Black Museums and Experiential Learning

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Abstract

Classrooms and museums have long provided the perfect environment for students to engage information on multiple levels. Some of the information is in the form of worksheets, textbooks, and interpretive panels others in the form of societal conceptions derived from their surroundings. Museums are supposed to be equitable spaces where facts can be engaged honestly but, historically, a lack of representation of Black communities and other minority groups proved museums to be spaces that silently continued to re-enforce negative connotations and racist ideas. This was a problem that was not lost on Black communities, who decided to build their own organizations and institutions that would show them in a more human light. These organizations recognized the importance of everyone in the communities they served, and strived to convey the history and spirit of a people through exhibitions that utilized every day objects. The early Black museums and cultural centers continually used experiential learning techniques to share their culture with all who visited, because a lot of the information they wished to disseminate was informal and learned through enculturation. This article will look at how Black museums developed using the idea of the "Democratic Museum" and what is now knows as experiential learning was used as a model to convey pride and community understanding in these spaces.

Keywords: Black museum movement, multicultural representation, experiential learning, museum field trips

Introduction

One can argue that many forms of education take place outside the classroom setting. From the earliest level children are learning more than just the fundamentals, they are learning who they are, who their friends are, and how they "fit" in the world around them. Students assign values, both knowingly and unconsciously, to the curriculum, their classmates, and themselves, based on the representations they are exposed to in the classroom, and throughout the school day. Education textbooks often do not adequately depict the diversity in many communities, nor do they provide a complete picture of historical events or concepts in minority cultures. James A. Banks (1993) points out that knowledge from a multitude of culture groups can be used to "illustrate the key concepts, principles, generalizations, and theories" (pg. 25) in any subject area. Field trips to culturally specific museums, as a form of experiential learning, can fill gaps in multicultural representation. Rone (2008) cites Jeffery Cantor's (1997) definition of experiential learning as "learning activities that engage the learner directly in the phenomena being studied". The concept behind experiential learning is that there is value in first person experiences in conveying difficult concepts in any curricula at any grade. King (1992) notes that many workshops facilitated with primary and secondary educators have utilized museums as exemplary experiential resources. The purpose of these workshops was to use materials in museums to encourage conversations around culture and how that affects the classroom. King (1992) notes that by exposing the educators to activities that challenged their opinions on culture, ethnicity, race, and value, educators can gain a deeper understanding of the students in their classrooms and embrace multiculturalism as an inherent tenant of education. The same theory can be applied to students. Experiencing narratives from multiple points of view can provide students with a clearer understanding of the significance of the lessons and how they relate to themselves, their fellow classmates, and their community. This paper discusses the history of the Black Museum Movement and the major participants and historical events that shaped the movement along the way, and its impact on the museum world as a whole and how minority communities and communities of color were represented in these spaces.

The theoretical background of this paper is that the inclusion of culturally specific spaces in curriculum building and experiential learning facilitates a deeper connection to classmates and class material. This can be accomplished by experiencing how major concepts, such as historical event or mathematical equations, affected and were impacted minority cultures. This paper will focus on the history of Black museums, the Black Museum Movement, and the institutions established during that period, as examples of versatility and usefulness of minority/culturally specific spaces when teaching more robust and inclusive lessons. For this article, qualitative research in the form of historiography was used to describe the development of the Black Museum Movement. Then, the value of incorporating fieldtrips to culturally specific museums into K-12 curriculums will be discussed.

In his book *Historiography in the Twentieth Century* Georg G. Iggers (2005) identifies historiography as the research and writing of history. Iggers discussed how history, and subsequently historiography, migrated from personal experience narratives to rigorous science. This move ultimately allowed for greater voices and interpretations of historical events and political movements. The primary texts used for this article all evaluate how lived experiences shaped the museum field, especially in relation to Black museums and the representation of Blackness within museum spaces. Moving forward with this definition of historiography, as in the study of and writing of histories told from personal experience narratives, it not only seems fitting to use this approach due to the subject matter, but also due to the desired outcome of this research. As stated earlier, the incorporation of culturally specific museums and spaces in school curriculums provides students the opportunity to evaluate the experiences of different minority groups through experiential learning. Many cultural spaces, especially in regards to Black museums, were developed to fill an informational and representative void regarding the depiction and understanding of their specific communities, and historiographical research on this topic allows for the evaluation of secondary publications related to the establishment of such spaces.

