeson, "Chicago's Labor Trail: Labor History as Collaborative Public History," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 76

However, I draw from historians who have departed between this academic-community history binary by following Denise Meringolo's alternate historiography of public history in *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks*, which rejects both academic historians and postbellum historic preservationists as the originators of public history.[25] Meringolo suggests a much earlier starting point centered in the National Parks' creation of an interpretive history program around the New Deal to argue that public history's roots are far more interdisciplinary (incorporating science and resource management), administrative, and collaborative than otherwise conceived. Park Service historians advanced history as a strategy that could aid in preserving the public landscape by educating the public, which tracks intensely with the CHP's effort to create an exhibit as part of its advocacy for a National Heritage Area.

It is important to note that *Calumet Voices* co-curators have chosen to characterize the exhibit as about the region's *heritage* rather than *history*, preferring the former wording for its association with first-person perspectives rather than with hierarchical and academic approaches rather than seeing the two as synonymous.[26] Local historical societies are often considered heritage organizations, and the national parks programs Meringolo narrates are considered the roots of heritage interpretation as a profession. At the same time, academic historians have characterized heritage interpretation as dominated by personal, tourist, natural environment, or architectural concerns rather than historical rigor.[27] Social and cultural historians, too, argue that their field increasingly incorporates first-person, diverse perspectives. I acknowledge here

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(2009): 60–64. It is important to note that the Chicago context is unusual; elsewhere, scholars tend to call for an increased focus on labor in public history—see Richard Anderson, "Taking Labor History Public: An Overview of the Field," *Labor* 17, no. 1 (March 1, 2020): 15–24, https://doi.org/10.1215/15476715-7962768.

[25] Denise D. Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History*, Public History in Historical Perspective (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012).

[26] Madeleine Tudor, correspondence with the author.

[27] Sue Hodges, "#Fake History: The State of Heritage Interpretation," in *What Is Public History Globally?: Working with the past in the present,* edited by Paul Ashton and Alex Trapeznik (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 295–308.

*Calumet Voices*'s commitment to narrating the region's past and culture from resident perspectives and the reputation history as a field and as a word has earned for top-down tellings. In this paper, I choose the phrasings "history," "public history," and "natural history" to situate *Calumet Voices* within longer timelines of how institutions and intellectuals have engaged with the region and its stories.

This thesis brings together urban environmental history in the Calumet with institutional genealogies of natural history museums and heritage organizations. By arguing that museum work should be considered in the context of the history of science, I intervene by suggesting that the collaborative networks of *Calumet Voices* should be considered within older intellectual networks of collecting, engaging communities, and producing knowledge.

<u>Source base/methodology</u>

To move between this longer institutional and intellectual history and the extremely recent public history of *Calumet Voices*, I engage institutional archives and scientific scholarly publications alongside readings of the exhibit itself and interviews with its co-curators.

The Field Museum's institutional archives and scholarly publications written by its staff provide an inside viewpoint on the museum's mission, outreach efforts, and scholarly focus over time. Exhibition files chart their curatorial and exhibition development processes; reports to the Board of Trustees reveal strategic planning processes and the museum's shifting mission, grant funding, and progress on stated projects; and organizational charts track the changing duties and focus of staff and the establishment of interdisciplinary centers, like the Center for Cultural Understanding and Change (CCUC) that undertook much of the museum's outreach and participatory anthropology research in the Calumet.[28] The Field staff captured in these internal

[28] Center for Evolutionary and Environmental Biology and Center for Cultural Understanding and Change, *The Field Museum Report to the Board of Trustees* (Chicago: The Field Museum, 1995), https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/327406.

archives also published their research and processes externally in conservation biology, urban anthropology, museum studies, and geography papers, revealing what forms of collaboration were considered innovative in their fields and when.

Alongside the Field's institutional history is the history of its collaborators—community organizers, conservationist groups, historical societies, native nations, and the CHP. While some of these institutions generate archives, others are best captured through news sources that track their projects and collaborations, with the Field and each other.[29] While these news sources are much more likely to present success stories and are less able to capture intra-organization decision-making, I take them as a record of the projects and relationships prioritized by co-curators before coming to *Calumet Voices*.

Recent history, such as that of an exhibit that ran at the Field through December 2023, cannot rely on archival sources alone. To understand the microhistory of how the exhibit evolved over its years of development and to capture individual perspectives, I draw on interviews with exhibit co-curators. While born-digital exhibition files and many of the CCUC's documents have not yet been comprehensively archived, access to working files provided by Field anthropologists allows a view into more present processes. Similarly, interviews with Field staff provide an understanding of the choices made by different participants and a reconstruction of museum processes from 1994 to the present. Alongside my own interviewing, I use the CHP's conference panels to understand how co-curators have talked about their process and experiences.[30]

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[29] For example, the Calumet Heritage Conference, hosted by the CHP, has nearly two decades of annual conference programs archived online, a quarter of which come with YouTube videos of panels.
[30] This thesis is primarily an institutional history of the Field Museum, and all interviews were conducted with current or former Field Museum staff. However, I draw on conference panels, exhibit tours and conversations, and news coverage for the voices of external co-curators.

Finally, I examine public history projects including *Calumet Voices* itself. This thesis takes seriously the exhibit's claim to *being* a history of the Calumet, but it also reads the exhibit itself as a source and a product of history. Exhibition design decisions evoke industrial aesthetics, case layouts juxtapose botanical specimens with art by steelworkers, and interpretive text frames the exhibit narrative by linking together individual objects. The exhibit is also full of text that can be literally read—credit lines that indicate whose objects are paired together in cases, section headings that summarize the Calumet's history as told by the exhibit and its co-curators, and even titles given to each of the series' four installments. By viewing the narratives told in the final product in the context of the curatorial decision-making and historical circumstances that brought it to life, I engage a diversity of "Calumet voices" and Chicago ones to understand the exhibit as a case study in museum collaboration.

Roadmap

Drawing from these sources, this thesis historicizes the *Calumet Voices, National Stories* exhibit through the lens of a Field Museum institutional history. How and why did a large natural history museum come to host a local history exhibit co-curated with dozens of community organizations? By tracing different strategies and pivots by the Field Museum's public engagement centers from 1990 to the present, I trace the way the museum built both the capacity and the interest required to consider *Calumet Voices* within the scope of the museum's mission.

An initial section contextualizes the climate for museums in the 1980s—a crisis that motivated dramatic changes in the ways museums sought relevance for themselves within their communities. Two parallel sections follow the development of two interdisciplinary centers created following at Field Museum's 1994 centennial to respond to this crisis: the urban anthropology-focused Center for Cultural Understanding and Change (CCUC) and the

biodiversity conservation-focused Center for Evolutionary and Environmental Biology (CEEB), including its office of Environmental and Conservation Programs (ECP). I follow the ways both centers increased public engagement between the museum and Chicagoland in the 1990s: while CCUC built capacity for working with advisory councils and local community organizations on exhibits and ECP emphasized the urgency of protecting local biodiversity, the two largely pursued distinct projects. When the ECP-supported project to recognize the Calumet as an ecological park was rejected by the National Park Service in 1998, however, the museum brought the urban anthropology work of CCUC into its Calumet efforts and began to pivot towards a heritage-focused strategy, a move I cover in the fourth section. I describe the ways in which the Field Museum encountered Calumet public history and community organizations through asset mapping projects that shored up the museum's conservation work. Finally, in a museology-informed section covering the most recent history, from 2011 to 2023, I trace the process of *Calumet Voices, National Stories* and the museum's move from a strategy of recognizing heritage to one that actively engaged in co-curation and authority sharing as part of exhibition development.

**Section 1: Crisis management (1984–1992)**

The Field Museum had originally been conceived of as a memorial and repository for roughly 50,000 artifacts and specimens from the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893.[31] In the near-century since, it grew from its founding collections and funding from the upper crust of the growing Chicago metropolis, including its eponymous department store magnate Marshall Field. By the 1980s, the museum was considered one of Chicago's major cultural institutions and was strong across the four major natural history museum disciplines of anthropology, botany, geology, and zoology. Despite these apparent strengths, however,

[31] Belovari, "Professional Minutia and Their Consequences," 147.

leadership at the Field in the 1980s envisioned the cultural landscape for their institution, and for natural history museums writ large, as a crisis. This climate would eventually motivate the kinds of experimental, innovative exhibits and research methodologies that would eventually lead the museum to attempt co-curation in *Calumet Voices*.

The crisis they faced was simultaneously cultural and economic. Demographic and bureaucratic changes challenged museums' bottom line. The public increasingly saw museums as simultaneously irrelevant and intimidating—many felt uncomfortable in these dusty "temples to the past."[32] Chicago as a city was becoming increasingly diverse, changing the demographics of potential visitorship away from the institution's upper-class white regulars. Museums had also become a frequent flashpoint for controversy, including critiques of museum anthropology collections that featured Native American remains, such as the Field's. Vocal protests raised questions about whether museums' key work of research, collection, and display did more harm than good.[33] Much more materially, tax code changes in the 1980s hampered museums' ability to support themselves on private philanthropy and corporate sponsorship.[34] A recession further cut into both these sources as well as admissions. Finally, the National Science Foundation (NSF), which had been a major funder of museums and especially natural history museum research, changed its priorities, reducing support for collections and systematic biology research.[35]

Museums needed to refine their mission and articulate their value in order to survive. In 1984, the American Association of Museums published *Museums for a New Century*, a commission report that laid out seven areas museums needed to focus one. These included "the

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[32] Nick Merriman, "Museum Visiting as a Cultural Phenomenon," in *The New Museology*, ed. Peter Vergo, Critical Views (Reaktion Books, 1997), 156; Duncan F. Cameron, "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 14, no. 1 (1971): 11–24, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2151-6952.1971.tb00416.x.
[33] Samuel J. Redman, "The Culture Wars of the 1980s and 1990s," in *The Museum: A Short History of Crisis and Resilience* (NYU Press, 2022), 112, https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.4493309.
[34] Elizabeth Culotta, "Museums Cut Research in Hard Times," *Science* 256, no. 5061 (May 29, 1992): 1268, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1598562.
[35] Figures cover the change from 1989–1992. See Culotta, 1268–69.

value of museums to the human experience" and "the visibility of American museums within the nation at large" along with economic and management concerns.[36] The public-facing side of the museum, the exhibits, became a solution to many of these problems; the collections and research side faded behind the scenes. Interactive, blockbuster exhibits could bring in visitors (and their dollars) and show them that museums weren't dusty memorials but instead places for entertainment and informal education. Simultaneously, they could be managed not by curators, who for the most part were Ph.D.-holding academics, but by an increasingly professionalized museum staff who borrowed management methods from the corporate sector, including marketing museums as part of both the tourism and heritage industries.[37]

An exhibits-focused plan for public engagement also fit well into what museum scholars were calling the "new museology," emphasizing the social role of museums as cultural institutions. Rather than being defined by their functions—collecting, preserving, and interpreting specimens and artifacts— museums ought to be driven by and responsive to their local communities' needs. They would become spaces to reflect critically on heritage, increase cultural understanding, and foster social agents of change.[38] The new museology shared roots with a recent international movement towards "ecomuseums," grassroots museums created by post-industrial communities in France in the 1970s. They defined themselves by "territory + heritage + memory + population" in contrast to the traditional museological "building + collection + expert + public."[39] The "population" of ecomuseums, who would both celebrate and preserve their local heritage through museums, was similar to the "community" or local visitorship of the new museology. Visitors and their experiences were centered in the new exhibit

[36] Julia D. Harrison, "Ideas of Museums in the 1990s," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 13, no. 2 (June 1, 1994): 164, https://doi.org/10.1016/0964-7775(94)90074-4.
[37] Harrison, 165.
[38] Borrelli and Davis, "Developing Capacity Building," 456.
[39] Peter Davis, "New Museologies and the Ecomuseum," in *The Routledge Research Companion to Heritage and Identity* (Routledge, 2008), 402.

development process.[40] Interactive exhibits, in which visitors from the community could make meaning alongside curators' intent, honored both these processes of interpretation.[41] Large museums pursuing interactive, multimedia exhibits therefore found themselves borrowing their self-conception and mission from much smaller, newer ecomuseums.

The Field made major changes in service of this exhibit-forward strategy in the 1980s. A new museum president, Willard L. "Sandy" Boyd, reorganized the museum into two divisions in 1984.[42] The Division of Collections and Research, comprising the four scientific departments of anthropology, botany, geology, and zoology, centralized the Ph.D.-holding curators conducting university-level, grant-funded research and separated them from the professional exhibits and education staff in the Division of Public Programs. The public programs staff would hold authority over the curators in exhibition development under a new vice president, Michael Spock from the Children's Museum in Boston, who emphasized experientiality, creativity, and multigenerational appeal.[43]

Boyd framed the move as beneficial to both sides of the museum. Public Programs graduated from a single department of education to become fully half of the museum. It was a focus of Boyd's fundraising by 1987, with over $43 million raised for renovations to 40% of the museum's halls.[44] At the same time, Collections and Research could "focus more of its energy and intellectual resources on addressing broad substantive issues in the realms of biology,

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[40] Charles Saumarez Smith, "Museums, Artefacts, and Meanings," in *The New Museology*, ed. Peter Vergo, Critical Views (Reaktion Books, 1997), 19.

