

***The National Museum of the American Indian.***

On Friday, February 17, 2023, I visited the National Museum of the American Indian. The museum divided into South, East, and West Galleries. South Gallery represents historical exhibitions from the past of Native American culture. Eastern and western Galleries present varieties of elements from the past and present life of Native Americans. Galleries for the include cultural objects, art gallery, and photographs collections representing Native Americans' stories. Frequently, collections contain interpretations to better understand the important historical aspects of Native American life. The museum component, which demonstrate white-Indians conflict, helped me to apply the theories and relate them to the articles that we read on the class. The article "A Hyphenated Identity" by Kitano helped me to connect Kitano's theory of domination to the Native Americans' conflicts and museum exhibits. The article "The Ignominious Origins of Ethnic Pluralism in America" by Steinberg and Takaki's article "Reflections on Racial Pattern in America" connect exhibits to the concepts of hegemony, ethnocentrism, and white supremacy associated with the oppression and harassment of the Indian population. Commodification and cultural relativism can be observed in the exhibits and paintings of the contemporary collection.

Upon entering the museum I noticed an exhibit "The truth about Columbus," which helps to discover the facts about Columbus that are not mentioned in the textbooks. According to the exhibit information, Columbus was the first person who deprived Indians of their rights, freedom, and land. To take the land and other wealth from the Indians, Columbus and the settlers used an armed force, horses, and hunting dogs that "tore the Indians apart". However, Columbus was not the last person who violated Native Americans' rights. In the article "The Ignominious Origins of Ethnic Pluralism in America", Steinberg describes the continuing existence of Indian-white conflict. He points out that "instead of hordes of settlers intruding on their land with horse and plow, Indians confront giant corporations armed with the formidable weapons of modern industrial technology" (Steinberg 21). Kitano's theory of domination can be applied to the exhibit "The truth about Columbus" and it can explain the conflict between Indians and whites. The dominant group, which is whites, control and oppress the dominated group, which is Indians. As a result, the dominated group becomes isolated, avoided, and disadvantaged. As Steinberg point out, whites had the full control over Indian's land, education, churches, and religion. The example of ethnocentrism, where other cultures, religion, and customs are judged and neglected, can be seen when Columbus called Indians "cruel" and "stupid" people "whose customs and religion are very different from our". Like Columbus, President Andrew Jackson in Takaki's article "Reflections on Racial Pattern in America" insisted that "Indians were culturally distinct and could not survive in white civilization" (Takaki 30). Continuous attacks "had a very destructive impact on Native American cultures – their distinctive religious, languages, and ethnic group identities" (Takaki 31). One of the museum exhibits

“The Indian Question” included the elements of battle and statement of Native American writer, Inshata-Theumba, who spoke for Native American rights. In his essay from 1880, “The Indian Question”, he commented that “when Indian fights for his property, liberty, and life, he called a savage. the first settlers in his land fought for their property, liberty, and lives, they were called heroes.” This statement is the example of hegemony where more powerful people, in these case settlers, dominate over weak and innocent people, such as Indians. One of the special artifacts I found in the museum was a Peace medal dated 1845 and was given by U.S. government to Native Americans. Two shaking hands are seen on the medal symbolizing “peace and friendship” between Indians and whites. Such medals were given to Indian tribes from 1778 through 1868 and represented Indian treaties and peaceful relations. However, the statement below the Peace medal contradicts such promise. Keokuk, an advocate of peace with the United States, wrote that many Indians were destroyed “at the hands of the Long Gun”. With increasing power of white people, Indian lands were divided without their consent and “the surviving Indian population was isolated on reservations” (Steinberg 18). Broken treaties intensified conflict between whites and Indians leading to expansion of white supremacy which characterized white people as a more powerful class. According to Steinberg, “white officials determined who would live upon a reserve, where, and how” (Steinberg 18). The Indian man was seen as “semi human” and “uncivilized bloodthirsty savage” who had no rights to land and was dangerous to white civilization. Violence, inhumanity, and the destruction of the Indian life resulted in a catastrophic decrease in the Indian population.

The Contemporary Art Collection includes a modern collection of paintings, objects, and other work, reflecting contemporary issues of Native American people. The process of commodification is noticeable in many pieces of the contemporary collection. Commodification is the process of transformation and replacement through which something could be traded. Sculpture of Sleeping Man represents Native Americans as “timeless” and addresses the commodification issues. This sleeping sculpture was created by Bob Haozous in 1975 who wanted to reflect “contemporary Indians who have lost their connection with Indian ideas and metaphorically drifted to sleep”. Such a transformation into sleeping man made Native Americans feel “like immigrants, on strange terrain, forced to adapt to the imperatives of an alien society” (Steinberg 21). Expansion of American culture and forceful relocation of Native American tribes led to their lifestyle changes. The painting “Culture Crossroads” by Chris Pappan, portrays an image of a “seated man and his mirror image which reflects two ideas, cultures, or identities coming together to create something new”. As Pappan points out, “traditions have to evolve and change in order to survive”. Their commodified identities help Native people to fit into the new image created by contemporary society. Moreover, Pappan’s art breaks erroneous ideas of Native Americans and inspires cultural relativism. As he strongly states, the artists are “keepers of culture”. Cultural relativism helps different cultures to connect and understand each other culture. Another example of commodification is the painting “Power Struggle” by Dallin Maybee. It illustrates a speeding train, which represents “a vehicle of evolution for Native Americans and indicates the rush of modernization and adapting”. The example of cultural relativism is also represented in “Jingle Dress” made by Maria Hupfield. The dress consists of paper jingles

which carry hundreds of names of Indigenous writers. Each name reflects Native American spirit and empowerment. The author of the “Jingle Dress” promotes “strong sense of cultural identity” and cultural relativism.

National Museum of the American Indian not only explores culture and history of Native Americans but addressed contemporary issues they continue facing living in the American society. Museum collections illustrate the stories of Indians’ life exploring the effects of hegemony, white supremacy, and ethnocentrism. Many contemporary artists preserve the history and culture of Native Americans by reflecting it through their creating artwork. As “keepers of culture”, they demonstrate commodified changes in the lifestyle of Native Americans and promote cultural relativism.