Overview of Museum History

In his definition of a museum, Mark Lilla (1985) saw these institutions as empowering structures that presented an inclusive history to be shared and understood by any patron that walked through their doors. The idea to create a space that worked to push against negative and harmful stereotypes through easily accessible and factual information that not only empowers but teaches empathy and a deeper understanding for a community of people was at the heart of the Black Museum Movement of the 1960s. Early directors and proponents of Black museums wanted to develop institutions where Black communities would learn their history and develop a greater and more positive cultural understanding. Museums offer a safe haven for people to learn tolerance and reverence for others along with cultural pride in themselves and the accomplishments of their communities. However, if a community or a people's history is only interpreted through the lens of subjugation, their view of themselves and their role in America's story is minimized.

Throughout the 19th and early 20th century, the elite in America were contemplating the education and civilization of their neighbors. Throughout this period a series of libraries, museums, and literary clubs appeared throughout major cities. The major movers in the American Museum movement were inspired by early European museum traditions. Similar to their European counterparts, earliest collections were held by private collectors and consisted primarily of artwork, artifacts, and natural items such as minerals and rocks. As time progressed the early museums became public institutions tasked with representing the communities they served. Harold Skramstad (2004), an early thinker in the American Museum movement saw a function of these early institutions as a venue where community values and self governing practices could be discussed freely. Museums were not the only organizations tasked with the representation and improvement of society during these eras; these new institutions were entrusted with educating the masses, and many of the early collections were research based. During the early 18th century, prominent people had cabinets of curiosities in their homes. The purpose of these rooms, and their cabinets, was to hold collections of interesting artifacts such as books and records that could be shared with friends and family. The 19th and 20th centuries also experienced a boom in

public libraries, literary social clubs, and exhibitions at trade fairs. Philanthropist propelled the eruption of public libraries and museums by providing funds for construction. Andrew Carnegie was instrumental in financing a large number of libraries beginning in 1881 when he presented his workers in Pittsburgh with a library. Circus tycoon P.T. Barnum opened a museum in New York City during the 19th century as well.

Early museums participated in a form of experiential learning, although not on the scale of modern museums today. These institutions, although private, provided its visitors access to artifacts that gave them a glimpse into cultures different from their own. Such learning opportunities were not limited to the halls of "established institutions" dedicated to the history the majority, many Black organizations were recognizing the value cultural institutions could have on shaping how Black communities were viewed. There was a recognition that the techniques and theories about museums being discussed in the segregated spaces, where representatives from Black communities were not allowed, could be beneficial to promote understanding and fight unfair, racist stereotypes many Black communities had to face.

Early Black Cultural Institutions

During the same eras there were parallel movements within urban Black communities. Throughout the 19th century the formation of a number of African American Literacy clubs surfaced in major cities, mirroring the mission of other social clubs, with an emphasis on encouraging literacy within the communities they served. William Whipper established the earliest known Negro literary society in 1828, known as the Reading Room.

Reading Rooms

Organizations like The Reading Room in Philadelphia served as libraries for communities of Free People of Color. These organizations hosted public programs with local speakers and provided a space where its members could practice public speaking and debate (Porter, 1936). Literary clubs are only one example of organizations and activities centered on the uplift of Black communities and the understanding of African Americans. African Americans also turned to public venues to display their accomplishments. In 1895 Booker T. Washington, along with twenty-nine other prominent African American men from all over the country met to discuss displays that would highlight the achievements of the Negro race throughout the three decades since the Emancipation Proclamation. Prior to the Emancipation Proclamation a majority of African Americans, with the exception of Free People of Color, were not allowed to participate in leisure reading or similar activities. Their stories were not told in context of local and national history, and their impact was often marginalized. After the Civil War, all African Americans could build their own communities and eventually establish their own civic institutions, like churches, schools, and libraries, to serve their needs while they adjusted to their new found freedom amid legal segregation and racism. Life after the Civil War was still restrictive for African Americans, but the freedom to move and settle where they pleased and the ability to open their own businesses and cultural institutions provided African Americans with the opportunity to build institutions based out of their experiences and preferences.