[41] It's worth noting that a museum's regular visitorship was not necessarily the same as its local community. Especially in the context of the Field, located in Chicago's museum campus downtown, museum leadership often invoked "community" to mean less white and less wealthy residents of Chicago's neighborhoods/community areas outside the Loop, as opposed to tourist audiences.

[42] Boyd, a former professor of law and president of a university, had joined the museum in 1981. See William H. Honan, "Say Goodbye to the Stuffed Elephants," *The New York Times*, January 14, 1990, sec. 6; Field Museum of Natural History Collections and Research, *1989 Report to the Board of Trustees* (Chicago: The Field Museum, 1989), 7, https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/327063.

[43] Spock joined as vice president of public programs in January 1986. He was also the son of a pediatrician. See Honan, "Say Goodbye to the Stuffed Elephants."

[44] Culotta, "Museums Cut Research in Hard Times," 1269; Honan, "Say Goodbye to the Stuffed Elephants."

geology, and anthropology."[45] Rather than fully abandoning its strengths, the newly centralized division could compete with universities for grant funding and continue to do serious research—a "university model" for museums' next steps. For example, most universities had largely fled the expensive field of systematic biology, which required extensive herbaria and field expeditions, in favor of genetics: museums would be able to fill the research niche left behind.[46] Likewise, museum anthropologists could leverage their access to real cultural objects gathered through decades of collecting. Curators were allegedly freed from the burden of exhibit project management, allowing them to focus on collections care and advancing in their scholarly fields.

However, ending the "era of the curator-driven exhibition" was far easier said than done.[47] At the Field, the new exhibition developers clashed dramatically with the curatorial old guard over *Traveling the Pacific,* a 1989 exhibit. Senior exhibition developer Phyllis Rabineau traveled to the south Pacific and brought back an 18-foot outrigger canoe and an idea for simulating an atoll from the south Pacific. But while Rabineau wanted to immerse visitors using a coral beach mural and wave sounds, anthropology department chair John Terrell vigorously objected, arguing that displaying more of the Field's prized Pacific ethnographic collections would better represent the majority of Pacific Islanders.[48] The dispute escalated from memos to increasingly bitter meetings. In an effort to stonewall Rabineau's storytelling, Terrell invoked his

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[45] Field Museum of Natural History Collections and Research, *1989 Report to the Board of Trustees*, 7.3

[46] Systematic biology is the study of the classification and diversification of organisms, including phylogeny. Museums were well positioned to work on systematic biology because they could leverage their collections to do comparative analysis. See Peter R. Crane, "Towards a Natural History Museum for the 21st Century: Collections and Research," *Museum News* 76, no. 6 (December 1997): 44.

[47] John Terrell, "Disneyland and the Future of Museum Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 93, no. 1 (1991): 149–53.

[48] "We have only 1,750 catalogue entries from Micronesia where there are atolls, but we have 36,000 artifacts in our Melanesian collection, which is known the world over and will be given only token representation in this exhibit," said curator John Terrell in a New York Times article on the exhibit. Other anthropology curators enumerated that while the previous Pacific exhibition had shown 6,000 Melanesian artifacts, the first part of the new exhibit only showed 500, and the second rotation would show 1,000. See Honan, "Say Goodbye to the Stuffed Elephants."

rank as curator (from Collections and Research) to argue that Rabineau (from Public Programs) was unqualified to acquire objects like the canoe. Field Museum president Boyd finally stepped in, leaving the canoe and atoll in the exhibit and asking Terrell to resign as chair. In a scathing article, now-former chair Terrell raised alarm that "The powers-that-be honestly believe exhibitions can be mounted without curators? Preposterous." and foretold a future in which museums became "Disneylands" devoid of rigor.[49] The dispute brought into question the relationship between the two sides of the museum.

Turning to exhibitions could not solve all the problems of the natural history museum in the 1980s. Though shows led by the new public programs department were drawing visitors at two or three times the rate of the earlier decades, the institutional infighting reflected not just interpersonal challenges, but intellectual ones. Museums could not actually compete with theme parks on entertainment alone, but the "theme park model" did risk diminishing the value of collections and the expertise museums had already invested in. And though blockbuster exhibitions might boost visitorship, they were unequipped to foster inclusion, especially because of the risk of relying on stereotypes.[50]

Furthermore, the curators of Collections and Research could not actually choose to operate their division like a research university. Chasing grant funding would lead to an unpredictable research tempo and constantly changing objectives, which was ill-suited to a nonprofit organization with a stated mission (and more importantly, a self-conception under the new museology as attending to the needs of its community and planet).[51] For anthropologists, the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1989 in

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[49] Terrell, "Disneyland and the Future of Museum Anthropology," 149.
[50] Harrison, "Ideas of Museums in the 1990s," 168.
[51] Ellsworth H. Brown, "Toward a Natural History Museum for the 21st Century: Catalogue of Change," *Museum News* 76, no. 6 (December 1997): 38–49.

response to growing activism around repatriation of native ancestors also introduced uncertainty into collections management. Museum professionals were worried repatriation would gut their collections, and they struggled to navigate historically fraught relationships with native nations.[52] Museum anthropology as a field lost popularity compared to social and cultural anthropology.[53]

The problem of relevance could not be solved by visitor numbers alone. Exhibit development needed museum research, and museum research needed public and intellectual stakes. Finding and keeping "ever-broadening audience in an uncertain future," as the American Association of Museums had called for, required not just exciting interactives but a real consideration of the educational and cultural needs of the public.[54]

The Field Museum responded with another reorganization. In 1992, it created two interdisciplinary centers that cut across the four academic departments as well as exhibitions and events."[55] They were the Center for Cultural Understanding and Change (CCUC) and the Center for Evolutionary and Environmental Biology (CEEB). Each paired the Field's traditional research strengths with specific social needs. CCUC would apply anthropology towards promoting cultural understanding and appreciation of diversity. It would focus on the value of material culture to education and exhibits addressing cultural concerns. CEEB would use systematic biology in service of biodiversity preservation, an issue of growing salience. Through science literacy and conservation work, it would defend the natural diversity that was captured in the museum's collections.

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[52] Redman, "The Culture Wars of the 1980s and 1990s," 114 citing Chip Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits: Inside the Fight to Reclaim Native America's Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 7.
[53] Donald Collier and Harry S. Tschopik, "The Role of Museums in American Anthropology," *Fieldiana. Anthropology*, no. 36 (2003): 26.
[54] Commission on Museums for a New Century, "Museums for a New Century" (American Association of Museums, December 1983).
[55] Peter R. Crane, "The Center for Evolutionary and Environmental Biology: Work in Progress," in *Centers for Cultural Understanding and Change and Evolutionary and Environmental Biology 1992 Report to the Board of Trustees*, by Field Museum of Natural History, vol. 1992 (Chicago: The Field Museum, 1992), 6–14, https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/327087.

The work of CCUC would include what curators called "The Field Museum's first inclusion of cultural practices from the United States."[56] The center's exhibits, programming, and ethnography/ethnology research would be the Field's first engagement with contemporary urban anthropology. Many of these projects would start close to home, in Chicago itself. This pivot to the anthropology of Chicagoland, including the cultures of Euro-American and immigrant Chicagoans (not mutually exclusive), was a new undertaking that emerged out of the imperatives of the museum in the 1980s.

For the first time, Chicagoland was not just the museum's intended audience for ticketed exhibitions; the city became museum anthropologists' intended field site for both research and activism. As part of this mission, the Field began to intentionally forge relationships with Chicago grassroots ethnic and community organizations including small historical societies and museums through the 1990s and early 2000s. CCUC therefore created the model for how the Field would engage with similar institutions in the Calumet to create *Calumet Voices*. Before the Field could treat community organizations like co-curators, the CCUC initially had to learn how to work with them as smaller-scale advisors.

CEEB's mission of biodiversity preservation initially took on a larger scope, responding to "the world's needs" for conservation. Like CCUC, however, CEEB would quickly find a local focus—in this case, the Calumet region. Chicagoland academics had long recognized the ecological uniqueness of the Calumet—the theory of ecological succession was devised in the

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[56] Notably, the Field has displayed objects from native people in the Americas since its founding but often froze them in a primitive, archeological, comparative-evolutionary understanding of native cultures. Under the umbrella of CCUC's engagement with grassroots community organizations, museum staff would also interact with contemporary native groups like the American Indian Center in Chicago. For quote, see Wali and Tudor, "Crossing the Line: Participatory Action Research in a Museum Setting," 70; for more context on native representation at the Field up to the 90s, see Belovari, "Professional Minutia and Their Consequences," 154; Susanne Belovari, "Invisible in the White Field: The Chicago Field Museum's Construction of Native Americans, 1893-1996, and Native American Critiques of and Alternatives to Such Representations" (Ph.D., United States -- Illinois, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), accessed February 27, 2024, https://www.proquest.com/docview/304361456/abstract/1CB7472D383848D1PQ/1.

Indiana dunes by University of Chicago ecologist Henry Chandler Cowles in 1916.[57] Railroads, steel mills, and canals reshaped and threatened the unique wetlands, dunes, and prairies through the 20th century.

But in the 1980s, the underpinnings of the reshaped industrial landscape experienced a crisis of their own. Between 1979 and 1986, steel plants were abruptly shuttered, to the tune of 16,000 lost Chicago and Calumet steelworker jobs.[58] The 1990s would bring a new reckoning with the newly post-industrial region. The term "brownfields" was coined to describe the environmental hazards of abandoned industrial land in which responsible corporations were unable or unwilling to pay for remediation.[59] And as both Chicago officials and development organizations desperately searched for ways to revitalize the region, some proposals—like those for building landfills or an international airport in the Calumet—represented dramatic changes both from industrial lifeways and to Calumet ecology.[60]

Recognizing both the value and the precarity of Calumet biodiversity, CEEB began seriously extending the Field's research and conservation efforts into the museum's backyard in southeast Chicago and northwest Indiana. CEEB's work in the region brought the museum into contact for the first time with many of the specific groups who would become *Calumet Voices* collaborators. This effort would also lay the groundwork within the museum for the value of conservation activism.

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[57] Mark Bouman, "The Calumet Region: A Line in the Sand," in *City of Lake and Prairie: Chicago's Environmental History*, ed. William C. Barnett, Kathleen A. Brosnan, and Ann Durkin Keating, History of the Urban Environment (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020), 288.
[58] David Bensman and Mark R. Wilson, "Iron and Steel," in *The Electronic Encyclopedia of Chicago* (Chicago Historical Society, 2005), http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/653.html.
[59] Mark Bouman, "Nurture's Metropolis: Chicago and the Rediscovery of Nature," in *Chicago's Geographies: Metropolis for the 21st Century*, ed. Richard P. Greene, Mark Bouman, and Dennis Grammenos (Washington D.C.: AAG, Association of American Geographers, 2006), 22.
[60] Bouman, "The Calumet Region: A Line in the Sand," 298.

CCUC and CEEB therefore would pursue different approaches based in different Field Museum strengths through the 1990s. However, both centers would be crucial in orienting the Field Museum towards Chicagoland as a site of research and action. In the next sections, I trace the ways in which the two centers were able to build capacity that would be prerequisites to *Calumet Voices,* even while encountering the limits of this strategy for the museum in the decades they operated.

**Section 2: Cultural community engagement (1994–2006)**

*Calumet Voices* featured a diverse array of co-curators and partners, from Illinois and Indiana local historical societies to steelworker heritage projects, environmental justice organizers, and native nations.[61] But how did the Field as a natural history museum, used to working with staff scientists and in-house exhibits staff, learn to work with diverse, smaller organizations like these? To get from museums' crisis of relevance to the collaboration that would define *Calumet Voices*, the Field needed to learn how to *internally* build processes for collaboration and *externally* build trust with different partners. In this section, I trace the Field's first engagement with community partners in exhibit- and network-building through the Center for CCUC, arguing that these form the roots of the co-curation process of *Calumet Voices*. At the same time, the CCUC faced challenges when it came to incorporating its community-oriented programs fully into the museum.

As part of the centennial external review and strategic planning process, four outside reviewers focused on the Anthropology department in Collections and Research. While they offered short notes on research quality and collections maintenance, the reviewers especially "urged the administration to examine…exhibits design in order to fully integrate the

[61] "Calumet Curators," Calumet Voices, National Stories, 2022, https://www.calumetvoices.fieldmuseum.org/co-curators.

anthropology curators into the process," according to the Field Museum's 1991 annual report.[62] The museum could not operate as half a university, producing research, and half a theme park, producing exhibits. Serious anthropology scholarship, the committee noted, had to cross the divisions to reach the museum's public audiences in Chicago, and interdisciplinary approaches to exhibits were the key. The 1992 strategic plan established CCUC and CEEB as cross-cutting interdisciplinary centers, working across museum departments and divisions.

