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AFTER THE SPIRIT SANG

*Aboriginal Canadians
and Museum Policy in
the New Millennium*

Introduction

In 1988, a pivotal event occurred that changed the course of Canadian museum administration forever. An exhibition intended to celebrate the rich cultural diversity of Canada's Aboriginal peoples, *The Spirit Sings*, opened at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary in 1988 as one of the many showcases developed for the Calgary Winter Olympics. What should have been a critical success from a curatorial perspective, however, became a huge embarrassment to its creators.

The Spirit Sings was an ambitious exhibition that sought to display the finest examples of Canadian Aboriginal material culture gathered from repositories around the world. To achieve this goal, a number of museums in Britain, Europe, and elsewhere were approached and asked to loan specific ethnographic items from

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their holdings. Not surprisingly, the costs to research and mount an exhibition of this magnitude were formidable. To help defray these costs, the Glenbow received corporate sponsorship from Calgary's oil industry, particularly Shell Oil.

Unfortunately, the participation of Shell Oil as principle corporate sponsor served as a lightning rod for Aboriginal criticism of not only the exhibition itself, but the contemporary treatment of Canada's Aboriginal people in general, and the Lubicon Cree of Northern Alberta in particular. Shell Oil, and several other petroleum producers, had been drilling on Crown land in the heart of traditional Lubicon territory, while the Lubicon had been lobbying unsuccessfully for years to negotiate treaty rights and land claims with both the federal and provincial governments.

The subsequent boycott of the exhibition and the withdrawal of many of the museums that had agreed to participate as donors sent shock waves throughout the Canadian heritage community. The controversy over *The Spirit Sings* had not only revealed Canada's history of shameful Aboriginal policies to the world, but had also exposed the profound gulf that existed between the largely non-Native administrators, curators, designers, and educators, and the Indigenous peoples whose heritage they presumed to interpret to the rest of the world. Moreover, in the wake of the Glenbow disaster, when other Canadian museum curators were asked how they would have approached the development of such an exhibition, they responded that they would not have done things differently.

It is not the intention of this paper to revisit *The Spirit Sings* in any great detail; the reader can access a substantial body of literature dealing with the exhibition and its immediate aftermath.¹ The historical importance of *The Spirit Sings*, when considered in the context of Canadian cultural policy, is not simply that it precipitated a re-evaluation of Aboriginal heritage in museums. *The Spirit Sings* debacle was a logical, if unfortunate, consequence of an evolving multicultural policy that sought to accomplish several competing goals at once: to satisfy the substate nationalist aspirations of Québécois; to assist new immigrant groups to integrate smoothly into the Canadian body politic; and to repair the social and economic damage created by a century of misguided government policies for Aboriginal people.

Indigenous Peoples and Their Place in a Multicultural World

Although some may assume that multiculturalism is Canada's greatest social gift to the world, in actual fact policies promoting cultural diversity are the result of almost a century of international response to the need to protect—and placate—minority populations in countries around the world.

Since the end of World War I, when the redrawing of European borders served to isolate cultural and linguistic minorities from their larger “parent” nations, there was recognition of the need to protect the human rights of these isolated groups in order to prevent the kind of ethnic unrest that prompted The Great War in the first place. As a result, bilateral treaties were established between neighbouring nations to “ensure reciprocal protection of co-nationals” caught on the wrong side of redrawn borders.²

After World War II, however, in the wake of the creation of the United Nations, the concept of protecting minority rights on a piecemeal, treaty-by-treaty basis was abandoned for a system that would both guarantee and protect basic civil and political rights for all people, not just minority groups. This concept was codified in the Charter of the United Nations in 1945, and later in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, which the signatory nations were expected to implement. A series of complementary, regional human rights agreements were later negotiated by other international organizations in different parts of the world.³

The concept of universal human rights prevailed until the 1960s, when a range of different minority populations began to mobilize politically. It became evident that the concept of universal human rights embraced by Western democracies after World War II had not adequately addressed the cultural, economic, and political inequalities that created ethnic violence and political unrest.

Until recently, most states around the world have aspired to be “nation-states.” In this model, the state was implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) seen as the possession of a dominant national group, which used the state to privilege its identity, language, history, culture, literature, myths, religion, and so on, and which defined the state as the expression of its nationhood. (This dominant group was usually the majority group, but sometimes a minority was able to establish dominance—e.g. whites in South Africa under the apartheid regime, or *criollo* elites in some Latin

American countries.) Anyone who did not belong to this dominant national group was subject to either assimilation or exclusion.⁴

A new concept of minority rights, known as “liberal multiculturalism,” was developed, which acknowledged the existence of three primary categories of minority populations: Indigenous peoples, substate minorities, and immigrant groups. Indigenous groups are considered to be those minority populations that exist in countries colonized by European nations: Indians, Inuit, and Métis of Canada; the Aboriginal peoples of Australia; the Maori of New Zealand; the Saami of Scandinavia; the Inuit of Greenland; and Indian tribes in the U.S.⁵ Substate nationalist groups are defined as those large, non-Indigenous minorities that have been present for most, if not all, of a country’s political history and consider themselves “states within states,” such as the Québécois in Canada, the Scots and Welsh in Britain, and the Basques in Spain. Immigrant groups are those ethnic minority groups that have recently (within the last 50–100 years) migrated to the traditional countries of immigration (i.e., Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States), initially from Europe, but more recently from Latin America, Asia, and Africa.⁶ Policies of liberal multiculturalism were intended to be developed and applied by individual countries in a way that would reflect the unique makeup of their own minority populations.⁷

In particular, policies regarding Indigenous minorities were in dire need of rethinking. In most countries, multicultural policies regarding Indigenous peoples were intended to reverse traditional government policy intended to assimilate these groups, including the implementation of the following:

- Recognition of land rights/title;
- Recognition of self-government rights;
- Upholding historic treaties and/or signing new treaties;
- Recognition of cultural rights (language/hunting/fishing);
- Recognition of customary law;
- Guarantees of representation/consultation in the central government;
- Constitutional or legislative affirmation of the distinct status of
Indigenous peoples;
- Support/ratification for international instruments on Indigenous
rights;
- Affirmative action for the members of Indigenous communities.⁸

Policies, declarations, and programs developed by the various United Nations agencies and other NGOs may have moral authority, but they have no legal authority. Therefore, the manner in which these policies are implemented from country to country is largely dependent upon the priorities and preoccupations of each individual nation.