World Fairs

Throughout the early 20th century World Fairs provided opportunities for people across America to see exhibitions from all over the world. These exhibitions included presentations on science, art, and culture. Black leaders, such as W.E.B. Dubois and Carter G. Woodson felt like the 1920 World Fair was a perfect opportunity to highlight the accomplishments and contributions African Americans were making in a country healing from Civil War. Although there was some dissent among the thirty men about the inherent racism exhibited by the Atlanta World's Fair developing committee, there was a consensus that this was an opportunity to showcase the equality and value of African Americans in this country. Prior to this event, African Americans tried to assert their presence in earlier world fairs. Their request to submit displays at the World's Columbian exhibition in Chicago (1893) was denied, although distinguished African Americans, like Booker T. Washington and George

Washington Carver were invited to speak at the event. Booker T. Washington was one of many notable men focused on uplifting African Americans during this era. His extensive involvement at world fairs, both locally and internationally, is a testament to his belief that race relations could be fixed if the value of the Black man could be shared across society (Wilson, 2012). Washington was not the only man with this belief; other men, including W.E.B. Dubois and Carver G. Woodson joined him. Carver G. Woodson, the father of Black History, encouraged the continued education and dissemination of information in relation to African American history through his scholarly publications, the Journal of Negro History and Negro History Bulletin. He successfully petitioned the government to officially recognize a week devoted to African American History and study, which in 1976 evolved into Black History Month.

The Rise of the "Democratic Museum"

While African Americans were looking for ways to assert the value of their history and the industry of their people as a whole, a shift in thought was taking place within the museum world itself. During the mid 20th century, professionals in the field realized that large numbers of their communities were not being served by, or using, museums. Many prominent museums professionals, like John Cotton Dana, expressed their concern with the lack of use of their institutions. Mr. Dana, and others like him, felt that there were too many barriers to information in the library and museum world and proposed rethinking how resources were managed. Dana felt that the traditional 19th century approaches to information collection and dissemination were elitist, by focusing solely on "best specimens" strictly for research purposes. Dana believed such policies did more harm to the community than good(Dana, 1920) . The concept of "best specimens" held racial and classist undertones that meant many artifacts and histories created and used by minority and working class communities were over looked or excluded altogether. He proposed that there was value in "ordinary" objects, not just the treasures of monarchs or politicians, and the new anthropological approach to museums illustrated how important normal, non-traditional artifacts, such as toys, tools, clothes, furniture, diaries, letters or family records, were to communities at large (Johnson, 1937). In *The Changing Museum Idea*, Mr. Dana (1920) called this new type of museum "Democratic Museums" because they provided a place where the history of all men was valued equally. This shift focused on interpreting the history of all citizens, not just the elite, through the use of items and stories experienced by everyone. This theory, although not discussed specifically with people of color in mind or in the room, became the template for minority museums throughout the 1960's and is still used to this day. The National Museum of African American History and Culture is specifically designed to take the patron through the many experiences in African American History by not only displaying artifacts of well renown African Americans such as Louis Armstrong and Nat Turner, but also items that related to regional African American communities, like the Cane River Creoles from Natchitoches, Louisiana (Flanagan 2016). In addition to a well-planned physical layout of the museum, The National Museum of African American History and culture also has a number of online resources that can be used in the classroom, including a searchable digital collection (nmaahc.si.edu) and learning labs that shows related collections housed in other Smithsonian Museums (LearningLab.si.edu).