CCUC chose its first curator, Alaka Wali, to reflect these priorities. Wali was new to museums but not new to urban anthropology or activism—she had previously worked on participatory research around reproductive health in Harlem and with indigenous people in Panama and Mexico.[63] In fact, she was prepared to "distance [her]self from the collections and focus on conducting participatory action research with community organizations."[64]

Founded in 1994, CCUC explicitly and immediately began with a focus on exhibits. Field president Boyd primed Wali and the fledgling center to direct their efforts towards an exhibit about contemporary culture. Boyd gave the project the working title "Wounds" and wanted "an exhibit about prejudice" and the value of multiculturalism.[65] However, both curators and exhibit staff pointed out that such a romantic approach to culture did not feel as if it came from the

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[62] Field Museum of Natural History Collections and Research, *1991 Report to the Board of Trustees* (Chicago: The Field Museum, 1991), https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/327086.
[63] This included forming a community advisory board that informed the research direction and pursuing highly participatory dialogue groups to navigate the sensitive context of Black women's reproductive health.
[64] Alaka Wali, "Listening with Passion: A Journey Through Engagement and Exchange," in *Mutuality: Anthropology's Changing Terms of Engagement*, ed. Roger Sanjek (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 180.
[65] For this thesis, I was granted access by Field anthropologist Alaka Wali to her files from CCUC and ECCo projects, at the time located in one of the museum's anthropology labs. Wali has recently retired from the Field Museum, but her working files have not yet been processed by the archives. Future researchers may find different arrangements of material than presented here, but I cite materials by their folder and as the "Alaka Wali unpublished papers" at the Field Museum. Phyllis Rabineau to Alaka Wali, "Attachment 1" to Living Together memo, 12 August 1994, *Living Together* folder, Alaka Wali unprocessed papers, Field Museum.

Field's anthropological strengths. "Many children's museums provide exhibits on multiculturalism and prejudice," they noted.[66]

What was the role of a natural history museum in this cultural conversation? Wali and the CCUC rejected a "Why can't we all just get along" approach to multiculturalism.[67] Using contemporary anthropological's theoretical frameworks, the CCUC and Field would use their exhibit to answer that "why" rigorously. Without resorting to the "university model," they nevertheless argued for the value of museum anthropological scholarship and theory. Early exhibit memos asked, "What could be *the Field Museum's* distinctive approach to an exhibit about prejudice?... This exhibit could explore and explain the sources of diversity—both biological and cultural."[68] The CCUC would build its new exhibit by drawing on old Field strengths in biology and anthropology.

Simultaneously, this exhibit would boost the Field's relevance as a Chicago cultural institution. At the very top of senior exhibition developer Phyllis Rabineau's list of exhibit goals was the aim to "effect a shift of public perception from Field Museum as a place where visitors can learn about other people, to a place where visitors can *also* learn about themselves."[69] Institutional self-perception was a part of the exhibit from its conception. When seeking support for the exhibit, the Field highlighted its timeliness and unique location: "our goal is to enhance visitors' experiences of living with diversity both globally and (increasingly so) locally."[70]

[66] Phyllis Rabineau to Madelyn Thompson, memo with draft grant proposal materials for Living Together, 14 August 1995, Living Together folder, Alaka Wali unprocessed papers, Field Museum, 3.
[67] Alaka Wali, in-person interview with the author, Field Museum, Chicago, November 29, 2023.
[68] Phyllis Rabineau memo, Attachment 2, 12 August 1994, *Living Together* folder, Alaka Wali unprocessed papers, Field Museum.
[69] Phyllis Rabineau to Alaka Wali, "Discussion document for the now-clearly-needing-a-better-name exhibit" memo, 23 September 1994, *Living Together* folder, Alaka Wali unprocessed papers, Field Museum.
[70] Phyllis Rabineau memo with attached first draft of grant proposal materials, 14 August 1994, *Living Together* folder, Alaka Wali unprocessed papers, Field Museum.

CCUC's exhibit opened in 1997 as *Living Together* (later subtitled "Common Concerns, Different Responses").[71] Curators used an ethnological (comparative) approach to demonstrate that different social groups' diverse responses to common challenges (including "constructing a home, forging community or social bonds, and embodying personhood") resulted from environmental and historical contexts but also "sheer human creativity."[72] This approach became visible in exhibition design that drew more from art museum or local historical society methods than the Field's usual playbook. The entrance to *Living Together* featured a large display of 135 shoes, both from Chicago residents and from the Field's ethnographic collections. Juxtaposing them offered visitors an opportunity to recognize how the makers of their own footwear were responding to similar needs for protective, fashionable shoes as shoemakers across space and time.[73] The National Museum of the American Indian, a Smithsonian museum in Washington, D.C., would later use similar approaches to display large collections of many objects in a single case, prioritizing the "big picture" of Indigenous diversity and aesthetics.[74] Scholars argued that this approach borrowed both from art galleries, scholarly "open storage," and from smaller museums that might not have the funding or space to carefully separate art and science along minimalist Western frameworks—natural history museums' highly audience-focused, blockbuster methods had emphasized minimalist case layouts for which every object could have a short, educational label, at times more important than objects themselves.[75]

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[71] Wali and Tudor, "Crossing the Line: Participatory Action Research in a Museum Setting," 70.
[72] Wali and Tudor, 70.
[73] Madeleine Tudor and Alaka Wali, "Showcasing Heritage: Engaging Local Communities through Museum Practice," in *Participatory Visual and Digital Research in Action*, ed. Aline Gubrium, Krista Harper, and Marty Otañez (Routledge, 2015), 200, Figure 12.1.
[74] The National Museum of the American Indian had been founded in 1989 and opened on Washington, D.C.'s National Mall in 2004.
[75] Importantly, just because cases displayed many objects did not mean they were "cluttered" or lacked curation. These clarifications were intended to create separation between crowded, amateur cases, which were also associated with volunteer historical societies. See Claire Smith, "Decolonising the Museum: The National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC," *Antiquity* 79, no. 304 (June 2005): 424–39, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X00114206; Kate Guy, Harja Williams, and Claire Wintle, eds., *Histories of Exhibition Design in the Museum: Makers, Process, and Practice* (London, 2023), 233,

To create this diverse, comparative exhibit, the Field had to overcome a major institutional hurdle: the museum simply did not have contemporary urban objects in its collections, and the CCUC curators lacked both the budget and the museum experience to do so. Instead, as they developed the exhibit between 1994 and 1997, Wali and the CCUC drew on the experience they did have—urban, participatory research. The *Living Together* team proposed a set of advisors that included both three paid scholar-practitioners and a larger advisory council of 26 Chicagoans representing businesses, educators, religious organizations, youth groups, and community organizations.[76] Staff anthropologists including Madeleine Tudor conducted ethnographic research and interviews with Chicago families.[77] These were incorporated into the exhibit through video, interactive games, and photography. CCUC used strategies learned from the "blockbuster" exhibits to bring the voices and faces of contemporary Chicagoans into *Living Together*.[78] Tie-in educational programs and materials used a similarly interactive approach—for example, miniature models of a Chicago two-flat and a Hopi pueblo, echoing dioramas in the exhibit, circulated together to Chicago schools to illustrate the ways that family structures

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https://www.routledge.com/Histories-of-Exhibition-Design-in-the-Museum-Makers-Process-and-Practice/Guy-Williams-Wintle/p/book/9781032156934.

[76] For example, one suggestion for a paid advisor was Jack Tchen, who had cofounded New York's Museum of Chinese in America. See Phyllis Rabineau, meeting notes and "Proposed paid project consultants," 22 September 1994, Alaka Wali unprocessed papers, Field Museum.

[77] Along with Wali as curator, CCUC's external affairs manager Jacqueline Carter coordinated the community advisory panel, and special projects coordinator Madeleine Tudor developed the video, interactive, and diorama that featured tours of six Chicago homes. See "Center for Cultural Understanding and Change," in *The Field Museum 1997 Annual Report to the Board of Trustees*, by Office of Academic Affairs, Center for Evolutionary and Environmental Biology and Center for Cultural Understanding and Change, vol. 1997 (Chicago: The Field Museum, 1998), 22, https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/328521.

[78] Along with its permanent exhibit space, Living Together also brought "satellite" exhibits into other permanent galleries in the museum, encouraging a comparative perspective. Wali and Tudor, "Crossing the Line: Participatory Action Research in a Museum Setting," 69; Alaka Wali, "Beyond the Colonnades: Changing Museum Practice and Public Anthropology in Chicago," *Sociological Imagination* 42, no. 2 (2006): 103.

influenced shelter, as Wali noted in her exhibit opening remarks.[79] Urban anthropology therefore flowed between the museum and the community in both directions.

The Field also came into contact not just with Chicagoan people, but specifically Chicagoan cultural organizations and social service organizations, like the Filipino American Historical Society of Chicago and the Polish Museum of America. While these relationships started with requests for these local museums to lend cultural objects to *Living Together*, they expanded into "building long-term relationships with grassroots organizations of different sizes and types."[80] What had begun as a solution to the Field's problem—a museum president mandate to create an exhibit about contemporary cultural diversity, without a ready-made collection to match—now provided a group of engaged potential partners.

Once *Living Together* opened in October 1997, the CCUC continued to build on both the challenges and the networks it had realized through the exhibit. Though the exhibit had emphasized commonalities rather than exotica, CCUC anthropologists realized they "could not so easily dismiss ethnicity and inter-ethnic and racial conflict as a persistent dimension of Chicago's social life" in the still deeply segregated city.[81] The CCUC could do more when it came to engaging with the neighborhood communities—treating them as true partners, not just advisors or sources. Starting with the eight institutions who had helped the Field gather material for *Living Together*, and eventually growing to over twenty in the next decade, the Field launched a programs series called Cultural Connections in 1998.[82]

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[79] "Living Together," in *1997 Report to the Board of Trustees*, by Center for Cultural Understanding and Change and Center for Evolutionary and Environmental Biology (Chicago: The Field Museum, 1998), 19–21, https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/328521; "Living Together: Shelters" box with lesson plans and models, N. W. Harris Learning Collection, A01-05, Field Museum.

[80] Tudor and Wali, "Showcasing Heritage," 200.

[81] Wali, "Beyond the Colonnades: Changing Museum Practice and Public Anthropology in Chicago," 103.

[82] Rosa Cabrera, "Beyond the Museum Walls," *Museum News* 85, no. 4 (August 2006): 37.

Cultural Connections continued the "common concerns, different responses" approach that had formed the exhibit's subtitle. Paired partners presented educational events along a shared theme—for example, the Indo-American Center might demonstrate putting on a sari and the Chicago Japanese American Cultural Society might show off the parts of a kimono in a joint event around dress and identity, or the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum and Cambodian Association of Illinois might highlight their two cultures' different ancestor-focused celebrations.[83] The programs received significant funding and attendance, reaching over 8,000 people by 2006.[84]

Serious anthropological scholarship continued to be important, both in communicating the value of the Field's expertise to the community and in justifying that the program belonged at the natural history museum. The ethnological framework, in which culture was presented through comparison and survey, helped participants avoid only implicitly contrasting the "other" against their own experiences.[85] Cultural Connections programs often ended with participants sharing a meal, and anthropologists sat at each table to mediate audience discussions.[86]

Academic and social value alone, though, was not enough to sustain a program at the Field. *Institutional* relevance remained important to museum leadership. Wali highlighted the ways in which CCUC framed its work to retain support: "I was able to demonstrate that doing engaged participatory research that was focused on different ways people were undertaking actions to better their lives was effective in building new audiences for the museum."[87] Despite these efforts, though, CCUC eventually struggled to retain a clear role within the museum. The center never had an operational budget beyond the salary of its founding curator, Wali, instead

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[83] Cabrera, 37.
[84] Wali, "Beyond the Colonnades: Changing Museum Practice and Public Anthropology in Chicago," 105.
[85] Mario Longoni, in-person interview with the author, University of Chicago, February 12, 2024.
[86] Wali, "Beyond the Colonnades: Changing Museum Practice and Public Anthropology in Chicago," 104.
[87] Alaka Wali and Sam Beck, "Alaka Wali: A Conversation with Sam Beck," *Anthropology Now* 8, no. 3 (September 1, 2016): 126, https://doi.org/10.1080/19428200.2016.1242923.

pursuing grant-funded projects.[88] Though the team had intended their *Living Together* exhibit to be a permanent one, it was largely deinstalled after just six years.[89] While "mission-focused" for CCUC, this work did not seem sufficiently "mission-focused" for the Field as a whole. As Wali put it: "We'd work with public housing, and museum people would say, 'Isn't that social services?'"[90]

After a decade of Cultural Connections, the program ultimately did not remain a part of the Field Museum. The community partners also experienced a gap between their concerns and those of the "big museum," which enjoyed better access to city funding and downtown tourism because of its museum campus location.[91] When the Field was unwilling to support the program long-term, CCUC instead worked with partners in its last three years to turn the programming series into the Chicago Cultural Alliance in 2006. CCA became a separate nonprofit that would continue both to run events and to advance the institutional priorities of the ethnic and community museums, including promoting tourism in their neighborhoods, outside the Loop.[92] The community museums and cultural organizations that had collaborated with the Field wanted something bigger and more enduring than "just a programming partnership."[93] CCUC's flagship program ended up leaving the institution's walls entirely, and it seemed to some that "the CCA is the main result of the activities of the CCP [Cultural Connections program]."[94]

Cultural Connections also brought the Field into contact with Calumet cultural organizations, including the Southeast Chicago Historical Society (SECHS) and the Pullman

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[88] Wali, in-person interview with the author, Field Museum, Chicago.
[89] CCUC continued to conduct participatory research and create exhibits based on its projects, but they were temporary and relegated to smaller back galleries. See Alaka Wali, "Collecting Contemporary Urban Culture: An Emerging Framework for the Field Museum," *Museum Anthropology* 37, no. 1 (2014): 67, https://doi.org/10.1111/muan.12044.
[90] Wali, in-person interview with the author, Field Museum, Chicago.
[91] Cabrera, "Beyond the Museum Walls," 38.
[92] Cabrera, 38.
[93] Longoni, in-person interview with the author, University of Chicago, 7:48.
[94] Borrelli and Davis, "Developing Capacity Building," 459.