In Canada, the introduction of Canada's multicultural policy in 1971 by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau followed on the heels of a humiliating reversal in Canadian Indian policy. In 1969, the government had tabled a White Paper on Native Policy in Canada intended to address the entrenched economic and social problems in Canada's Native communities. The policy paper, which was developed without input from Aboriginal groups, advocated the abolition of reserves and the repeal of the Indian Act in exchange for full citizenship rights. The overwhelmingly negative response to the White Paper by Native groups across Canada reflected their concern with the failure of the government to offer any protection for the Aboriginal land base or the social and economic programs promised in treaties and protected through the Indian Act.⁹

The failure of the White Paper was also indicative of Pierre Trudeau's preoccupation with the Québécois, a substate minority group that had been advocating for increased political autonomy for at least a decade. Trudeau was reluctant to grant special rights to any minority group, and did not make any distinction between Indigenous minorities and substate minorities in policy. The result was an Aboriginal policy with a non-Aboriginal agenda, an initiative designed to deter attempts by Quebec nationalists to lobby for special rights, rather than policy intended to revise the Indian Act while protecting Aboriginal rights.

Unfortunately, the government did not appear to have learned any lessons in policy development from the rejection of its White Paper on Indian Policy. Instead, the multicultural strategy introduced into Parliament a short time later continued to prioritize the implementation of English/French bilingualism and biculturalism across Canada. On 8 October 1971, Trudeau made a speech to the House of Commons in which he announced that the Liberal government had initiated a cultural policy that he described as "multiculturalism within a bilingual framework."¹⁰

Because of this emphasis on cultural duality at the expense of Indigenous and ethnic groups, the "official multiculturalism" that developed in Canada after 1971 was a program that concentrated on legal equity for all citizens under the law,

while promoting a symbolic form of diversity that did little to address the socio-economic concerns of Native peoples or immigrants. The result has been, argues sociologist Augie Fleras, a culture-blind form of multiculturalism.

Under a culture-blind Multiculturalism, minority women and men have the right to *identify* with (not necessarily practice) the cultural traditions of their choice, *provided* these affiliations do not violate the laws of the land, interfere with the rights of others, or pose a threat to core values and institutions. Diversity is endorsed, to be sure, but only to the extent that all differences are equivalent in status, subject to similar treatment, and comply with the state's self-proclaimed right to define what differences count, what counts as difference. Differences are further de-politicized ("neutered") by channelling diversity into relatively harmless avenues around identity or culture.¹¹

The cultural festivals and ethnic museum exhibitions that appeared all over Canada in the 1970s and 80s, emblematic of what critics have called "folkloric multiculturalism," became the standard expression of cultural diversity in Canada. This bland, toothless, feel-good approach to diversity may have facilitated the integration of immigrant minorities into Canada, but did not address the systemic social and economic inequities experienced by Aboriginal people exposed to assimilative government policies for over one hundred years.

The principles of liberal multiculturalism, which advocated recognition of cultural distinctiveness and policies that entrenched Aboriginal rights, were only partially dealt with through the patriation of Canada's Constitution in 1982, where Aboriginal rights were legally entrenched. However, in Canada's cultural institutions, such as its museums, Aboriginal history and culture continued to be interpreted in a sanitized, non-controversial fashion in keeping with the aesthetic of folkloric multiculturalism.

By the mid-1980s, when Calgary was preparing to host the 1988 Winter Olympics, the concept of creating a museum exhibition to display the best in Aboriginal material culture was well in keeping with the non-controversial, paternalistic form of multicultural expression then in vogue in government policy circles. The international outrage over *The Spirit Sings* resulted, in large part, from the perceived collusion of the Glenbow Museum with a corporate sponsor actively involved in what many perceived to be cultural genocide in Northern Alberta. What was even more disturbing, however, was the profound sense of surprise and indignation expressed by some museum professionals, who did not appear to

understand why an exhibition of this magnitude should be developed in partnership with Native people, or why museums should be cognizant of the contemporary socio-political experience of Canadian Aboriginal people. The profound “disconnect” between government policy-makers and Native people clearly exposed the shortcomings of “official multiculturalism” to the world.

Something had to be done.

Turning the Page: The AFN/CMA Task Force Report

Because of the events in Calgary, a national conference, co-hosted by the Canadian Museums Association and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) was convened at Carleton University in November of 1988. Out of the conference a working group, or task force, was convened to develop an ethical framework and strategies by which Native peoples and cultural institutions could work cooperatively to represent Aboriginal culture and heritage.¹² The specific recommendations for change made by the Task Force included: participation of Aboriginal people in the governing process of museums; involvement of Aboriginal people in the planning, research, implementation, presentation and maintenance of all exhibitions, programs, and/or projects that include Aboriginal cultures; repatriation of Aboriginal cultural patrimony (human remains, sacred and ceremonial items, and other significant cultural objects); training of Aboriginal museum professionals; and implementation of recommendations through legislation and funding programs.¹³

Since the 1990s, Canadian museum organizations have invariably reported on the changes that have taken place from the perspective of the academy, or from the perspective of institutional managers.¹⁴ The academic authors generally take a case study approach, critiquing a few of the more egregious cases of mainstream institutional wrongdoing (e.g. *The Spirit Sings, Into the Heart of Africa*) while offering recommendations for change. The responses by heritage professionals—generally those in management—have ranged from largely defensive, even hostile reactions (as with the early literature associated with *The Spirit Sings*) to self-congratulatory pieces describing the institutional changes that they have implemented. The commentaries from source communities regarding institutional change in museums tend to echo this range of commentary.