The focus of the more anthropological, Democratic Museum is on the origin of a people, their culture, and how they fit into American society. This new collection development policy valued folk histories, oral traditions, and common objects as much as examples of excellence or artifacts from crucial events in history. This new type of museum legitimized folk and oral traditions by placing them equally with more traditional artifacts. At the heart of this shift was the belief that there is value in all forms of history, and it is this shift that provided the early museums of the Black Museum Movement, and other minority museums, the type of collection policy that would best serve their patrons. A collection development policy valuing all forms of information was important for the early museums of the Black Museum Movement because it legitimized the materials their communities possessed as artifacts that could, and should, be used to interpret the local history. Traditionally, African Americans were rarely asked to donate items to a museum because they did not own items that fit the way museums were interpreting them within the American story. Because early Black

museums were shaped in the vein of folk museums, their initial collections consisted of artifacts that were important to the culture and community they were representing, and still in the hands and being used by said community (Flemming, 1994). By utilizing the democratic museum model, Black museums and subsequent minority museums were not bound to traditional collecting policies. The museums developed during the Black Museum Movement had the freedom to collect artifacts, both traditional and non-traditional, which had value within the communities they served (Gaither, 2004). In *From Storefront to Movement,* Andrea A. Burns (2013) discussed the first collection development and community outreach meetings of the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, in Washington, DC, where the director encouraged the community to donate mundane items like mixing bowls and gloves to the museum. These meetings, which were initially focused on developing the museum quickly, became a tool the community used to socialize and strengthen connections with one another and define how they wanted to be perceived by people beyond their close community.

The way Black communities used the idea of the Democratic museum directly ties into experiential learning. Implementing exhibition and collection policies that invite the visitor to gain a deeper understanding of their cultures by engaging with easily accessible artifacts and first-hand experience narratives facilitates conversations that can easily be duplicated in any classroom setting. The practice of telling the story of oneself through “everyday” objects provides the opportunity to complicate the old tradition of “show and tell” through more thought out, research heavy assignments that allow students to express who they are and how they shape the communities around them.

The Rise of Black Museums During the Civil Rights Era

The attitude behind early Black exhibitions and other forms of Black public history was to uplift of the African American race as a whole. W.E.B Dubois, George Washington Carver, and Carter G. Woodson all focused their efforts on presenting collections that highlighted the abilities of African Americans and their contributions as an industrial people to the rest of the country, in order to illustrate the similarities between the races in hopes to positively influence race relations. Black museums were the first wave of ethnic specific museums that were established to tell the story of a particular community through the eyes of that community. The numerous civil rights court cases filed during this era document the push towards multiculturalism in American society, and museums were not immune to this change. During the 1960s, a call for equality in race relations intensified and there were vocal calls for equality and equal representation across society. During this era both the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement took hold in the U.S. and dramatically shaped how Black communities saw themselves and their value in America. These movements and created a shift in Black public history. Unlike the movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the museums that developed during the 1950s-1970s focused on uplifting the communities they targeted and served.

A Civil Rights Movement of the mid 1960s began in Alabama and eventually spread throughout the United States. With leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks, this movement called for the abrogation of the implied acceptance of segregation and subjugation of African Americans in public spaces while demanding equal treatment and access to resources funded by all tax payers (Jackson, 2004). The Civil Rights Movement focused more on the legal mistreatment of African Americans instead of how they viewed themselves and their culture. The Black Power Movement consequently was born out of the Civil Rights Movement and focused on both issues. Black Power Activists recognized a need for legal action to ensure equal treatment of African Americans in all states; however they also recognized African Americans needed to reclaim their identity and their legal and political power. As Peniel E. Joseph (2006) stated in his book, *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights Black Power Era,* “At its core, this movement attempted to radically redefine the relationship between blacks and American society (p.2)”. While both of these movements played a vital role in developing the Black Museum Movement, museums were spaces where communities could learn about themselves, and the pioneers of the Black Museum Movement believed their institutions could help redefine memory and challenge the current power systems in the United States (Burns, 2013). The

ambitions of the Black Museum Movement aligned with those of the Black Power Movement, and were often demonstrated in many of the programs and exhibitions these museums hosted. The Black Power Movement challenged established institutions that purposely suppressed African Americans, and museums were not immune to accusations of exclusion of and misinformation about People of Color. Museums were perceived to be agents of democracy and community pride, and they and their staff were viewed as authorities on their holdings. The exclusion or minimal inclusion African American communities in museums implies that African Americans and their stories are not important. Black museums developed during the Civil Rights Movement avidly challenged this practice of exclusion by advocating for better community representation in larger institutions. .

