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Cherie Lynn Milliron Olsen

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FROM WESTERN CULTURE'S REPLICATION TO WESTERN CULTURE'S CULMINATION: THE ROLE OF NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUMS IN TRANSFORMING THE IDENTITY OF UNITED STATES CITIZENS

Cherie Lynn Milliron Olsen

HIST 495

Dr. Mark Peach

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Introduction

On May 23, 1917, Laura W. L. Scales stood before the American Association of Museums and asked the question, “For where so clearly as in the museum can the immigrant be encouraged to believe that in this new world are continued the good things of his old one?”[1] This poignant inquiry embodies the intentional work in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to place museums as the answer to the United States’ condition of cultural ambiguity. The aftermath of the Civil War had left the country in disarray, and the United States was experiencing an extreme identity crisis.[2] Though the United States had previously sought emancipation from its overbearing parentage, it now longed to better understand its history and heritage. Struggling between a strong tradition of individualism and the need for unification within a divided nation, the United States sought to establish a cultural thread to weave through the varying ideologies of its citizens. Many United States citizens turned to museums as one means to solidify the nation and establish cultural identity. In particular, natural history museums were seen as a way to rebrand the United States under a merged front. While natural history museums brought United States citizens together, the curators, donors, and workers also used natural history museums as a tool for modernization. Ultimately, the changes within United States natural history museums during the Gilded Age correlate with the three evolving phases of the United States’ relations with Europe: dissociation, imitation, and cultural appropriation.

The Museum Movement

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[1] Laura W. L. Scales, "The Museum's Part in the Making of Americans," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 12, no. 9, Devoted to Educational Work in Museums (Sep., 1917): 191.

[2] Dorothy Ross, “Historical Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century America,” *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 4 (Oct. 1984): 925.

From the 1870s to the early 1900s, the United States saw fresh interest in cultural institutions. Libraries, zoological gardens, museums, historical societies, and publishing houses flourished. Groups of people began to recognize that scholarship was integral to creating a more mature cultural identity within the United States. This realization sparked revitalized interest in study and intellectual pursuits. An 1884 *Science* article author explains this concept by writing, "The state of its public museums, laboratories, and other scientific institutions, gives a very reliable measure of the appreciation and culture of science by a nation."[3] The consensus was that museums could be a way to give citizens a sense of commonality.

Prior Educational Environment

Prior to the Gilded Age, education was primarily eclectic. Families were encouraged to educate their children in whatever way they saw fit. There was almost always a strong emphasis on practical education and work. Speaking of this environment, an unnamed author writes in an 1884 *Science* article, "We are often inclined to consider America as a country where money-making suppresses all other interests, where learning, art, poetry, --in one word, all the finer manifestations of the human mind, --can enjoy even a poor existence only in a few places, and find in general very unfavorable ground."[4] Many United States citizens saw little benefit in scholastic study. Referring to this group of people, Neil Harris explains, "These were men trying to persuade Americans they were loud and coarse, and the result was a people brow beaten into a conviction of their own cultural inferiority, who turned their collective back on native traditions of design."[5]

Factors in Museum Movement

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[3] "Museums of Natural History in the United States," *Science* 3, no. 54 (Feb. 15, 1884): 191.

[4] "Museums of Natural History in the United States," 191.

[5] Ibid., 547.

The Search for a United States Legacy

To some extent, the United States was now afraid of the individualism it had created. Its educational practices were not working to create cohesion. Citizens had moved from viewing themselves as a collective unit, separate from other nations, to viewing themselves as individuals, separate from other United States citizens. Partly because of the Civil War, the nation had learned that this diacritical form of thinking could be dangerous. It no longer sought to be an entity unto itself. There was growing recognition that though the United States was established in the 18th century, it had a history that reached significantly earlier, and there was cultural benefit to educating the country in this history. Thus, Orosz remarks, "By 1870, scholarly research and popular education had become fully accepted as equal goals of the American museum."[6] The museum would be a vehicle to lead the United States in recognizing the importance of theoretical knowledge alongside practical knowledge.