What the vast majority of this literature does *not* express is the true nature and extent of change in museum practice. Despite the spate of literature on the

subject, how much change has *actually* taken place in Canada's museum world, post-*Spirit Sings*? And are these changes authentic or cosmetic?

Museum Governance

Most agencies that administer heritage, whether they are museums, government departments, or university faculties, are hierarchical and bureaucratic institutions. Regardless of policy documents and funding programmes that make institutional change both imperative and inevitable, the actual time involved in shifting the operational paradigm is immense and difficult—not dissimilar to turning around a large sailing vessel in high seas.

Let us examine, for example, the managers of the typical, *Spirit Sings*-era heritage organization, operated under the auspices of government agencies, universities, and/or large private foundations. Because of the nature of employment in these realms, there may or may not be regular injections of “new blood.” The result is, unfortunately, organizations whose employees reflect more traditional and inflexible approaches to museum decision-making; they may be intellectual adherents of particular philosophies that are now out-of-date or discredited; they may be resistant to new ideas; and, most of all, they may resent the democratization that comes with accountability to stakeholder groups.

Most museum curators are subject-matter specialists in the field where they are expected to carry out their research and exhibition development activities. As such, their intellectual horizons are defined by the theoretical and methodological approaches characteristic of their specialties, whether they be anthropologists, zoologists, art historians, botanists, and so forth. Not surprisingly, scholars with advanced training in these disciplines have largely “bought in” to the epistemologies of their specialties. Not only do they believe their professions to be inherently “good,” but, not surprisingly, they tend to resent criticism of their work by people they consider non-practitioners. When museum audiences possessing specialized understandings or affinities with particular museum exhibitions (i.e. “stakeholder groups” or “source communities”) respond negatively to museum activities, curators, conservators, and other museum professionals may feel bewilderment and resentment.

In the past, dealing with recalcitrant museum visitors and public critics was considered the domain of the visitor services and public affairs personnel who occupy the bottom layers of the museum “food chain.” However, over the last

twenty-five years, controversies arising from audience reaction to a few high-profile exhibitions have brought the inadequacies of museum operation into sharp relief. It is clear that the problems with museum exhibitions have their origins much higher in the museum structure.

As a heritage professional employed by government during this period, I observed, and experienced first-hand, the negative reaction to enforced change brought about by *The Spirit Sings* and the *Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples*. First, there was hurt and resentment. As noted earlier, heritage professionals—historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists in particular—see their professions as being inherently “good.” Part of the problem here is that historians and cultural anthropologists prior to the 1980s had been largely dismissive of the role that colonialism, Enlightenment philosophy, and Darwinism played on the formation of their professional paradigms, personal worldviews, and views of Aboriginal people in particular. If the issues of colonialism and racism were considered at all in curatorial circles, they were treated as abstract concepts that did not apply to themselves.

These attitudes were particularly evident in the generation of “Baby Boomer” archaeologists, now nearing retirement. This particular intellectual cohort were trained in the theories of Lewis Binford and processual approaches to archaeology, which stress empirical, as opposed to inductive, approaches to the analysis of the archaeological record. While the Binford philosophy did contribute to a much more systematic and quantifiable approach to archaeology, it ignored the fact that research conceived and carried out within the social and intellectual context of colonialism is fundamentally biased. Therefore, the Binfordian archaeologists foisted on Aboriginal people in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, were woefully under-prepared to deal with contemporary Native communities. It took several years of government cutbacks and contemporary Aboriginal protest movements (such as the *Spirit Sings* boycott and the Oka Crisis), before archaeologists were forced to change their approaches, acknowledge their accountability to communities, and adopt a “post-processual” research paradigm for archaeology.¹⁵

In some cases, it became painfully apparent that heritage professionals, particularly those unfamiliar with community-based research, were woefully unprepared to establish interpersonal relationships with Native people on an individual or collective basis. Not only were they academically unprepared to establish a dialogue with communities, they were socially unprepared as well. For the most part,

upper middle-class Euro-Canadian bureaucrats were, and continue to be, uncomfortable dealing with Aboriginal people.

Some of this discomfort is understandable. *The Spirit Sings* protests of the 1980s, followed soon after by the Oka Crisis and a series of blockades and protests in the years after, had made museum curators wary of Aboriginal people. For many museum administrators, their only real connection to Aboriginal people had taken place under the shadow of bitter disputes over medicine bundles, sacred sites, and contested exhibition representations. For the most part, these public servants did not have experience living in Aboriginal communities, or have any personal friendships or kin relations with Native people. The prospect of having to develop authentic working partnerships with Native communities to secure exhibition funding and develop new programming was a scary prospect, to say the least.

Some museum administrators attempted to subvert the partnership process by making superficial, cosmetic changes to museum practice that did not make substantive changes to the mission and overall functioning of the institution. For example, inviting source community members to participate in exhibition planning committees is mere tokenism if they are not allowed substantive influence (e.g. veto power) over elements of collection, conservation, and interpretation. Engaging docents from source communities without involving them actively in the development of programming for different visitor communities is also tokenism. Unfortunately, many museums take this route, because the alternative would involve a radical restructuring of the museum's decision-making hierarchy and a corresponding reallocation of resources to museum departments (e.g. Educational Services) generally denigrated or ignored altogether by the subject-matter specialists who comprise museum management.