Black museums began to play a major role in defining equality and inclusion in America as beacons of self-identification for a people who spent decades, if not centuries trying to exhort their place in America's tapestry. These museums did far more than simply analyze the history of a people; they built their collections and practices on the traditions of the Black communities themselves (Fairchild, 2008). The focus of Black museums often made them an inaugural introduction to museums for their surrounding communities. Their foundation was built on the understanding that education was essential to the advancement of Black people. Within the communities they served these institutions proved to be not merely a storage place for artifacts, they preserved and disseminated Black culture and all that it encompassed. Like the churches, schools, and universities before them, Black museums were charged with educating future generations within the culture itself. Three pioneering institutions in the Black Museum movement were the DuSable Museum in Chicago, Illinois, the Anacostia Museum in Washington, DC and the International Afro-American Museum in Detroit, Michigan.

The DuSable Museum was the first African American museum established during the Black Museum Movement. This museum started in the home of art historian and high school teacher Dr. Margaret Burroughs. As an established activist in the Chicago area, Dr. Burroughs collected artwork and artifacts related to the African-American community of Chicago. She and her husband, with the help of influential associates, purchased a home formerly owned by the local Pullman Porter Union and commenced collecting and displaying art created by African Americans and other artifacts related to African American history. Once the museum opened the staff began to place advertisements in local papers encouraging the community to donate items and announcing upcoming displays (Burns, 2013). Over time her home was perceived as a safe place for African American cultural patrimony and the local community began to donate more items to boost their holdings. To this day, its mission is to interpret and preserve the history and culture of African and African Americans (Museum History, The DuSable Museum of African American History, 2018). Today, The DuSable Museum is a Smithsonian affiliated institution still striving towards its mission. Through public programming and teacher classroom resources (www.dusablemuseum.org/lesson-plans/), this institution actively disseminates information regarding Black people all over the world.

In 1967 the Anacostia Museum became the nation's first federally funded neighborhood museum, founded through a partnership initiative with the Smithsonian. This repository was established to bridge the growing gap between the citizens who lived in Anacostia and the rest of Washington D.C. Segregation laws, rezoning and other suppressing legal maneuvers forced the predominantly Black community to become isolated from the Washington D.C. and its growing tourist industry. Anacostia was a community that was once solidly middle class that had succumbed to violence and looting after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. The looting and violence instilled fear within community members and destroyed the camaraderie they once shared. The meetings held during the museum's development stages served several purposes, to help staff inform the neighborhood of the new museum and to gather important information and artifacts needed to sustain the museum. A third, unofficial purpose of these meetings was to encourage community interaction. As more and more community members began attending the early collection development meetings, more people began sharing their experiences living in Anacostia over the years. Although this museum used the DuSable Museum and its collection development techniques as a template, the Anacostia Museum is distinct from the DuSable Museum through its early programming and exhibitions. The Anacostia Museum focused on the history of

Anacostia instead of Black History as a whole, and many of its programs focused on issues that were important to the people of Anacostia specifically. Information gathered during the early meetings played a critical role in developing exhibitions and public programs. An example of an exhibit from Anacostia Museum during the late 20th century is "The Rat—Man's Invited Affliction" which was an exhibit that discussed the living conditions in the Anacostia community (Burns, 2013).