State Historic Site—both future *Calumet Voices* participants.[95] However, as Cultural Connections became the CCA, SECHS no longer fit as neatly into the new conception of the organization as a "consortium of ethnically focused cultural organizations."[96] Thee version of the CCA that spun off from the Field was less well-equipped to work with history-focused Calumet groups—perhaps in part because of the heavy emphasis on multiculturalism that had led the initial exhibit.

Through CCUC's *Living Together* and Cultural Connections, the Field forayed for the first time into urban anthropology. It treated ethnic and community organizations in Chicago as first advisors and sources, then programming partners in a trust-building process. Partners benefitted too, in a process that Mario Longoni calls "lending prestige" from the Field Museum to other Chicago organizations, linking the "big museum" to the small and the neighborhoods to the Loop in a growing network.[97] The continuation of the CCA beyond the Field testifies to its value to the Chicagoland organizations with which the Field came into contact via the CCUC. However, the pieces had not yet all coalesced for the Field to pursue longer-term, relevant urban engagement that it could also justify within its museum mission.

**Section 3: Conserving Calumet biodiversity (1994–1998)**

CCUC's Cultural Connections program showed one way that the Field could work with communities. But how did the downtown museum come to be interested in not just the city but specifically the Calumet, spanning far southeast neighborhoods and across state lines into

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[95] In May 2003, the SECHS led a Cultural Connections tour of "Chicago's Southeast Side – The Built Environment," ending with a local Polish meal at a parish. SECHS also connected with another consortium partner, the Polish Museum of America, to share archives relating to the Polish community on the Southeast Side. See Joe Mulac, "A Few Words from the President," *Southeast Chicago Historical Society News*, April 2003, Chicago History Museum Research Center, https://chhiso.ent.sirsi.net/client/en_US/public/search/detailnonmodal/ent:$002f$002fSD_ILS$002f0$002fSD_ILS:218652/one.

[96] Chicago Cultural Alliance quad-fold brochure, Chicago Cultural Alliance c/o Irish American Heritage Center, Madeleine Tudor unprocessed papers, Field Museum, emphasis added..

[97] Longoni, in-person interview with the author, University of Chicago.

northwest Indiana? For a museum new to applied research and activism, this geography was far from intuitive. The Field's first focused interest in the Calumet—and eventually, its history—would come not from the historical societies in Cultural Connections, but from the other interdisciplinary center founded at the museum's centennial.

This section traces the role played by the Field's conservation-focused arm, Center for Evolutionary and Environmental Biology (CEEB) and office of Environmental and Conservation Programs (ECP) founded alongside CCUC in 1994. Emerging from the museum relevance crisis of the 1980s with a new desire to apply its research towards biodiversity preservation, the Field found the Calumet in its own moment of crisis—both ecological and economic. In this section, I locate this encounter geographically within Chicago networks and historically within longer timelines of environmental study and change in the Calumet. While biodiversity piqued the ECP's interest in the Calumet as a region, traditional conservation strategies also eventually fell short in the region's postindustrial context.

CEEB's projects combined the museum's strengths in systematic biology with the growing urgency of environmental conservation. At first, these did not geographically center in Chicagoland. The Field had nearly a century of experience collecting and cataloging plants and animals in the tropics.[98] Scientists could continue working in familiar biomes, pivoting their efforts towards environmental biology work to address increasing habitat destruction and biodiversity loss there.[99] The Field became coordinator of the Rapid Assessment Program (RAP)

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[98] Crane, "The Center for Evolutionary and Environmental Biology: Work in Progress," 10.

[99] The "evolutionary" biology in CEEB's name referred to another potential focus area, developmental biology and biotechnology. In a research landscape where biotechnology and genetic engineering were increasingly funded (e.g. for pharmaceutical or agricultural applications), this represented an effort to pursue systematics and paleobiology, two areas where the Field's collections were strong, towards these applications. While these ideas showed up in 1992 planning for the CEEB, when the center was formally founded in 1994 it had already developed an office of Environmental and Conservation Programs with its own founding director. In this thesis, I primarily focus on the work of ECP, which was a major departure from other forms of research pursued at the Field and reframed through this applied-research lens by CEEB.

in tropical South America, a strategy in which scientists used the Field's computing and collection to quickly capture "snapshot" biological inventories of threatened habitats in Bolivia and Peru.[100] The Field's extensive herbarium sheets were printed and distributed as "instant field guides" that allowed scientists in the field to quickly understand what species might already be present, as opposed to threatened or extinct, in their field sites.[101] ECP's founding director, Debra Moskovits, had previously worked at Conservation International (the founder of RAP).

CEEB also worked on scientific literacy. This goal drew from the museum's experience as an informal educational institution close to home. "All of us in CEEB also have a special responsibility to the people of Chicago," wrote the center's first vice president, botanist Peter Crane.[102] Science literacy was seen as key to addressing major global challenges like ozone depletion by fostering informed citizens and future scientists, and Chicago Public Schools students and teachers were in particular need of high-quality biology teaching resources.[103]

The Field combined both its conservation focus and its Chicago responsibilities by highlighting biodiversity in the metropolis. "In the minds of many the term biodiversity is virtually synonymous with the destruction and conservation of tropical rainforests," Crane admitted. However, "In the greater Chicago area, perhaps more than anywhere else in the nation,we have the jarring juxtaposition of massive heavy industry and urban sprawl, with astounding biological diversity, albeit now distributed among a patchwork of fragmentary prairie, woodland, dune and wetland systems." Crane traced this fragmentation both to the

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[100] RAP had been launched by an external organization, Conservation International, that generally paired museum systematic biologists with local scientists, but ECP quickly built the Field into a major contributor to the program, especially by using its computing and identification resources.
[101] Center for Evolutionary and Environmental Biology and Center for Cultural Understanding and Change, *The Field Museum Report to the Board of Trustees*, 69.
[102] Crane, "The Center for Evolutionary and Environmental Biology: Work in Progress," 13.
[103] Along with more general relevancy-focused goals to reach a broad Chicago-based audience, Crane cited the high number of low-income students and the bottom-quartile scores over 40% of CPS students received on standardized science tests as specific reasons to center educational efforts on Chicago. See Crane, 13.

plowing of the prairies that had originally fueled the "nature's metropolis" but also to rapid urbanization from the 1970s to the 1990s, when Chicagoland's population grew by 4% while urban land use rose 51%.[104]

The Calumet region, named after the watershed of the Calumet river, was a nexus of natural resources that had long been attractive for both transportation and industry. Its wetlands were the site of a continental divide that had made it a portage, or place of passage between navigable rivers, for many nations of native Miami and Anishinaabe (mostly Potawatomi) who claim the area as the homeland of the Council of Three Fires.[105] The same wetlands and dunes, shaped by glaciers and Lake Michigan, formed ridges and swales, a dense transitional landscape that united tallgrass prairie, forest, and "the Everglades of the North" in an incredibly close geographical area.[106] The city of Chicago, built on Potawatomi and French trading posts, became a rapidly growing "shock city" in the 19th and 20th century by building extensive railroads through the Calumet, connecting the metropolis to its hinterland resources like agricultural land.[107]

Along with becoming a marketplace, Chicago also leveraged its location on the Great Lakes to become an anchor of American manufacturing, using ports on the Chicago River and Lake Michigan to link its production infrastructure with eastern markets. To make the wetland portage navigable required extensive dredging and widening of harbors and rivers like the Indiana Harbor in 1901 and the Cal-Sag channel in 1922. Blast furnaces and steel mills' chimneys increasingly rose in the Calumet, taking advantage of access to railroads, navigable

[104] Peter R. Crane, "Biodiversity in the Metropolis," in *The Field Museum Report to the Board of Trustees*, by Center for Evolutionary and Environmental Biology and Center for Cultural Understanding and Change (Chicago: The Field Museum, 1995), 16, https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/327406.
[105] John William Nelson, *Muddy Ground: Native Peoples, Chicago's Portage, and the Transformation of a Continent*, The David J. Weber Series in the New Borderlands History (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2023), 10.
[106] Bouman, "The Calumet Region: A Line in the Sand," 288.-
[107] Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*.

waterways, and Chicago's growing labor force.[108] To match the magnetic pull of Calumet industries, waves of migrants arrived over the course of the century, from southern and eastern European laborers to Mexican immigrants to African Americans through the Great Migration of the 1920s. The strong working-class community included master-planned towns like Pullman and Marktown, built by the mills to house workers and also public housing at Altgeld Gardens and the expansion of the Black Belt through the South Side.[109] As a site of industry, the Calumet also became a site of labor clashes, especially the Memorial Day Massacre in May 1937 when police attacked striking Republic Steelworkers.[110] The Calumet seemed to be a site of both incredible resources and incredible conflict between the landscape, the industry, and the people.

Though Crane framed CEEB's interest in Chicagoland through its current-day "jarring juxtaposition," the Field was actually returning to a longstanding field site for Chicago scientists, not establishing a fully new one. The first of the Field's over 20,000 Calumet objects date from the 1890s and include two of the only six ever specimens of *Thismia americana*, a plant that was first and only seen in 1912 around Lake Calumet.[111] *Thismia americana* was both the only North American member of its genus and a symbiotic plant without chlorophyll, an extremely early epitome of unique Calumet biodiversity.[112] In 1896, UChicago plant ecologist Henry Chandler Cowles studied the Indiana Dunes along Lake Michigan's southern shore and used their dynamic environment to pioneer the theory of ecological succession, and his students continued to study the dunes ecosystem.

[108] Bouman, "A Mirror Cracked," 107.
[109] Reiff and Hirsch, "Pullman and Its Public," 99; Bouman, "A Mirror Cracked," 107.
[110] Grennan Browning, *Nature's Laboratory*, 210.
[111] Paul Eisenberg, "Landmarks: Field Museum Exhibit Gives Voice to Stories of Calumet Region, a Place That Really Matters," Chicago Tribune, December 4, 2022, https://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/daily-southtown/ct-sta-eisenberg-landmarks-st-1205-20221204-oz757t4u3japtmu6b2j24hry3u-story.html.
[112] Bouman, "The Calumet Region: A Line in the Sand," 380n26.