Symptomatic of this institutional discomfort with Aboriginal partnerships is the appearance in the museum world of an entirely new cultural industry—a direct product, one might argue, of the *Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples*. This new cultural industry consists of the provision of a variety of Aboriginal consulting services to non-Native heritage institutions. The Aboriginal cultural workers who consult to heritage institutions assume many different roles—they may be Elders; they may be craftspeople; they may be wilderness guides; they may be performers or interpreters—or, they may simply be well-mannered, kind people with brown skins that come from reserve communities and are

comfortable dealing with non-Natives. Whether these Aboriginal consultants authentically represent their communities' cultures and values is a matter of some debate. However, they have become as necessary to the effective functioning of a mainstream museum possessing Aboriginal artifacts as a Curator of Ethnology. Ironically, at a time when the commodification of traditional Indigenous culture threatens its long-term survival, it could be argued that the emergence of the "professional Elder" in the wake of *The Spirit Sings* is cultural commodification at its most blatant.

This may sound like an unfair, even mean-spirited assessment of mainstream museums' success in promoting diversity in their institutional cultures. However, the utilization of specialized Indigenous contractors on an episodic basis enables some mainstream museums to remain essentially intact in terms of their overall operating philosophies and day-to-day procedures, and this has not gone unnoticed by Indigenous communities. Even in regions where museums have implemented radical restructuring of their working relationships with Indigenous communities (the Glenbow Museum in Calgary comes to mind),¹⁶ there has been no reduction in the pressure applied by First Nations communities to repatriate their sacred objects and other material culture.

Repatriation and Legislation

A key element of the Task Force recommendations was the repatriation of sacred and ceremonial objects to their Aboriginal source communities, considered essential to Indigenous cultural revitalization, and a means to promote reconciliation between government institutions and Native communities.¹⁷ One of the common criticisms levelled at the recommendations in *Turning the Page* is that they were just that, recommendations that had no teeth without legal sanctions, i.e. legislation and penalties for wrongdoing. Because the *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act* (NAGPRA) appeared in the U.S. around the same time as the *Turning the Page* Task Force Report, the Canadian effort to promote repatriation was initially seen, in some quarters, as being less effective in protecting Indigenous heritage. So which was more effective—NAGPRA or the Canadian Museums Task Force?

While NAGPRA looks great on paper, in actual practice there are enough loopholes in the legislation that protection of Aboriginal heritage is only partially

achieved. First, NAGPRA only applies to publicly funded American museums, leaving the private commercial galleries and extensive personal collections unaffected. Secondly, the legislation does not apply to the major American flagship museum, the Smithsonian, though it should be noted that a special piece of legislation (the National Museum of the American Indian Act of 1989) governs approaches to repatriation at the Smithsonian.¹⁸ And finally, under NAGPRA, repatriation of artifacts is only mandatory when it involves the patrimony of Native American communities in the United States. This means that large American museums that hold ethnographic materials from Canada and elsewhere are not obliged to return anything to their original owners, much less engage in meaningful dialogue. To be fair, however, the American museums that hold large international ethnographic collections have been compelled to initiate meaningful dialogue with source communities, which testifies to the effectiveness of moral suasion on, and the need for positive public relations by major public institutions.¹⁹

Of course, the other aspect of legislation is enforcement. While I believe there is evidence that NAGPRA has facilitated the return of thousands of skeletal remains and sacred objects back to tribal communities, it is doubtful whether it has actually increased the protection of Aboriginal patrimony that is in private hands, in tribal hands, or in the ground in archaeological sites. Anyone who has watched even a few episodes of the American version of *Antiques Roadshow* will be aware of the brisk trade in American Indian artifacts, and the often-stunning dollar figures associated with these items. This fuels the thriving market in illegal antiquities, and recent reports from the U.S. indicate that the authorities are fighting a losing battle in their efforts to protect archaeological sites in vast, isolated areas of the American Southwest, which are attractive to pot hunters because of the pottery, shell and turquoise jewellery, and perishable (and therefore rare) items preserved by the dry conditions. In some states in the American Midwest and southeast, pot hunting is an entrenched, multi-generational pastime with lax law enforcement to prevent it.²⁰

The main problem with enforcement of American antiquities law is that protection of archaeological heritage is generally governed by state legislation rather than federal legislation. Some states have very lax enforcement, and when arrests are made, there is considerable pressure brought to bear on elected local officials to let the offenders off with small fines or dismiss the case altogether, which

occurred when a large, undisturbed Late-Mississippian Culture archaeological site in Kentucky was systematically looted and destroyed by pothunters. The account of the incident, which has since become a popular case study in cultural resource management classes throughout North America, was dubbed by archaeologist-author Brian Fagan as “The Tragedy of Slack Farm.”²¹

For those unfamiliar with the story of Slack Farm, the particulars of the case involve a house and farm owned by the Slack family near Uniontown, Kentucky. The Slack family were aware of the site on their land, but did not allow pothunting on their property, although digging for artefacts was permitted under Kentucky law at the time. When the last member of the family died and the property was sold, a group of pothunters from several states banded together to offer the new owner \$10,000 for permission to “excavate” the site. The group proceeded to attack the site with shovel and bulldozer, destroying and displacing human remains, remnants of ancient dwellings, and other artefacts not considered marketable. After complaints from neighbours, a misdemeanour charge of grave desecration was laid against the thieves. Further investigation revealed that the looters had destroyed over 650 burials. Despite the strengthening of antiquities laws following the public outcry, criminal charges against the culprits responsible for destroying Slack Farm were eventually dropped in 1990, and they were never prosecuted.²²