The International Afro-American Museum, established in Detroit, Michigan, had the clearest tie to the Black Power Movement. Dr. Charles Wright, who was an obstetrician by trade, was inspired by the World War II museum he visited in Denmark. After visiting the World War II museum he began postulating how African Americans in Detroit could erect a similar institution to honor and share their stories. In 1965, after returning from his trip abroad, Dr. Wright and thirty other prominent African American men in Detroit gathered to discuss developing an African American museum. Dr. Wright believed that traditionally African American history had been "whitewashed" by mainstream institutions, and an institution that challenged traditional narratives would benefit Whites and Blacks. Built in 1967, the museum set out to provide a counter narrative to the harmful story that encouraged the "dehumanizing brain washing" and "self-degrading ideas" taught in schools and mainstream institutions (pg 29). Dr. Wright strongly believed that a Black museum could help advance the Civil Rights Movements on a larger scale by empowering the Black community, in particular men, and encouraging them to fight for better treatment and representation. If the International Afro-American Museum represented the heart of the Black Power Movement, it also represented the issues inherent in the Black Museum Movement, and the Civil Rights Movements in general. While this movement called for equal representation and inclusion, it was focused on encouraging and building up Black masculinity. The name of the repository was strategically picked to echo the chant "I Am a Man" that was being used in the Civil Rights Movement. Consistent with the Civil Rights Movement, there were very few women in visible positions of power at the museum, although there were women who played a large role in insuring that that the space reflected the mission of the Museum and the needs of the communities it served (Burns, 2013).

John S. Welch (2006) notes that during the 1960s and 1970s many community activists living in large metropolitan cities began to question the validity and usefulness of mainstream museums that excluded collections and exhibitions of minority communities. Burns (2013) began her book with an account of the "militant minority" making the same types of accusations at MUSE, a New York based museum collaborative organization meeting in 1969. During the meeting June Jordan, an African American poet and conference attendee stated:

> Take me into the museum and show me myself, show me my people, show me soul America. If you cannot show me myself, if you cannot teach my people what they need to know-and they need to know the truth, and they need to know that nothing is more important than human life-then why shouldn't I attack the temples of American and blow them up? (p. 2)

Accusations of Black exclusion in museums caused the American Association of Museums (AAM) to reexamine how museums interact with underrepresented patron communities. The organization developed committees to evaluate diversity in the field and create plans that called for a more diverse workforce, collection development policies and public programming in museums. Due to the recommendations of the committees, museums and art museums started to present more ethnic exhibitions. One such exhibition, "Harlem On My Mind: The Cultural Capital of Black America 1900-1968", was supposed to be more inclusive of the African American art community, but it lacked of inclusion of actual artwork by African-American artists (the museum opted to use photos of artwork) or African-American academics during the planning phases of the exhibit was met with backlash from the community (Wlech, 2006). Regardless of how well the exhibit was attended, this exhibition revealed the problem between existing museum professionals and the patrons they hoped to reach. By failing to utilize resources within the African-American community, the museum implied that the community still needed to be interpreted by the "establishment."Amalia Mesa-Bains (2004) defines power as "the ability to create self-definition upon which one can cater" (p. 101). If we apply this definition of power to the museum world, by excluding members from African-American communities, museums are effectively removing their power to self identify and interpret their own cultural patrimony.

Like all change, the call for greater inclusion in museums was at first met with resistance. While the heads of established organizations and institutions were pushing for more inclusion, staff members had reservations. In addition to concern about the lack of artifacts related to African American History, there was also the concern about professional education in relation to the directors and staff of the newly developing museums (Burns, 2013). The staff of established institutions usually failed to notice inherent understandings that were shared between the staff of the new Black museums, their patron base and the collections they worked with. These inherent understandings, which Mesa-Bains (2004) referred to as "interethnic intimacy," or the mutual respect, understanding and exchange of cultural ideas that shaped how people interpreted information, and experienced the museums. Interethnic intimacy is a valuable tool for minority communities and their museums. Museums staffed with and developed by members of a particular community, are more aware of certain cultural cues outsiders tend to miss. Black museums served a valuable purpose within the communities they served. In more traditional museums, African American voices were often stifled; institutions established during the Black Museum Movement had the ability and determination to expose America to African American culture in their own words. As a whole, Black museums and their staff understood the needs of their patron base and developed interpretation. Exhibited artifacts and hosted programs not only informed their audiences, but also validated traditional narratives from their base communities. The programs and exhibits presented insight into how the Black community viewed themselves and each other.