Death of Pioneers

Along with renewed interest in museums during the post-Civil War era, there was also a fresh need unearthed for the preservation of United States culture. For the first time in its history, the United States was facing the death of its pioneers, the men and women who established the nation. The United States' foundational spirit was in danger of ceasing to exist. There needed to be a way to save the nation's unique history. Museums would prove capable of creating a narrative to preserve the United States' history.

Scientific Discovery

[6] J. Orosz, *Curators and Culture: An Interpretive History of the Museum Movement in America, 1773-1870* (Enlightenment, New York City, Science Smithsonian, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), (1986): 8.

Additionally, there was hope that the creation of museums would eventually lead to fresh scientific discoveries. Lucier explains this concept. “To be ‘pure,’ American science needed integrity, and in this sense the quest for purity echoed the antebellum call for exclusivity, an unalloyed organization of scientists committed to a common cause.”[7] However, in order to “create a science,” United States citizens first had to produce and financially support universities capable of doing research.[8] These universities would eventually lead to museums. Specifically, science took brick and mortar in the form of natural history museums. Henson argues, “Cultural imperatives during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries led inexorably to the establishment of a national museum that included history.”[9] In this context, natural history museums are defined as museums that feature purposeful, educational collections concerning history, art, and science within the context of a specific region’s overarching historical narrative. The museum was to be a place to retain and display the important values of the United States’ past. Kohlstedt calls this arrangement the “search for order.”[10] The goal was to ensure that following generations would be exposed to the same United States’ ideals.

Establishment of Sister Institutions

However, before there could be museums, there needed to be a group to promote museums. Historical societies began to spring up in the United States for the first time. These were comprised of pockets of people who saw a great deal of necessity in keeping alive

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[7] Paul Lucier, "The Origins of Pure and Applied Science in Gilded Age America," *Isis* 103, no. 3 (September, 2012): 530.

[8] Harris, "Gilded Age Revisited,” 536.

[9] Pamela M. Henson, "‘Objects of Curious Research’: The History of Science and Technology at the Smithsonian," *Isis* 90, Supplement, Catching up with the Vision: Essays on the Occasion of the 75th Anniversary of the Founding of the History of Science Society (1999): S269.

[10] Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, “’Thoughts in things’ modernity, history, and north american museums,” *Isis* 96, no. 4 (2005): 587.

awareness of Western Europe's traditions. Spencer writes in article on the history of natural history institutions in the Western United States, "At the time of the founding of the American colonies natural history had a long tradition in Europe. Its practices were transported to the colonies via immigrants who had previously been members of English groups such as the Royal Society."[11] These groups later "acted as training schools and support groups."[12] After the Civil War, these smaller groups gained a larger voice and more financial support. They were able to contribute to a large amount of funding. This funding went directly toward the establishment of many cultural institutions.

Libraries were also among the sister institutions of museums. The first public library opened in Boston in 1852.[13] McCrossen explains that these early libraries had similar goals to natural history museums. He writes, "Public librarians sought to uplift and rearrange cultural priorities and tastes."[14] However, these changes were not intended to dissolve social hierarchy. The primary goal was to educate the general public, but there was no underlying desire or expectation that this education would lead to a change in societal status. Rather, this culturalization was seen as the rewriting of a play, one that saw those of a higher status with a greater part and those of a lower status with a lesser part. However, the education of both those from a higher status and from a lower status was deemed valuable to the United States.

Universities were another institution that began to thrive in the Gilded Age. In 1884, an unnamed writer in a *Science* article states, "The scientific life of America is under the influence

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[11] Larry T. Spencer, "Naturalist and Natural History Institutions of the American West: A Preview," *American Zoologist* 26, no. 2 (1986): 295.

[12] Ibid.,

[13] Alexis McCrossen, "'One Cathedral More' Or 'Mere Lounging Places for Bummers'? The Cultural Politics of Leisure and the Public Library in Gilded Age America," *Libraries & Culture* 41, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 170.