While there have been no lootings of Canadian archaeological sites on this scale, Canada’s protection of Aboriginal sacred and ceremonial material is only marginally better. The idea of the Canadian Task Force was to encourage the underlying *ethos* governing museum operations to evolve naturally, rather than to impose change on a resistant museum establishment. However, the Task Force recommendations *were* only recommendations, and museums responded, predictably enough, in a patchwork fashion concerning policy and operational change. In fact, some museums, like the Provincial Museum of Alberta (PMA, now the Royal Alberta Museum), initially stepped up their efforts to acquire Aboriginal collections.²³ The policy of the PMA in the early 1990s was to resist, rather than facilitate, repatriation. Eventually however, the Government of Alberta instituted legislation to force movement on recalcitrant institutions like the PMA, most specifically repatriation of sacred and ceremonial objects belonging to the Blackfoot Confederacy of Treaty Seven, who were the Alberta tribal groups most affected by the loss of material cultural objects.²⁴

Most Canadian museums, however, did make a sincere effort to address the issues regarding repatriation of sacred objects and human remains. Most large museums are members of the Alberta Museum Association (AMA), Canadian Museum Association (CMA), and the International Council of Museums (ICOM)—or at least adhered to the various Code of Ethics espoused by these bodies. However, even museums with clearly articulated mission statements and policy and procedure manuals can make grave errors in managing their collections, if the governance of the museum is weak or negligent.

This was the case at the Anthropology Museum at the University of Winnipeg, which had as part of its collection a number of ceremonial objects associated with the Midewiwin Society, an Ojibwa ceremonial group. These items had been placed in the museum for safekeeping by members of the Pauingassi First Nation, a small Ojibwa community almost 300 kilometres north of Winnipeg. The controversy began when it was discovered that a significant portion of Pauingassi artifacts supposed to be in the museum were missing from the collection. It was later discovered that these artifacts and other items had been removed and “repatriated” to an American Ojibwa cultural organization in the United States without the knowledge or consent of the museum’s administrators or the Canadian tribal community from whence the artifacts originated. A provincial enquiry, chaired by the Manitoba solicitor-general, revealed that negligent management, characterized by the improper training and supervision of museum employees, and a failure to follow their own standard museum practices manual, resulted in what essentially was a theft of artifacts from the museum.²⁵

Perhaps the most distasteful element of “the Pauingassi affair” was that one group of American Aboriginal activists manipulated and exploited an obviously negligent university department to steal another Native community’s cultural patrimony. That the major Aboriginal culprits responsible for this theft have yet to be punished in any substantial way, draws attention to another weakness in the management of Indigenous cultural resources—that being the need to make Native communities and organizations equally accountable for their conduct in heritage matters.

Government Policies for Research

The recommendations for institutional change itemized in *Turning the Page* were based on the ethos of partnership; co-management, co-responsibility, mutual appreciation, and commonality of interest, all values that reflected the intellectual and social currents of the time, but ones that required considerable time and money to institute in practice. Because of the symbolic importance of the *Task Force Report* (not dissimilar in impact and tone from a United Nations resolution), government agencies began the long process of creating policies and programs to foster more inclusive and democratic approaches in Canada's cultural industries, whether they be those that delivered Aboriginal heritage via print or electronic media, trained university researchers, regulated cultural resources, or interpreted Canada's Native past to the public.

One of the major irritants of *The Spirit Sings* exhibition was the virtual absence of Aboriginal input in every stage of the exhibition's development, indicative of the prevailing approaches to research, which privileged Euro-Canadian scholarship and ignored community-based priorities and expertise. The result was a massive reshaping of research policies and programmes involving Aboriginal heritage by the leading federal research bodies, a process that took fifteen years after *The Spirit Sings* to implement. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, for example, initiated its *Dialogue on Research and Aboriginal Peoples* in 2002, intended to develop new policies and procedures for funding and evaluating university-based research on original peoples.²⁶

The result of these consultations have had mixed reviews from university researchers, largely because of the implied threats to academic freedom embodied in the creation of community-based review panels responsible for evaluating research applications. The arguments against these review panels include their perceived bias against theoretical, as opposed to applied, research projects. Critics also question whether unqualified laypeople, whether Native or non-Native, should be involved in evaluating research proposals that require a certain level of technical expertise to judge. Finally, there is the real concern that community-based evaluators will make choices based on partisan political points of view, especially when these choices involve research on issues that pose a possible threat to their own individual and collective interests. Similar funding initiatives governing other cultural programmes for Aboriginal heritage, such as the Aboriginal Heritage component of the Museums Assistance Program, have also been implemented by

other federal and provincial departments.²⁷ The overall result has been an “iron fist in a velvet glove”—an enforced adherence to research partnerships, due to the fact that institutional access to crucial program funding is tied to the implementation of such policies.

The Creation of Aboriginal Museums: Training and Facility Development

The significance of museums, historic sites, and other heritage facilities as bona fide cultural industries that communicate, reproduce, experience, and explore the social values and hierarchical structure of the nation has long been recognized and utilized by Canadian governments, both past and present. One of the major recommendations of the *Task Force Report* involved the training of Aboriginal museum curators and other heritage professionals, and the creation of cultural facilities owned and operated by Aboriginal communities. It is perhaps this aspect of the Task Force Report to which Native communities responded the most enthusiastically. For the Blackfoot communities in Treaty Seven, repatriation of sacred and ceremonial objects to their home communities and families, followed by the construction of on-reserve interpretive facilities for housing these items, has been a central priority for the last twenty-five years. It was the Blackfoot people, with the assistance of then-Alberta premier Ralph Klein, who pushed for the provincial repatriation legislation to be enacted. What quickly followed was the spiritual reawakening of medicine bundles from dormancy, and the revival of traditional Blackfoot societies and ceremonies.