Chicago scientists and teachers who worked in the Calumet also became involved in early concern for the environment and its relationship to the city. Some environmental educators saw natural history as a resource like any other, like one who wrote, "Chicago['s]... stores of educational material are as limitless as her resources are boundless; her natural environs abound in features of great scientific interest."[113] Middle-class progressive reformers saw access to "unspoiled" natural environments like the Indiana dunes as a tool for educating and socializing the growing urban population.[114]

Others realized that the expanding metropolis threatened the integrity of its nature. In 1896, Standard Oil was building a massive refinery next to Cowles's fieldsite in Whiting, Indiana, leveling dunes and filling marshes to make room for oil tanks.[115] The ecologist joined the efforts of early Chicago environmentalists, who were reluctant to altogether halt development on the prime lakeshore but did seek to preserve some natural land for future generations.[116] In 1915 Cowles co-founded the organization that would later become the Nature Conservancy, and he and regional associations like the Chicago Academy of Sciences supported 1916 efforts for a Dunes National Park.[117]

The Field joined this legacy of scientist-conservationists. Along with the clear stakes for Illinois's natural environment, Crane also connected the Field's new commitment to Chicagoland

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[113] Grennan Browning, *Nature's Laboratory*, 104.
[114] Grennan Browning, 105.
[115] Jonathan Wlasiuk, "A Company Town on Common Waters: Standard Oil in the Calumet," *Environmental History* 19, no. 4 (October 2014): 692, https://doi.org/10.1093/envhis/emu069.
[116] One UChicago geologist, Rollin Salisbury, wrote, "The dunes are going and more are to go. I do not think we should stop it altogether, because the head of Lake Michigan is so advantageously situated for industrial development that industries must develop there. . . . [But we can] secure the permanent preservation of a generous and well-selected tract, for the use of ourselves, and of the generations to come." See Bouman, "The Calumet Region: A Line in the Sand," 294.
[117] Cowles and his UChicago mentee Victor Shelford founded the Ecological Society of America in 1915. In 1946, Shelford and an activist contingent of the conservation organization became the Ecologists' Union that lobbied Congress for habitat preservation. In 1951, the Ecologists' Union would eventually rename itself the Nature Conservancy, still a major conservation player today. See Grennan Browning, *Nature's Laboratory*, 147; Bouman, "The Calumet Region: A Line in the Sand," 294.

conservation with perhaps more cynical questions of museum legitimacy: "Chicago's biological heritage also presents a straightforward challenge – how can we urge the population of São Paolo or other tropical cities to conserve their natural resources unless we commit to do the same?"[118]

ECP committed by helping found the Chicago Regional Biodiversity Council, nicknamed Chicago Wilderness, in 1996.[119] Drawing on the Field's prestige as a cultural institution, Chicago Wilderness linked together government agencies and forest preserves with cultural institutions like arboreta and fellow science museums.[120] Chicago Wilderness began with 34 members and quickly grew to over 250, echoing the network structure being used by CCUC.[121] The group successfully coordinated volunteer restoration work in forest preserves, matched federal funds with projects, and raised awareness for environmental stewardship.[122] Many strategies followed the model set by the Nature Conservancy, a founding member, by focusing on acquiring large amounts of natural land to legally protect it. Chicago Wilderness maintained a narrow strategic focus—organizations that worked on biodiversity could join whether they were government agencies, conservation groups, or cultural centers, but environmental organizations with different emphases, like pollution, could not.[123]

Searching for Chicago biodiversity in need of preservation, Chicago Wilderness encountered the Calumet, as Cowles had a century earlier. The 1990s found the Calumet after a decade of crisis. Starting in March 1980 with the closure of the century-old Wisconsin Steel plant in South Deering, Chicago's largest community area, many of the major steel plants closed

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[118] Crane, "Biodiversity in the Metropolis," 16.
[119] While the idea of the network had been formed in February 1993, before ECP's founding, the Field was quickly seen as a major partner. Museum president Sandy Boyd signed the invitation and opened the 1994 meeting that first convened the whole group. See Laurel M. Ross, "The Chicago Wilderness and Its Critics: The Chicago Wilderness: A Coalition for Urban Conservation," *Restoration & Management Notes* 15, no. 1 (1997): 17–24.
[120] Liam Heneghan et al., "Lessons Learned from Chicago Wilderness—Implementing and Sustaining Conservation Management in an Urban Setting," *Diversity* 4, no. 1 (March 2012): 80, https://doi.org/10.3390/d4010074.
[121] Heneghan et al., 75.
[122] Heneghan et al., 23.
[123] Bouman, "Nurture's Metropolis: Chicago and the Rediscovery of Nature," 23.

within a decade.[124] Over 20,000 industrial jobs dropped out from under steelworkers' feet, and the region's population decreased 11% on average from 1980 to 1990 as many residents left for better prospects.[125] While places across the Great Lakes Steel Belt (turned Rust Belt) experienced similar deindustrialization, the Calumet was hit unusually hard, in part because so many mills had concentrated in the region to access its resources and infrastructure.[126]

One of the major remaining industries in the Calumet was waste disposal, which came with its own hazards as well as opponents. In the 1940s, the city opened its first large dump in the Far South Side, tacitly marking the Calumet as wasteland in a literal sense, and public housing development Altgeld Gardens had been built on top of one.[127] Altgeld resident Hazel Johnson described the region as a "toxic donut," with sewage plants, landfills, the polluted Little Calumet River, and emissions from Acme Steel's remaining steel plant in Riverdale surrounding the development on all sides.[128]

Johnson and other Calumet residents responded to environmental hazards in their neighborhoods by organizing for environmental justice. In 1982, Johnson founded People for Community Recovery (PCR), a community organization that worked to document dumping, track community health issues caused by toxic waste, and protest for housing justice and against environmental racism—Altgeld's neighborhood was 97 percent Black.[129] In 1989, fellow

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[124] Rod Sellers, *Chicago's Southeast Side Revisited*, Images of America (Chicago, Ill: Arcadia, 2001), 119.
[125] Bouman, "A Mirror Cracked," 107.
[126] Bouman, "The Calumet Region: A Line in the Sand," 295.
[127] I draw here on Traci Voyles's concept of "wastelanding" as a racialized and colonial system of power, a lens both drawn from and drawn on by environmental justice organizers. See Traci Brynne Voyles, *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 9; David N. Pellow, *Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago*, Urban and Industrial Environments (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002), 68.
[128] Bouman, "A Mirror Cracked," 108.
[129] Along with Johnson and PCR, environmental justice organizers on the other side of the country were also being led by Black women to organize against toxic landfills. Also in 1982, major protests against the expansion of a landfill in Warren County, North Carolina have been called the origin point of the terms environmental justice and environmental racism. Johnson's efforts were immediately connected to this network through events like the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. See Pellow, *Garbage Wars*, 73.

organizer Marian Byrnes convened a coalition of local environmental groups known as the Southeast Environmental Task Force (SETF), which fought plans to build a garbage incinerator on the old Wisconsin Steel site.[130] She, like Johnson, rooted her activism in her neighborhood: Byrnes began her activist career to protect a fragment of prairie across the street from her house.[131]

Environmental justice arose in the Calumet when traditional conservation organizations, predominantly white and middle-class, were distrusted there. Many steelworkers worried that anti-pollution regulations had put the mills they depended on out of business.[132] Johnson's PCR and Byrnes's SETF framed their activism around defending their communities from being treated as disposable—Calumet residents faced disproportionately high risks of rare cancers linked to toxic pollution.[133] By opposing landfills that brought few jobs and lowered property values, they also appealed to residents' desires for economic revitalization. PCR and SETF won key victories like a moratorium against dumping.

In 1990, Mayor Richard M. Daley surprised many by announcing a redevelopment plan for the region that featured constructing a Lake Calumet International Airport on top of landfills and the Calumet River. The airport would have razed large portions of Hegewisch, South Deering, and the East Side and terraformed the lake, further displacing both the Calumet's population and its biodiversity.[134] The proposal reflected a desperation on the part of the city to fill the void left by departing industry with new economic development at any cost. However,

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[130] Byrnes, who was a white woman and an educated former schoolteacher, was widely lauded for building bridges through her activism. See Southeast Environmental Task Force, "About Us," 2024, https://setaskforce.org/about-us-2/.
[131] "The Accidental Environmentalist," *Chicago Tribune*, September 24, 2002, https://www.chicagotribune.com/2002/09/24/the-accidental-environmentalist/.
[132] Christine J. Walley, "The Ties That Bind," in *Exit Zero: Family and Class in Postindustrial Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 121, https://doi.org/10.7208/9780226871813-007.
[133] Walley, 34.
[134] Sellers, *Chicago's Southeast Side Revisited*, 122.

Calumet organizers fiercely showed up to oppose the plan. Residents joined Byrnes and the SETF in protests and vigils at City Hall.[135]

The airport proposal was so drastic that it united a unique coalition of Calumet environmental justice organizers, development advocates, and conservation organizations.[136] The airport plan put the Calumet on Chicago Wilderness's radar. Chicago Wilderness partners hosted a "Calumet BioBlitz" that used ECP's tropical rapid inventory methods to quickly document and raise awareness of the unique species in the region.[137] Some local residents went looking for endangered species like *Thismia americana*, the long-lost unique plant that had only ever been found in the Calumet, in the hopes of justifying the value of the region and an end to the airport plan. Others commissioned a report that highlighted how endangered wetland birds would collide with aircraft.[138] Calumet residents were willing to try invoking mainstream environmentalist strategies despite histories of distrust because Daley's proposal was unthinkably disastrous for their hometowns.[139] The City eventually withdrew the airport plan in 1992 in the face of widespread, diverse opposition.

Chicago Wilderness and city urban planners (including government agencies in the coalition) began to seriously consider what sustainable development could look like in the Calumet—if residents were invested enough to stop the airport, then perhaps there was enough energy for broader conservation work in a precarious place. In Chicago Wilderness's

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[135] Larry Galica, "Landing a Third Airport: Lake Calumet Foes Protest," *Northwest Indiana Times*, January 17, 1992, https://www.nwitimes.com/uncategorized/landing-a-third-airport-lake-cal-foes-protest-at/article_bddc7e0f-4346-5766-88c6-78ebdecbe046.html; Bouman, "The Calumet Region: A Line in the Sand," 298.

[136] Walley, "The Ties That Bind," 130.

[137] "Botanists Hunt Rare Prairie Plant in the Wilds of South Chicagoland," *Chicago Tribune*, August 11, 1991, https://www.chicagotribune.com/1991/08/11/botanists-hunt-rare-prairie-plant-in-the-wilds-of-south-chicagoland/.

[138] "Birder Takes Issue with 3rd Airport Study," *Chicago Tribune*, August 1, 1991, https://www.chicagotribune.com/1991/08/01/birder-takes-issue-with-3rd-airport-study/.

[139] Noting how people went looking for endangered species like the Franklin ground squirrel in Calumet swamps, Calumet resident and ethnographer Christine Walley wrote, "I found it poignant that area residents had to reckon with the fact that the plight of ground squirrels was legally given more weight than their own homes and lives." See Walley, "The Ties That Bind," 130.

Biodiversity Recovery Plan, the coalition noted that "The Lake Calumet area… may provide opportunities to restore and create some large complexes" through Nature Conservancy-style methods of acquiring large swathes of land, with a variety of biomes, that could become protected areas.[140] The city conducted numerous planning studies in the region, emphasizing its unique wetlands.[141]

Environmental justice organizations like SETF worked with ECP and Chicago Wilderness, becoming "the most visible locally based actor and collaborator with the Field Museum" within the network.[142] In 1993, SETF founder Marian Byrnes supported a campaign for a Calumet Ecological Park, a proposed wetland recreation area that would preserve an environmental corridor through the Lake Calumet area to Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore.[143] The Calumet Environmental Park Association (CEPA) she represented became a Chicago Wilderness member by 1997.[144]

However, the unlikely alliances that had formed against the Calumet airport were not sustainable. Government agencies in Chicago Wilderness held power over community organizations and could reject residents' sustainable development proposals, like "good neighbor" dialogues between them and local polluting industries, for being insufficiently biodiversity-related. Chicago Wilderness had focused on biodiversity, not pollution, and saw the residents' plans as outside its scope.[145] Hazel Johnson of the PCR called out major environmental

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[140] "Chicago Wilderness Biodiversity Recovery Plan" (Chicago: Chicago Wilderness, 1999), https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.chicagowilderness.org/resource/resmgr/Publications/biodiversity_recovery_plan.pdf.
[141] "The Calumet Area Ecological Management Strategy: Phase I Sites" (Chicago: City of Chicago Department of Environment, Chicago's Environmental Fund, and Illinois Department of Natural Resources, 2002), Chicago State University Calumet Environmental Resource Center, https://www.csu.edu/cerc/documents/calumetems.pdf.
[142] Bouman, "Nurture's Metropolis: Chicago and the Rediscovery of Nature," 31.
[143] "Calumet Ecological Park Feasibility Study: A Special Resource Study Conducted in the Calumet Region of Northeast Illinois and Northwest Indiana" (US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Midwest Region, August 1998), https://www.csu.edu/cerc/documents/calumetecologicalparkstudy.pdf.
[144] "Premiere Issue," *Chicago Wilderness*, Fall 1997, inside back cover, Chicago Wilderness Magazine Archives.
[145] William Peterman, "Revitalising the Calumet: A Model for Urban Regeneration?" (Area-based Initiatives in Contemporary Urban Policy, Copenhagen: Danish Building and Urban Research and European Urban Research Association, 2001), 8, https://www.csu.edu/cerc/researchreports/documents/RevitalisingTheCalumet2001_000.pdf.

organizations' insufficiently collaborative "partnerships": "We don't need white people to speak for us… We want our own agenda. The Sierra Club and the Wildlife Federation use information from grassroots groups like us and take it back to their offices and get grants and we don't get any of the money."[146]

These agencies and environmental organizations were major parts of ECP's network, but they were ill suited to working with growing (and simultaneously disproportionately marginalized) segments of the Calumet population.[147] From CCUC, with the benefit of an anthropological point of view, Wali wrote, "There has been growing recognition within [Chicago Wilderness] that long-term stewardship of fragile habitats depends on involving a more diverse constituent base than the traditional memberships of conservation organizations…. the agenda of environmental conservation needs to be integrated into broader efforts to create sustainable strategies for enhancing regional well-being."[148]

CEPA's plan for a Calumet Ecological Park proved a major test for the post-airport coalitions. The organization seemed to be primed for success—it represented interested citizens with a track record of success through SETF, aligned with the predominant land management-based conservation strategies, and covered a unique and threatened landscape. CEPA even garnered bipartisan Congressional backing for 1996 legislation that supported a feasibility study for the ecological park.[149] The National Park Service (NPS) would evaluate the

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[146] Pellow, *Garbage Wars*, 76.
[147] Chicago Wilderness persistently struggled to communicate the value of conservation to communities, even on the northwest side, where rewilding efforts that required removing non-native forests met widespread opposition. See Debra Shore, "The Chicago Wilderness and Its Critics: Controversy Erupts Over Restoration in Chicago Area," *Restoration & Management Notes* 15, no. 1 (1997): 25–31.
[148] Wali, "Beyond the Colonnades: Changing Museum Practice and Public Anthropology in Chicago," 110.
[149] This was compiled with related projects into the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996. See "Calumet Ecological Park Feasibility Study: A Special Resource Study Conducted in the Calumet Region of Northeast Illinois and Northwest Indiana," 2.

proposed park area, and advocates hoped it would recommend the park be created and incorporated into the NPS system.