Black museums did not treat black history as a "flavor of the month," as exhibits that were put on display every once in a while. Black history and culture was their sole focus. As such, Black museums could serve as templates for institutions that wanted to build better relationships with the unrepresented communities around them. Special museums grew to represent the communities they served. Minority museum directors and staff understood what the community wanted to convey, because they were members of that same community. Minority museums were involved in the expansion of exhibition and collection development that has been vital to the survival of all museums.

The very nature of how museums developed in America is a testament of the strong role they play in civic development. The earliest museums, whether developed by a state or local government or a community organization, served as a center of leadership for a community. Although they often excluded women, children, ethnic minorities, and the working class in their collection, development policies and exhibitions, the early museums were built to educate and civilize the communities they served. The Black Museum Movement and its participants believed in the value of museums as educational institutions with their power to impart pride and civic obligation within a community. The institutions were viewed as agents of change; hosting community programs addressing social issues in society and unpleasant memories no other organization wanted to discuss. By displaying art depicting slavery from the African American point of view, like the piece commissioned by the DuSable Museum, or discussing horrible living conditions facing a neighborhood every day, these museums became places that were capable of influencing and encouraging growth within their desired patron base through reflection and discussion. King (2017) referenced report compiled by the National Museum of African American History and Culture which stated that there is a consensus Black history is important but most teachers only have 8-9 percent of class time to explore it. In addition to a limited amount of time to explore Black history, many of the teachers focused exemplary examples from African American communities. This is a sufficient approach, but the information provided may not be accessible to all students and could be used as examples of tokenism to the rule instead of calling a stereotype into question. By exploring local and national minority history museums, such as The National Museum of African American History and Culture, in addition to discussing the work and lives of well celebrated members of a community students will be able to gain a deeper understanding of how a specific culture influenced those who participate in it regardless of their "standing". As mentioned throughout this article, many of the early Black museums focused on "every day" objects to convey the importance of the communities they represented. These objects were easy to access and provided common ground and points of conversation for all visitors while also exploring the complexities of specific practices within a culture. By exploring easily accessible artifacts and experiences, such as bowls, spoons, aprons, students will be able to engage historical and social concepts, facilitate open conversation about

cultural practices with fellow classmates, and gain a deeper understanding of how these behaviors and objects shape those closest to them.

Conclusion

Historically and today, Black Museums have been places where the Black community could counter the misinformation about themselves and their culture in mainstream society. The major institutions during the Black Museum Movement served as a template for other minority communities and the museum world at large. This movement forced the museum world to acknowledge its limited portrayal of minorities in their exhibitions and develop techniques to better incorporate their surrounding underserved communities. Burns (2013) pointed out that the director of the Smithsonian during the 1960s requested that exhibits including African American history be re-evaluated to present a more positive, honest image of their experiences in America. At the heart of this movement, like all civil rights movements, was the desire to fight against the negative stereotypes about the Black community that had validated discrimination and segregation for centuries. Activists who participated in the Black Museum Movement recognized the value that museums hold in any community. They recognized that museums have the ability to influence how people viewed themselves and their abilities, and they also recognized many barriers that prevent a true depiction of African Americans and their history from being told in major, established museums. Instead of accepting defeat, activists saw an opportunity to build institutions that served several purposes: to provide a safe place for the history of their communities, to highlight why the museum world needed to address the exclusion of minorities in their collection and exhibition policies, and to communicate the detrimental impact exclusion had on their patron base as a whole.

Educators can use Black museums to provide a better educational experience for all students. These spaces offer the narratives that provide context into how communities have grown, not through stereotypical depictions, but through the voices of the many who live there and shape them on a daily basis. Culturally specific museums and sites are a wonderful resource that helps move society towards true multicultural education that is inclusive and representative of any and every student.

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