Along with this community-based cultural revival came the desire to interpret the Blackfoot past in an on-reserve interpretive facility. Prior to the official opening of the Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park in July of 2007, the Siksika Community sought to familiarize its citizens with standard museum practice, and provide initial training to potential employees. The Museum and Heritage Studies Program at the University of Calgary initiated one such program for the fall of 2005. The introductory course in basic museum practice (Museum and Heritage Studies 201) was offered in an intensive one-week format at the Siksika (Blackfoot) Reserve in Gleichen, Alberta the first week of September. The goal of the course was to provide band members, band councillors, and university undergraduates with a basic knowledge and understanding of museum practice, to serve as a prerequisite for further training in the field. By

offering the program on the Reserve, the course instructor was able to utilize the various historic sites on the reserve as teaching tools. The “best practices” regarding care and interpretation of sacred and ceremonial objects from a Blackfoot cultural perspective, were presented jointly by Blackfoot ceremonialists and specialists in museum practice.²⁸

Another 2005 project, this time focusing on exhibition development in collaboration with Aboriginal partners, was initiated by the Nickle Arts Museum with members of the Kainai First Nation in southern Alberta. The project was the development of a museum exhibition celebrating the life and work of Kainai journalist and cartoonist Everett Soop (1943–2001), a collaboration between Nickle Museum curators Heather Devine, Geraldine Chimirri-Russell and members of Everett Soop’s family, principally his older brother, Louis Soop. With the endorsement of different Kainai tribal organizations (e.g., the Blood Tribal Administration and Red Crow Community College), the project successfully secured an exhibition development grant from the aboriginal component of the Museums Assistance Program of Canadian Heritage.²⁹ The result was a museum exhibition that was well received by the critics, and which began touring to out-of-province venues in the fall of 2007.

The long-term goal here is the establishment of ongoing, democratic pedagogical and curatorial relationships, which will serve to educate source communities on the elements of museum practice. The hope is that this involvement will not only correct misconceptions about museum operations by making these processes more transparent, but will also bring the members of source communities into the museum profession itself. This cannot take place until culturally sensitive training initiatives are in place.³⁰

Another goal of these joint initiatives is the sensitization of mainstream museum personnel into the contemporary realities of life for many ethnic and racial minorities. The long-term future of ethnographic museums depends on a continuation of collaborative research with Indigenous communities and groups, such as those carried out in the projects discussed above. However, working in multi-disciplinary, cross-cultural settings is *not* easy. Museum professionals operating in these capacities are expected to assume a multitude of responsibilities when supervising cross-cultural research projects. Consequently, it is the ability of museum specialists to carry out these people-oriented functions, rather than their academic skills, which often influence the overall success of cross-cultural partnerships with source communities.³¹

Appropriate interpersonal attitudes, skills, and behaviours are crucial to successful work with Aboriginal communities. Outsiders cannot expect to come into Indigenous communities, collect artifacts and sensitive cultural information at will, and leave. Researchers must be prepared to devote the time necessary to establish good interpersonal relationships with the community-based participants in the research, and to demonstrate the flexibility needed to react to the vagaries of daily life in Native communities.

As Murray L. Wax notes in “The Ethics of Research in American Indian Communities” (1991):

What is crucial is participation in the life of the community; being present at gatherings and ceremonies; *listening to others and responding in a manner that indicates one has reflectively heard* [my emphasis] and giving of one’s self and one’s possessions in the sense of sharing and maintaining reciprocity with one’s peers. These are also keys whereby a stranger gains acceptance.³²

At the same time, however, museum professionals must be careful to avoid involvement in political factionalism or other elements of reserve life that may negatively affect research.

The most successful museum-community partnerships resonate with the qualities of collegiality and respect in Aboriginal community settings. The resulting projects, more often than not, are the result of work conducted over several years—the time required, in many cases, for outsiders to gain a degree of acceptance.³³

The willingness of museum-based specialists to work with *other* experts outside the museum in research partnerships is crucial to the future of ethnocultural programming of all kinds. The level of interdisciplinarity and methodological sophistication required in Indigenous Studies, for example, has grown to such an extent that teamwork, or at the least consultation among specialists, has become a necessity. This is particularly true in the field of Indigenous history, often called “ethnohistory” because of its multidisciplinary character.

In “Strange Bedfellow, Kindred Spirits” Jennifer Brown notes that:

Ethnohistorians are often intellectual free traders; we borrow other people's methods, concepts, and tool kits, from linguistic, archaeology, geography, and literary criticism, and we thereby enrich our analyses, even if we risk making them more complicated and ourselves more confused... what ethnohistory is all about is the crossing of boundaries, of time and space, of discipline and department, and of perspective, whether ethnic, cultural, social, or gender-based.³⁴

This can create problems, however, as René Gadacz points out in "The Language of Ethnohistory." Because the field has become so multidisciplinary, borrowing, as it does from anthropology, sociology, history, psychology and other disciplines, there is the danger that not only terminology, but approaches are being misused, creating problems in research and interpretation.³⁵

In recent years these ideas have been forcefully articulated in the literature of contemporary museological theory, which defines cultural heritage facilities and sites (like other forms of mass media) as didactic places that construct representations of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and spirituality that mirror society's status quo. These revisionist works also assert that the mainstream (i.e. scholarly) perceptions of reality presented by museums often repudiate the worldviews, the values, and aspirations of some of the audiences that they serve. The reaction of minority groups to these "disabling representations" and "oppressive cultural narratives" is embodied in the protests, blockades, boycotts, and other forms of activism directed against heritage institutions over the last two decades. Such measures are the result of disenfranchised groups who feel that no avenues exist for gaining power and control over the artifacts that comprise their heritage, or over the way in which their cultural values and history are communicated through those objects.