However, the NPS disagreed, and it said as much in its 1998 Calumet Ecological Park Feasibility Study report. To be incorporated into the system's management, the study area needed to have nationally significant recreational, cultural, and historic resources. The biodiversity easily qualified: "Lakeplains are an ecosystem unique to the Great Lakes basin…The Calumet study area includes remnants of exceptional biodiversity."[150] But the social and environmental dynamics of the region disqualified it in the NPS's eyes. Even though NPS acknowledged local residents were underserved by green spaces in their urban industrial region, their use of the Calumet environment was dismissed as unimportant. "An evaluation of these [recreational] resources showed that the area's existing open space and parks provide a benefit to the local communities *rather than* attract visitors from surrounding states or other parts of the country," the NPS wrote (emphasis added). Tourists would simply go to the dunes instead.

Historical and cultural resources such as the remnants of steelworks and company towns also seemed suitable for inclusion in the NPS system. However, the "magnitude and complexity of the region's development," namely the way its industrial legacy of toxins would require extensive, expensive decontamination before the NPS could legally acquire sites, created hesitation. The feasibility study seemed to express surprise that "*despite* over 100 years of industrialization… numerous significant cultural resources remain in the region."[151] For the NPS, the environmental history of the Calumet was a disqualifier for conservation rather than a motivator. Because the traditional conservation strategy required "untouched" natural land to

[150] "Calumet Ecological Park Feasibility Study: A Special Resource Study Conducted in the Calumet Region of Northeast Illinois and Northwest Indiana," 21.
[151] "Calumet Ecological Park Feasibility Study: A Special Resource Study Conducted in the Calumet Region of Northeast Illinois and Northwest Indiana," 23.

preserve, it ended up working against rather than with the realities of postindustrial heritage in the region. The NPS rejected the park for many of the same reasons that developers had rejected the brownfields.

However, the NPS did suggest a new possibility: a National Heritage Area (NHA) designation.[152] Local rather than national actors would have to handle funding and management, including for the expensive cleanup efforts, but NPS could grant a possible Calumet National Heritage Area some prestige and technical assistance. The designation had been created for similarly industrial sites like the nearby Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor and placed more emphasis on culture and history ("heritage") than unspoiled nature.[153]

Ultimately, the NPS rejected the ecological park proposal that CEPA, backed by ECP and Chicago Wilderness, had raised in the feasibility study. It was a major setback for their conservation strategies in the region. It was not enough to form partnerships and work with resident stakeholders towards biodiversity conservation. The environmental and community history of the Calumet had shaped both the region's physical landscape and the willingness of its residents to work with organizations like the Field and the city, in ways that the prevailing methods of the conservation activists and scientists were unprepared to engage. Though the Field had tried to stay within its ecology comfort zone, its strategies worked against rather than with the realities of the region. It was time to expand the expertise of Field Museum scientists to broaden sustainable development possibilities for diverse Calumet communities.

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[152] "Calumet Ecological Park Feasibility Study: A Special Resource Study Conducted in the Calumet Region of Northeast Illinois and Northwest Indiana," 38.
[153] Brenda Barrett, "National Heritage Areas: Evaluating Past Practices as a Foundation for the Future," *Proceedings of the Fábos Conference on Landscape and Greenway Planning* 4, no. 1 (2013): 66.

**Section 4: Calumet heritage assets (2002–2011)**

CCUC's community engagement and ECP's biodiversity conservation had been established as interdisciplinary but separate projects for the two centers in the 1990s. However, in the Calumet, the interconnectedness of culture and the environment challenged the prevailing approaches. Along with the NPS's post-feasibility study suggestion for a National Heritage Area, the two centers' leadership at the Field began to consider how to more effectively work in the region. If anthropology, biology, geology, and zoology could coexist under the Field Museum's neoclassical roof, could combining them also improve the museum's work outside its white walls? CCUC had faced institutional challenges gaining legitimacy and consistent funding. ECP's efforts, on the other hand, were well-funded but struggling to reach policymakers and Calumet residents. Starting in the early 2000s, the two centers' leadership—Alaka Wali in CCUC and Debra Moskovits in ECP—began to combine their work. Eventually, the two centers would unite from independent centers into their own museum division: Environment, Culture, and Conservation (ECCo). Building on the previous two sections that highlighted the foundations laid by both centers, I now trace the ways the Field pursued a more concerted strategy in the Calumet that integrated social and natural sciences. I argue that this strategy enabled the *natural history* museum to approach *history* institutions as an asset for the region, better matching the scope of its activism to the broad base of the museum's mission and research.

Coming off encounters with complex intra-community dynamics in the Calumet, Moskovits and the ECP realized they could not work in the Calumet the same way as in the Loop. They needed to better understand the specificity of Calumet communities—in other words, the work of anthropologists. Wali and the CCUC, on the other hand, were struggling to justify why a museum should engage in social justice activism. The ECP's growing need for

environmental justice provided that *why*. “We came to realize that there was a limit to what we [CCUC] could do because funders weren’t that willing to support a social justice agenda. Once we aligned more closely with the environmental conservation agenda — how to engage urban communities in stewardship of urban nature — we were more successful in receiving funding and institutional support,” Wali said frankly.[154] Moskovits was extremely successful when it came to funding—she had won the museum record grants in 2002 and 2003, $11 million from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation and $5.25 million from USAID for ongoing RAP work.[155] The two centers could become the solutions to each others’ problems.

CCUC anthropologists, including some who had conducted interviews in Chicago homes for *Living Together*, began working in the Calumet to garner better information about community dynamics. While their immediate goal was to better support Illinois Rapid Assessment Programs (IRAP) that would bring ECP’s biological inventory methods to the Calumet long-term, ethnographer Elizabeth Babcock was careful to note, “scientific research and data collection alone will not save and reclaim Chicago’s natural areas.”[156] Introducing her findings, Babcock wrote, “The Office of Environmental Conservation Programs at the Field Museum seeks to collaborate with Calumet area residents on environmental conservation, restoration, and education projects.” The phrasing could have described any of ECP’s earlier Calumet work, but for the following sentence: “Preliminary to such a process is the establishment of lines of communication with local communities, and an understanding of how people perceive the natural areas in their region.”[157]

[154] Wali and Beck, “Alaka Wali,” 126.
[155] Academic Affairs, *2003 Annual Report to the Board of Trustees* (Chicago: The Field Museum, 2004), 22, https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/327039.
[156] Elizabeth C. Babcock, “Environmentalism and Perceptions of Nature in the Lake Calumet Region,” unpublished report (Office of Environmental and Conservation Programs, August 14, 1998), 1, Lake Calumet Project (misc.) folder, Alaka Wali unprocessed papers, Field Museum.
[157] Babcock, 1.

CCUC's ethnographers explicitly borrowed from urban planning's concept of "asset based methodology."[158] Created by Jody Kretzmann and John McKnight, this approach inverted "culture of poverty" discourses that understood disinvested communities by what they lacked. Instead, asset mapping looked for ways people had found resilience, without destroying the environment.[159] This methodology was well suited for the Calumet, in which residents were clearly invested in their region and history, but outsiders considered it a "dross-scape," "ghost town," or "rustbelt hell."[160] What did residents see as the strengths of their community hat made them want to invest in it and stay in the region? How did resident creativity generate unique solutions or human-environment interactions only possible in the Calumet? And how might these assets become points of entry for further sustainable development?

CCUC's reports acknowledged that past research and outreach had emphasized formal environmental organizations like CEPA or SETF; in their new approach, they paid attention to "informal, intangible, and implicit forms of environmental activism," especially the attitudes and actions of Black and Latino Calumet residents who had been historically overlooked by planners.[161] As museum anthropologists specifically, they also used a material and place-based approach that allowed them to understand that "community" was not as simple as the City's official community area boundaries.

In a 2003 report, CCUC found that a diverse set of practices—organizations, small businesses, and civic activism—could be seen as assets.[162] For example, ethnographers argued

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[158] Center for Cultural Understanding and Change, "Mapping Social Assets in the Lake Calumet Region," Final report draft (Chicago: United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service North Central Research Station, June 13, 2003), 3, Calumet Draft 2 folder, Alaka Wali unprocessed papers, Field Museum.
[159] Wali, in-person interview with the author, Field Museum, Chicago.
[160] Center for Cultural Understanding and Change, "Mapping Social Assets in the Lake Calumet Region," June 13, 2003, 59.
[161] Center for Cultural Understanding and Change, 2–3.
[162] Center for Cultural Understanding and Change, "Mapping Social Assets in the Lake Calumet Region," Interim report (Chicago: United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service North Central Research Station, May 7, 2002), 4, Executive Summary folder, Alaka Wali unprocessed papers, Field Museum.

that community beautification, especially through gardening, was an everyday form of engaging with the environment, but also that broadly, questions of economic opportunity bore on environmental concerns. In one interview, residents were concerned both that one proposed industrial plant would emit harmful emissions but that another "greener" one might not provide the community enough jobs.[163]

The anthropologists highlighted that the concept of "pride in place" and community was a necessary component of environmental protection and community development.[164] Residents defined their own sense of community. Race was extremely salient, they found, as were neighborhood boundaries. For example, while the town of Pullman was listed as one municipality, the original "model town" and historic architecture had become known as "South Pullman," with a middle-class white and Latino population, while "North Pullman" (north of 111th Street) was a predominantly Black neighborhood including the original workingmen's homes.[165] Because many North Pullman residents rented rather than owned their homes, South Pullmanites perceived them as having less attachment to the neighborhood and interest in upkeeping or beautifying it. The CCUC emphasized that racial and ethnic diversity in the Calumet was a strength, since different communities brought different values and approaches to the region. But they acknowledged that outreach strategies like block clubs that covered only certain ethnic neighborhoods; conservation organizations that drew from the same membership base; or development agendas that could not provide both economic and environmental stability would not be useful ways to advance either conservation or development.

[163] Center for Cultural Understanding and Change, 7.
[164] Babcock, "Environmentalism and Perceptions of Nature in the Lake Calumet Region," 2.
[165] Center for Cultural Understanding and Change, "Mapping Social Assets in the Lake Calumet Region," June 13, 2003, 10.

Instead, the reports highlighted that "efforts would be most effective at those junctures where residents are crossing divisional boundaries to address their shared environmental concerns."[166] Local history emerged as one of these junctures. When North Pullmanites planned to convert the Old Pullman factory into a transportation museum, which would both uplift community history and attract tourists, residents were willing to collaborate with South Pullmanites by attending their community meetings. Because of the neighborhoods' shared architectural history, North Pullmanites consulted South Pullmanites on their personal expertise of historic preservation for family homes.[167] And in a region where budgets were tight but many local leaders belonged to an "old-timer" generation that deeply valued industrial history, local governments were broadly willing to allocate funds and political support to restoration and preservation of buildings and areas.[168] History had the ability to draw together the community across place, generation, and postindustrial transition.[169]

The Field thus first encountered local history organizations through the urban anthropology lens as Calumet assets, rather than as peer institutions. This made the natural history museum more willing to expansively interpret "history" than professional public historians at a history museum might have. "Historic awareness represents a major asset in the Lake Calumet region, regularly acting as an impetus behind community cohesiveness and improvement. Given the exceptional diversity of the region, both physically as well as demographically, historical awareness can take on numerous forms," CCUC wrote.[170]

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[166] Center for Cultural Understanding and Change, "Mapping Social Assets in the Lake Calumet Region," May 7, 2002, 8.
[167] Center for Cultural Understanding and Change, "Mapping Social Assets in the Lake Calumet Region," June 13, 2003, 37.
[168] Center for Cultural Understanding and Change, 95.
[169] Levin and Adair, *Defining Memory*, 294.
[170] Center for Cultural Understanding and Change, "Mapping Social Assets in the Lake Calumet Region," June 13, 2003, 97.