Critical theory also suggests that if museum institutions are not part of the solution, they are part of the problem. Such a perspective demands that museums change the way that they do things in order to embark on fruitful relationships with visitors in general and members of source communities in particular.³⁶

The importance of the crisis engendered by *The Spirit Sings* is that it illustrated clearly the failure of professionals in Canada's cultural industries to recognize the unique identity of Aboriginal people within the context of national government policies promoting multiculturalism. As a result, *The Spirit Sings* exhibition

became the “tipping point” that initiated a sea change in how Canada’s cultural institutions and cultural professionals approached the research, collection, protection, and interpretation of Aboriginal heritage.³⁷ At present, Canadian policy-makers are faced with the challenge of developing and implementing cultural and communications policies that will enable it to preserve its unique national identity and cultural sovereignty in the face of powerful, globalized mass media.³⁸ The future protection and interpretation of Aboriginal heritage will also be influenced by the social, political, and economic struggles affecting Indigenous people and ethnic source communities elsewhere in the world, as communicated via electronic media. Canada’s challenge will be to reconcile its past and present dealings with Aboriginal people in a way that satisfies the Indigenous need for autonomy and control over Indigenous heritage, while preserving the sovereignty and cohesion of the larger community.

Notes

1. Most of these articles were produced during or immediately after the exhibition, and were authored primarily by individuals directly involved in the situation—as curators, as government officials, as anthropology professionals or as activists. References of note include the following: W. J. Byrne, “Collections, Traditions, and a Path to the Future: Reflections on the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples,” *Alberta Museums Review* 19:1 (Spring/Summer 1993): 21–26, 48; Beth Carter, “Let’s Act—Not React: Some Suggestions for Implementing the Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples,” *Alberta Museums Review* 18:2 (Fall/Winter 1992): 13–15; John Goddard, “Last Stand of the Lubicon,” *Equinox* 21 (May–June 1985): 67–77; Julia Harrison, “‘The Spirit Sings’ and the Future of Anthropology,” *Anthropology Today* 4:6 (December 1988): 6–9; Marybelle Myers, “The Glenbow Affair,” *Inuit Art Quarterly* (Winter 1988): 12–16; Bruce Trigger, “Reply to Julia Harrison’s Article,” *Anthropology Today* 4:6 (December 1988): 6–9; Bruce Trigger, “A Present of their Past? Anthropologists, Native People, and their Heritage,” *Culture* 8:1 (1988): 71–79; Gerald T. Conaty and Beth Carter, “Our Story in Our Words: Diversity and Equality in the Glenbow Museum,” in Robert Janes and Gerald T. Conaty, eds. *Looking Reality in the Eye: Museums and Social Responsibility* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005): 43–58. Perhaps the most insightful critiques of the controversy are the following: Robyn Gillam, “The Spirit Sings: A Sour Note in the Museum’s Halls,” in Robyn Gillam, *Hall of Mirrors: Museums and the Canadian Public* (Banff, AB.: Banff Centre Press, 2001): 101–134; and Frances W. Kaye. “Whose Spirit,

- What Song?" in *Finding the Audience: Viewing Arts and Arts Institutions on the Prairies* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2003): 139–184.
2. Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Odysseys: Negotiating the New International Politics of Diversity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007): 28.
 3. *Ibid*, 29–30.
 4. *Ibid*, 61–62.
 5. *Ibid*, 66–77.
 6. Within the last thirty years, many European countries that have traditionally been the source of migrants (e.g. Italy, France, Sweden, and so on) have now become destinations for migrants from Africa and Asia. Because these countries continue to view themselves as monocultural nations, they have often failed to develop and implement effective policies that address the needs of “temporary” migrants who have become permanent residents in their nations. See Wayne A. Cornelius, Takeyuki Tsuda, Philip L. Martin, and James F. Hollifield, eds. *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective* (Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 2004).
 7. Kymlicka 2007, 66–86.
 8. *Ibid*, 66–68.
 9. The definitive analysis of the development and withdrawal of Canada’s White Paper on Native policy continues to be Sally M. Weaver, *Making Canadian Indian Policy: The Hidden Agenda 1968–70* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981).
 10. Tamara Palmer Seiler, “Thirty Years Later: Reflections on the Evolution and Future Prospects of Multiculturalism,” *Canadian Issues* (February 2002): 6.
 11. Augie Fleras, “Multiculturalism as Critical Discourse: Contesting Modernity,” *Canadian Issues* (February 2002), 10.
 12. Assembly of First Nations and Canadian Museums Association. *Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships Between Museums and First Peoples—Task Force Report* (Ottawa: Author, 1992).
 13. *Ibid*, 8–10.
 14. See Leighann Carole Neilson, *Museum Visiting In Canada: A Means to Furthering Cultural Goals?* Unpublished MA thesis (Kingston, Ontario: Department of Sociology, Queen’s University, 2000); Ann Markusen, Gregory H. Wassall, Doug DeNatale, and Randy Cohen, *Defining the Cultural Economy: Industry and Occupational Approaches*. Presentation at the North American Regional Science Council Meetings, Toronto, 17 November 2006.
 15. For an excellent summary of the philosophical debate over “the New Archaeology” see Paul Newell, “Philosophy and the New Archaeology,” *The Galilean Library*, <http://www.galilean-library.org/manuscript.php?postid=43805> (accessed 11 June 2009).
 16. See Gerald T. Conaty, “Glenbow’s Blackfoot Gallery: Working towards Co-Existence,” In Alison K. Brown and Laura Peers, eds. *Museums and Source*