Public and academic historians at the time engaged in heated debate about whether projects like erecting memorials in public parks, secondary school education, amateur oral history programs, or local historical societies that refused no donations were legitimate forms of "doing history."[171] Many of these forms—especially teaching, preservation, and genealogy—have been dismissed as less rigorous, especially compared to the academy-trained public historians that increasingly professionalized the field starting in the 1970s.[172] These concerns are at least as old as the American Historical Association's formation in 1884, when it refused admittance to historians who engaged in local and regional history, seen as the domain of women in the postbellum era.[173] The Field did not share these concerns. Their list of Calumet organizations included the Southeast Chicago Historical Society, which boasted extensive archives and collections, alongside Washington High School, where students undertook projects designing tours of the southeast side, and Wolf Lake, an area managed by Fish and Wildlife that included a veterans' memorial.[174]

This was a museological benefit of the asset framework. Because the Field was focused on organizations' ability to convene groups and work across boundaries—potentially but not exclusively on environmental issues—anthropologists were willing to expansively define "heritage" and "organization." Because they were interested in the functional value of public history as a practice, the natural history museum was well positioned to cast a wide net and discover many historical organizations who might be future partners. CCUC had developed a highly successful framework for how to work with smaller museums through Cultural

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[171] Grele, "Whose Public?"
[172] Filene, "Passionate Histories."
[173] Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks*, 32.
[174] Briefs on Calumet Area Organizations, appendix to Babcock, "Environmentalism and Perceptions of Nature in the Lake Calumet Region."

Connections and knew it could provide prestige and resources to organizations interested in collecting, interpreting, or educational programs.

Asset mapping formed a part of the Field's participatory action research agenda, which represented a desire for relevance rooted not just in good PR for the museum, but in real benefits to the residents studied. For those who "may not be consciously aware of the potential of their communities' diverse assets and shared concerns, they assume a sense of ownership and capacity that fosters stewardship roles and interest in learning about the unique and rare wetlands, woodlands and prairies found in their 'backyards,'" ethnographers wrote.[175]

In 2008, the Field continued to unite its applied anthropology and conservation work through a new program, New Allies for Nature and Culture. Explicitly borrowing from environmental justice frameworks, New Allies started with ethnographic research across the region that identified 200 environmental, social, and cultural organizations working in Chicagoland—[176] This research revealed that "environmental" and "social justice" organizations could be defined broadly, and the groups in fact shared common concerns like youth development, health, food, and the arts (along with more explicitly environmental ones like climate change).[177]

Through New Allies, ECCo linked the CCA, which had grown out of CCUC's Cultural Connections program, and Chicago Wilderness, which had been a major part of ECP's work. "For the last few years, we have been encouraging them to work together, but they did not see what they had in common. After our research identified youth development as a common concern, we linked CCA's focus on youth programming with CW's [Chicago Wilderness's]

[175] Center for Cultural Understanding and Change, "Mapping Social Assets in the Lake Calumet Region," June 13, 2003, 17.
[176] Jennifer L. Hirsch, "New Allies for Nature and Culture: Exploring Common Ground for a Just and Sustainable Chicago Region," *Environmental Justice* 1, no. 4 (December 2008): 190, https://doi.org/10.1089/env.2008.0522.
[177] Hirsch, 191.

recently launched Leave No Child Inside initiative, which aims to reconnect children with nature," wrote ECCo's research and operations director Jennifer Hirsch.[178] As with Cultural Connections, New Allies also convened organizations at the Field or at sites around Chicago for conversations and programming.

The result was network building, connecting different coalitions along their extant interests. The Field contributed its existing strengths—first, in ethnographic research to identify groups; then, in public education and event facilitation to bring them together; and finally, in multimedia interpretation and presentation to spread awareness of their findings and work. For example, ECCo's Madeleine Tudor produced *Journey through Calumet*, a website version of the Calumet asset map.[179] By framing the organizations as community assets and publishing that explanation online in an accessible way, ECCo staff leveraged multimedia techniques in a way that they could frame as public engagement ("like an online exhibit") while directly raising their partners' profiles.

Neither CCUC nor ECP alone could sustainably pursue the interdisciplinary, applied, relevant Chicagoland engagement the museum had initially envisioned in 1992, for reasons including budgets, politics, and unpreparedness to reckon with the complicated environmental and social history of the Calumet. However, asset mapping provided the museum a clearer path forward that aligned with the post-feasibility study "heritage" focus. "This strong ethnographic base of knowledge about ecology and culture in the region, that's allowed us for the next 20 years to work closely in the region," said Mario Longoni.

The Field approached the Calumet during this period with a clear conservation *agenda* but urban anthropology *methods*. This clear mission ended up aligning with the combination of

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[178] Hirsch, 193.
[179] "Journey Through Calumet," The Field Museum, 2003, http://archive.fieldmuseum.org/calumet/.

disciplines—social and natural sciences—that made up the natural history museum. "Some of the Field Museum elements come back in here," as Mark Bouman puts it. "It's not just biodiversity recovery. It's the role that people play in biodiversity recovery. So the people and nature pieces are woven back together."[180] Though the Field was not itself a history museum, this agenda conditioned the way it approached the Calumet's history: as part of a search for community assets that could cut across geographical and social boundaries. The Field was therefore uniquely positioned to be interested *anthropologically* in Calumet history and to be willing to define "history" or "heritage" broadly when it came to working together. As a museum, but not a history museum, the Field would be able to share its research and interpretation expertise with partners who were similarly invested in material culture and museum methods, all while undergirded by its own overall mission of regional conservation that put the "natural" with the "history."

**Section 5: Co-curating *Calumet Voices* (2011–2023)**

Both the heritage area framework suggested by the NPS and the historical assets the Field had encountered through ECCo projects primed the museum to think historically for its next steps in the Calumet. After the 1998 feasibility study, the Calumet Heritage Partnership (CHP) had been founded to pursue NHA status. The Field formally rejoined their efforts in 2011.[181] The museum supported a 2018 feasibility study, this time for the NHA rather than an ecological park. As a partner in the CHP's effort, Field staff convened a group of local museums, libraries, and community organizations—many of which Field staff had first encountered through asset mapping—as the Calumet Curators, a subgroup of the CHP, starting in 2018. They would

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[180] Mark Bouman, virtual interview with the author, January 22, 2024.

[181] "The Road to Heritage Area Designation," Calumet National Heritage Area Initiative (Chicago: 16th Annual Calumet Heritage Conference, 2015), https://calumetheritage.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/TheRoadtoHeritageArea.pdf

develop exhibits hosted at three sites in the Calumet region before combining with a fourth at the Field in a summative exhibition, *Calumet Voices, National Stories: Journey through Calumet.*

This final substantive section combines a history of the exhibit development process for *Calumet Voices* with a museology-informed analysis of the exhibit as a historical and design product. I argue that the open questions of museum relevance, community development, conservation, and network creation the Field had engaged with in the previous decades informed the Field's approach to developing *Calumet Voices*.[182] In the exhibit making process, the Field emphasized the value of museum *methods* more than its extant collections to articulate its institutional role in the project. The Field "did public history" with Calumet Curators as a way to build community among regional partners in ways informed by the capacity and challenges that had developed since 1994. The resulting exhibition reflects both Calumet history and the ways the Field navigated its role to support the NHA.

Field staff drew on the museum's capacity to convene organizations, which it had developed during the CCUC era. The Calumet National Heritage Area feasibility study had found many organizations that stewarded historic collections or interpreted cultural and natural heritage—but noted that they often didn't know of each others' existence or weren't aware of their shared goals.[183] The Field drew on the Cultural Connections model, which had used museum education methods like program facilitation to physically bring collaborators together. The fact that the Field had already made contact through ethnographic asset mapping and also the fact that it was a museum meeting with peer institutions may have reduced some community

[182] In 2013, ECCo became the Science Action Center for Conservation and Culture and today is called the Keller Science Action Center. Keller staff, including former Calumet Heritage Partnership president Mark Bouman and *Living Together* and *Journey through Calumet* anthropologist Madeleine Tudor, led the Calumet work at the Field.
[183] Tudor, in-person interview with the author, Field Museum, Chicago.

distrust, turning the size of the Field into a strength (ability to share prestige and resources) rather than a deterrent.[184]

Not just a node in a network of ephemeral programs, the Field returned to the value of exhibits and material culture. Mark Bouman, a past president of the CHP, joined the museum in 2011. “From the moment I got there…, we were beginning really to think about how the museum as a site of exhibits could play a role, in addition to having a stock of different scientists that work on stuff,” he said.[185] Staff visited the exhibits installed at the Rivers of Steel NHA in Pittsburgh and the South Shore Center for the Arts in the Calumet, studying their design.

While acquiring collections was usually a major part of curation, the Field had not formed a contemporary urban collection until 2012. Instead, its participatory research had produced reports, photo archives, or programs.[186] When Field anthropologists did begin collecting, they did so strategically, focusing not just on amassing objects at the Field but the role that the *act of collecting* played in the community—in other words, they saw collections not just as an asset for the museum but also for the Calumet region. This was a major departure from the origins of museum anthropology in which fieldwork was a source of knowledge that flowed unidirectionally towards the museum.[187] Curators especially avoided redundancy with local historical museums, deferring to regional residents. Field staff facilitated visits to storage for the creators and owners of the material objects they acquired, noting, “As they walked with us

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[184] Tudor and Wali, “Showcasing Heritage,” 208.
[185] Bouman, virtual interview with the author, 27:36.
[186] Wali, who had had the status of curator at the Field since 1994, made her first acquisition in 2007 in the Shipibo context in Peru. The museum had not had an Anthropology Acquisitions Fund until 2005, when it deaccessioned its collection of George Catlin paintings to endow one. Wali described the factors that guided the new collection’s framework and accession guidelines: “(1) the ‘fit’ between the collection and the natural history/anthropology mission, (2) the link between the new collection and the existing collections, and (3) the salience of the assemblage for revealing emerging qualities of urban social life.” Thus, both finances and the concept of “mission” were extremely salient. See Wali, “Collecting Contemporary Urban Culture,” 68, 73n1; Wali, “Listening with Passion: A Journey Through Engagement and Exchange,” 180.
[187] Outram, “New Spaces in Natural History.”

through the aisles replete with objects from North American Indians (among which the contemporary North American collection is housed), they commented on the pride they felt in having their material included. The transformation from object to museum-worthy artifact added value to the reflection of heritage."[188] Objects were also brought back out into the community—at the 2015 Calumet Summit in support of the NHA, the museum contributed numerous maps that partners used to identify places connected to heritage area themes, and at the 2014 Field Members' Night, visitors could view newly accessioned steelworkers' objects, which often elicited connections to personal family histories.[189]

In another departure from "normal" museum methods, rather than curators and exhibit developers shaping the narrative, the Field took its lead from the CHP's existing work: the NHA feasibility study. "Within the feasibility study, we had the three main themes distilled of the region: Nature Reworked, Innovation for Industries and Workers, and a Crucible of Culture…When the time came for conversations with partners, we already had a scaffolding…in which to see their relevance of their objects and specimens," Bouman says.[190] Each of the exhibition sites addressed these themes, though each with different emphases based on their collections and partners. This represented a major shift in who had authority over exhibit stories, contrasting with *Traveling the Pacific* still on display a few galleries away.

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[188] The juxtaposition with Field collections originating from native nations is a reminder that the politics of inclusion in museums are fraught. These methods were useful because of the specific historical context the Field had found during its asset mapping, in which Calumet heritage was generally a connecting rather than a dividing source of pride. Note that "pride in place" had been a key element that the Field sought to locate in its asset mapping projects, seeing this as a key prerequisite to conservation and development strategies. See Tudor and Wali, "Showcasing Heritage," 205.

[189] Calumet Stewardship Initiative, "Calumet Summit 2015: Advancing Our Shared Agenda" (report, South Shore Cultural Center, Chicago, May 12, 2015), https://calumetheritage.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/2015CalumetSummitReport.pdf; Tudor and Wali, "Showcasing Heritage," 197.

[190] Bouman, virtual interview with the author, 33:13.

This approach to exhibit-building was not entirely new. The CCUC had used a similar approach when it worked with public housing residents to create exhibits that would be displayed in community venues, like neighborhood art centers or banks—they had provided anthropological frameworks, like "placemaking" or their flagship "common concerns, different responses" to inspire resident photographers, for example.[191] Further back within histories of Chicago public history, *Calumet Voices* can be placed in conversation with Jane Addams's Labor Museum at Hull House, which had exhibited immigrant ethnic crafts.[192] The Labor Museum, created in 1900, had borrowed from the Arts and Crafts movement as part of an agenda to "recover labor's connection with nature" by linking traditional arts from southern and eastern European countries with the natural materials like fiber used to make them.[193] The explicitly progressive-reformer Labor Museum had a clear agenda of immigrant assimilation, and exhibits sought to connect different ethnic groups to their new home in Chicago by showing how their factory labor was similar to ethnic crafts, using similar raw materials.[194] Obviously, the Field in 2018 had a different relationship to the nature/city binary, the question of ethnic assimilation, and Chicago's relationship to industrialization. But reading these two Chicago exhibits against each other highlights the long Chicago history of participatory ethnographic exhibit making.

What *was* new, especially for the Field, was the fact that the process of making the exhibit was the goal more than the final product at any of its four homes. The Field delegated significant authority throughout the process in ways that ultimately are visible in the exhibition itself. Field staff were acutely aware that to actually create an NHA would require an act of Congress. However, they saw the exhibit development process as a way to act out and work

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[191] Wali and Tudor, "Crossing the Line: Participatory Action Research in a Museum Setting," 82.
[192] Grennan Browning, *Nature's Laboratory*, 114.
[193] Grennan Browning, 121.
[194] Grennan Browning, 124.

through the kinds of partnership the NHA would need to manage the region. Bouman says, "The exhibit is local people collaborating regionally to tell a nationally significant story. That's what a heritage area is."[195]

Though Madeleine Tudor is nominally the Field's curator of the exhibit, she emphasizes that the goal for the Field was to bring partners together. The Calumet Curators group did more of what the Field's job titles would call exhibition development than curation, but the group named themselves, she notes. The Field's hierarchies and processes intentionally became subordinate to the CHP's and partners'.[196] "When you work together, it's a way of creating relationships that has more of a substantial quality. You've created something… A community is a group of people who make things together," Tudor says.[197] When making the case for the Calumet NHA to the NPS, the new management plan would then argue that "the creation of the *Calumet Voices/National Stories* exhibit by the CHP's Calumet Curators group provide[s] a strong indication of what an CHA [Calumet Heritage Area] can do" and noted that after the exhibit, the group continued to think together through programs and future pilot projects around heritage interpretation in the region.[198]

The exhibit development process itself was significantly more hands-off on the part of Field staff, including exhibit developers and conservators. Ben Miller, one of the staff exhibit developers, noted that the project, funded by a small grant, was closer to the "scrappy" participatory action research pursued in communities than the exhibits usually produced for the Field's own halls. Exhibit developers at the Field usually create the exhibit's narrative, write and edit text along with curators, and play a major role in deciding what objects end up in cases.

[195] Bouman, virtual interview with the author, 40:05.
[196] Tudor, in-person interview with the author, Field Museum, Chicago.
[197] Tudor.
[198] Calumet Heritage Partnership, "Calumet Heritage Area Management Plan," April 2021, 2.28, https://calumetheritagearea.org/management-plan/.

Here, they stepped back to mostly handle "the technical concerns for building something in a physical space rather than the intellectual concerns."[199]

Even when the Field provided partners with extensive technical tools, partners could and did choose not to use them. The "bubble plan" is one of exhibition developers' most frequently used tools, describing the overall arrangement of an exhibit's content flow, per exhibit developer Meredith Whitfield.[200] Karen Brozynski, a past SECHS president and Calumet Curator, had not chosen objects for cases or used these tools before. "I learned about Google Docs…I learned about bubble plans, which I never want to see again," she laughs. "I had the best time, it was the best group of people to work with."[201] Both the Field and the partners acknowledged that the goal was not to use every tool that the Field had developed to fit its "blockbuster" context. Instead, partners had authority to use what served them best. The Field selected display cases from their stock for partners to fill as they wished, and they ensured that the title panel of the exhibit was a flexible tri-fold that could be rearranged depending on the needs of other sites.[202] Because the goal was to share authority and strengthen community, Calumet Curators rejecting or adapting Field techniques actually were moments of success for the project writ large.

In fact, exhibit developers mediated between the Field writ large and the partners to advocate for the community members' preferences. Tudor and Miller both commented that the historical society cases were extremely dense and full of objects, and they lacked the environmental monitoring that Field conservators preferred for specimen cases. "It would never fly here if we wanted to load up a case like that," Tudor laughs. Next to them, "the Field Museum cases almost look sparse."[203] Both design styles coexisted in the final exhibit.

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[199] Ben Miller, virtual interview with the author, January 19, 2024, 9:51.
[200] Tudor et al., "Calumet Heritage Conference 2020," 26:08.
[201] Tudor et al., 32:08.
[202] Tudor et al., 19:02.
[203] Tudor, in-person interview with the author, Field Museum, Chicago.

However, the Field did contribute to the content by adding two collaborators to its fourth exhibit quadrant: the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma and the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi.[204] While the NHA feasibility study had included indigenous histories in the region, they had not been represented in the asset maps or in the CHP network due to histories of indigenous dispossession, displacement, and genocide in the region and across the country. Concurrently with *Calumet Voices*, the Field was undertaking a major reinstallation of its permanent Native American galleries, now called *Native Truths: Our Voices, Our Stories* and featuring extensive first-person interpretation by contemporary native people. The Miami and Pokagon collaborators had first become known to the museum through *Native Truths*. They leveraged these connections to include them in the Calumet exhibit.[205] The late-breaking inclusion of native nations is a starting point for future work.[206] Asset mapping could only connect the Field to current residents in the region, limiting the "community" reflected. However, the Field's ability to crossover between exhibit projects suggests an opportunity arising from the "big museum"'s inclusion among smaller partners.

*Calumet Voices*, as displayed at Pullman National Monument, the Gary Public Library, Porter County Museum, and the Field, reflects the transformation and complexity of the region. Because the goal was community-building rather than coherence, the exhibit was more free to blur the lines between collaborating with and representing "historymakers" in the region. Objects like steelworker helmets that also include Earth Day stickers argue for multi-dimensionality rather than tension between heritage and environmental stewardship.[207] Groups like Hazel Johnson's PCR are lauded as historical actors in their own right, and community organizers who

[204] "Journey Through Calumet."
[205] Miller, virtual interview with the author.
[206] Tudor, in-person interview with the author, Field Museum, Chicago.
[207] Tudor and Wali, "Showcasing Heritage," 204.

became Calumet Curators blurred the lines between "making history" through action and through interpretation.[208] The Field focused narrowly on ways it could loan prestige, share authority, and offer resources in service of building public historical community that could support long-term goals of conservation and development in the Calumet. Beyond doing history for history's sake, the Calumet Curators strengthened regional connections and heritage interpretation skills. Though the exhibit has closed and moved, that community remains. .

**Conclusion**

Motivated by crises of relevance, finance, and authority in the 1980s, the Field Museum at its centennial was uniquely willing to experiment with interdisciplinary, action-based work that expanded past the museum's walls. Their social justice work successfully convened Chicagoland cultural institutions but struggled to retain long-term institutional support as an anthropology program in the 1990s, while simultaneous conservation efforts could draw from institutional interest in biodiversity preservation but were ill-equipped to engage with post-industrial social and industrial landscapes in the Calumet. These strategies and struggles tested the limits of the museum's mission and capacity. Ultimately, the Field responded to both its internal crisis and to Chicagoland needs with museum methods that balanced scholarly research (in urban anthropology and sustainable development) with public practice (exhibits, programs, and network building).

The Field's strategy led it to a new geographical focus in the Calumet at a moment when the region, like the museum, faced transition and crisis—a label others applied to the Calumet

[208]For example, Gary resident and community organizer Cassandra Cannon became a Calumet Curator because she had led efforts to create a Lakeshore People's Museum from oral histories and personal connections, but she also spoke to her own family history as Black steelworkers through loaned objects, exhibit tours, and exhibition development. Cassandra Cannon, exhibit tour (24th Annual Calumet Heritage Conference, "Showcasing Calumet Communities: Collaborative Directions for Museums and Heritage Areas," Chicago, October 7, 2023).

rather than one residents used to describe their neighborhoods. Even as the economic, environmental, and social complexities of the post-industrial region presented challenges, the state of the Calumet and the Field in the 1990s opened up new possibilities that put partnership and collaboration on the table in a unique historical encounter.

*Calumet Voices* became a history exhibit facilitated by a natural history museum. Perhaps the most innovative part of its co-curation was not the convening of partners, but the Field's framing of the collaborative development process as a community-building exercise in its own right. The museum shared authority even as the project was undergirded by a longstanding agenda of biodiversity conservation matching its origins in the natural sciences. Using a museum exhibit to make a community (and a regional development plan) is an approach that may have only been possible when facilitated by urban anthropologists doing public history.[209]

As nearly every museum worker I've ever met has informed me, large museums like the Field are "big ships" that turn slowly—strategies and trends may persist in one area of the museum even while others experiment or move past them, and at times even staff under the same roof may not know the extent of the institution's work.[210] While the Calumet Ecological Park proposal was defeated in the feasibility study and instead moved forward as a National Heritage Area proposal, parks and recreation have continued to play a major role in Calumet development and public environmental history.[211] This thesis stakes out an intellectual/scientific history of a

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[209] Richard Harvey Brown and Beth Davis-Brown, "The Making of Memory: The Politics of Archives, Libraries and Museums in the Construction of National Consciousness," *History of the Human Sciences* 11, no. 4 (November 1, 1998): 17–32, https://doi.org/10.1177/095269519801100402.

[210] The Field Museum's 1997 acquisition and display of Sue the T. rex, just as Living Together was being installed, for example, clearly demonstrates the longevity of "blockbuster" exhibit design and the popularity of the Field's longrunning collections strengths in paleontology rather than less collection- or exhibit-based urban anthropology or conservation. And after CCUC adapted urban planning methods for asset mapping in the Calumet, the Field would then "export" the asset mapping methodology to a non-urban context by using it in the Peruvian Amazon. See Alaka Wali, "Chapter 3: Contextualizing the Collection: Environmental Conservation and Quality of Life in the Buffer Zone of the Cordillera Azul National Park," *Fieldiana. Anthropology*, no. 45 (2016): 21–33.

[211] For example, Ford Calumet Environmental Center, built on Lake Calumet by the city; Steelworker's Park, a major remediation and steel heritage victory; and the National Park Service incorporating both Pullman National Historical Park and Indiana Dunes National Park. Bouman, "Nurture's Metropolis: Chicago and the Rediscovery of

single institution in Chicago, but many more future approaches are fruitful—this first-pass historical treatment of the road to *Calumet Voices* reflects a starting point and an argument for the value of the exhibit genealogy for practitioners and historians.

A cynical reading of this history might conclude that the Field's interest in community outreach both begins and ends with its conservationist roots. Environmental histories and histories of science in the museum have often revealed uneasy alliances with power, and the Field's choice of geography for its activism can be read as at best convenient and at worse a form of "salvage anthropology" in a region at a vulnerable moment. While the Field may have done community history in the Calumet, this viewpoint suggests the downtown museum has not genuinely engaged with the region's communities or heritage on their own merits. This thesis could provide a cautionary tale as to the uses and abuses of public history.

On the contrary, practitioners of public history may rightly notice that *Calumet Voices* represents a collaboration between environment and city, and between museums and communities, at a moment when many are seeking models for how to connect. Like it or not, large museums like the Field do hold power and resources that can be shared. A case study in authority sharing of collaborative exhibit development suggests a way for facilitators to funnel scrappier budgets towards community building even if the larger institution remains led by other motives. It is tempting to hope that the Calumet Curators model can be borrowed from by other heritage projects. Rather than pursuing collaborative exhibitions for the sake of either collaboration or exhibitions in their own right, *Calumet Voices*'s history encourages public historians to think more expansively about the factors that bring collaborators to the table and the role of exhibits as process.

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Nature"; Mark Bouman et al., "Stewardship of the ACME Steel Collection," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=am6g24jfw8c; "Pullman National Historical Park," National Park Foundation, January 24, 2024, https://www.nationalparks.org/explore/parks/pullman-national-monument.

But I suggest that the answer lies somewhere in between. I draw on institutional histories not to either valorize or criticize the many strategies attempted by the Field Museum in a turbulent time (when are museums *not* declaring themselves in a turbulent time?), but to explore a history of specificity using one organization. Beyond the Field, why did *Calumet Voices* emerge in Chicago? It has been shaped by specific contingencies born of Chicago geographies during the time period covered here—from the dynamics of a museum campus anchor trying to work with ethnic and community historical societies in diverse neighborhoods; to the postindustrial context of southeast Chicago and northwest Indiana after the 1980s; to, of course, the celebrated geological and hydrological uniqueness of the Calumet region itself. In an exceptionally segregated and also diverse city, urban, racial, class, and industrial contexts made history an asset where it might not be elsewhere. Like the interlaced dune and swale of the Calumet, nature and metropolis come together here. It is not an accident that the exhibit fits into longer Chicago histories that connect science, planning, and public learning. *Calumet Voices* emerged from a unique, and uniquely Chicagoan, sense of crisis and possibilities combining industrial heritage, natural and social science, and cultural collaboration. While remaining rooted in its intellectual and environmental moment, *Calumet Voices* opens possibilities for "doing public history" with unconventional allies.

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