- Communities: A Routledge Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003): 227–241.
17. For a succinct overview of the prevailing arguments for and against repatriation, see Elazar Barkan, “Amending Historical Injustices: The Restitution of Cultural Property,” in Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush, eds., *Claiming the Stones, Naming the Bones: Cultural Property and the Negotiation of National and Ethnic Identity* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2002): 16–46.
 18. For a description of the Smithsonian’s comprehensive repatriation strategy, see *National Museum of the American Indian*, “Repatriation,” <http://www.nmai.si.edu/subpage.cfm?subpage=collaboration&second=repatriation> (accessed 22 February 2008).
 19. In terms of good curatorial citizenship, the institution that comes immediately to mind is the Field Museum in Chicago, which has a number of high-profile ethnographic collections originating outside of the United States. They house one of the world’s largest assemblages of Pacific artifacts, as well as a large collection from Canada’s West Coast tribes. The Field Museum has been active in developing working relationships with its source communities, and has initiated repatriation of human remains to Indigenous groups outside of the U.S., such as the Haida. See “Trip Home” (a press release on Haida repatriation at the Field Museum): http://suethedinosaur.org/museum_info/press/press_haida3.htm (accessed 11 June 2009).
 20. See Hester Davis, “Facing the Crisis: Looting in the U.S.” *Archaeology* (July 1998), <http://www.archaeology.org/online/features/loot/> (accessed 11 June 2009).
 21. See Brian Fagan, “The Tragedy of Slack Farm,” <http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/dept/d10/asb/archaeology/pothunting/index.html> (accessed 11 June 2009).
 22. R. Barry Lewis and David Pollack, “The Future of Kentucky’s Past,” in R. Barry Lewis, ed., *Kentucky Archaeology* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 213–226; 219–220.
 23. It could be argued that this accelerated acquisition activity was not in response to the Task Force recommendations at all, but to the impending passage of the *Native American Graves and Repatriation Act* (NAGPRA). For an overview of NAGPRA, see National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, <http://www.nps.gov/history/nagpra/INDEX.HTM>. See Heather Devine, “The Syncrude Canada Aboriginal Peoples Gallery,” *Alberta Museums Review* 24:1 (1998): 58–62.
 24. See Government of Alberta, Queen’s Printer, *First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act*, http://www.qp.gov.ab.ca/documents/Acts/F14.cfm?frm_isbn=0779701658 (accessed 10 October 2007); and Government of Alberta, Queen’s Printer, *Blackfoot First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Regulation*, http://www.qp.gov.ab.ca/documents/Regs/2004_096.cfm?frm_isbn=0779729943 (accessed 10 October 2007).
 25. See the Manitoba Auditor-General’s Report, entitled, *Investigation of Missing*

- Artifacts at the Anthropology Museum at the University of Winnipeg*, <http://www.oag.mb.ca/search.php?keywords=hickes> (accessed 11 June 2009); and Cheryl Petten, "Missing Artifacts Lead to Auditor-General's Scrutiny," *Windspeaker*, August 2002, <http://www.ammsa.com/windspeaker/topnews-August-2002.html#anchor1983155> (accessed 11 June, 2009).
26. See Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, *Aboriginal Research Pilot Programme*, http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/site/about-crsh/publications/arpp_evaluation_response_e.pdf (accessed 11 June 2009).
 27. See Canadian Heritage, *Museums Assistance Program*, <http://www.pch.gc.ca/pgm/pam-map/index-eng.cfm#a2> (accessed 11 June 2009).
 28. See *Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park*, <http://www.blackfootcrossing.ca/index.html> (accessed at 11 June 2009).
 29. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this particular funding program was initiated as part of the long-term policy response to the recommendations of the 1992 *Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples*.
 30. Heather Devine, "Towards a Critical Pedagogy for Museums," in Hildegard K. Viereg, ed., *Museology and Audience (Museología y El Público de Museos)* (Munich: International Committee for Museology [ICOFOM]), 2005: 61-68; 65.
 31. Devine 2005, 65-66.
 32. Murray L. Wax. "The Ethics of Research in American Indian Communities," *American Indian Quarterly* 15:4 (Autumn 1991): 431-456, 435.
 33. Devine 2005, 66.
 34. See Jennifer Brown, "Ethnohistorians: Strange Bedfellows, Kindred Spirits," *Ethnohistory* 38:2 (1991): 115-116.
 35. Rene Gadacz, "The Language of Ethnohistory," *Anthropologica* 24: 147-166).
 36. See Trudy Nicks, "Introduction," in Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown, eds. *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader* (London and New York: Routledge 2003): 19-27.
 37. The term "tipping point" as "the moment in time at which an emerging trend or idea achieves the critical mass that enables it to gain momentum, spread rapidly, and become dominant. The term was introduced by Malcolm Gladwell in his book *The Tipping Point* (New York: Abacus, 2001), which compares the development of trends and fashions to the sudden spread of epidemics and suggests that change is not a gradual process, but takes place in sudden dramatic shifts. In the same way as a small weight will tip the balance of a pair of scales in equilibrium, a small change in organizational strategy may have major effects. The concept has been applied to leadership and change management." See "Business Definition for: Tipping Point" *Bnet Business Dictionary*, <http://dictionary.bnet.com/definition/tipping+point.html> (accessed 11 June 2009).
 38. Neilson 2000, 13.