[14] Ibid., 174.

of these universities and these independent corporations are so popular that they receive considerable legacies nearly every year."[15] The author makes repeated mention of New Haven and Cambridge as considerable storehouses of the intellectual life of the United States.[16] Museums worked hand-in-hand with universities. Gratacap explains this by writing, "And the extension of natural history study in the schools or colleges is directly promotive of the interest of the museum."[17] Essentially, museums served to display exhibitions of research and inspire individuals to study various disciplines related to natural history. In turn, the university would train students to make great contributions to museums through their professional work.

Financial Resources

Additionally, funds were now available to support these cultural institutions. Neil Harris explains, "Money was a prerequisite for museum foundations, and it was only in the latter half of the nineteenth century that Americans felt wealthy enough to spend large sums on the arts."[18] Thus, while the few museums that existed prior to the 1870s experienced transformation, numerous museums sprang up as a cure to the nation's disease of cultural insecurity.

Dissociative Period (Prior to 1857)

The first United States natural history museums were established in a vacuum. There was little connection between the exhibition topics and practices of Europe. In many ways, the United States still sought ways to detach itself from any relation to Europe. This aim bled over into the philosophies behind the earliest United States natural history museums. However, towards the

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[15] "Museums of Natural History in the United States,"193.

[16] Ibid.

[17] L.P. Gratacap, "Natural History Museums (II)," *Science*, New Series 8, no. 185 (Jul. 15, 1898): 67.

[18] Neil Harris, "The Gilded Age Revisited: Boston and the Museum Movement," *American Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (Winter, 1962): 546.

end of this time, key individuals began to call for the crafting of exhibitions that reflect Western Europe's tradition and values.

Academy of Natural Sciences

When Charles Willson Peale opened the Academy of the Fine Arts in 1812, the United States was truly starting to feel its autonomy from Great Britain, and "this autonomy would be felt nowhere more strongly than in the realm of natural science."[19] There was a great deal of uncertainty as to how such an institution would be received by United States citizens. In response to Peale's explanation of his endeavor, Robert Fulton wrote, "You are about to make a fair experiment of the public taste for fine paintings."[20] Few thought that the Academy of the Fine Arts would be successful. However, science was penetrating every realm of the intellectual world. While Peale displayed portraits of prominent United States citizens, he also sought to create an environment where scientific ideas could be emphasized and nurtured.[21] Peale enlisted seven founders for the Academy of Natural Sciences: "a doctor, a distiller, a chemist--the mineralogist Gerard Troost – and several apothecaries."[22] The Academy of Natural Sciences drew a great deal of attention from the Western World.[23] Stroud explains its significance to later generations of museum workers, "It would not be until the twentieth century that the United States would reach its flowering in world science, but the seeds had been planted with the

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[19] Patricia Tyson Stroud, "The Founding of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia in 1812 and Its Journal in 1817," *Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia* 147 (1997): 227.

[20] Charles Willson Peale and Robert Fulton, "Extracts from the Correspondence of Charles Willson Peale Relative to the Establishment of the Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 9, no. 2 (Jul., 1885): 130.

[21] Stroud, "The Founding of the Academy of Natural Sciences," 227.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., 229.

founding of such institutions as The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia and nourished by its groundbreaking *Journal*."[24]

P.T. Barnum

Society tends to remember Barnum for his curious shows and circuses. Indeed, Barnum's philosophy was to, "Make it bigger and better than any that have preceded it," and he carried this way of thinking into the world of museum work.[25] Though the Academy of Natural Sciences had a great amount of significance in the early world of natural history museums, P.T. Barnum was one of the first individuals who turned the tides in order to recognize the importance of Europe in museum acquisitions. Barnum sought to mimic the British Museum in his plans for the establishment of a national museum in New York.[26] Betts explains, "The Smithsonian Institution, the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences, and many of the colleges had assembled scientific collections and established museums throughout the first half of the century…but it was Barnum alone in the commercial community who maintained agents here and abroad to keep a vigilant lookout for items related to natural history."[27] Barnum was particularly concerned with natural history. Betts explains, "Natural history had remained a feature of the showman's enterprises throughout the Museum years."[28] His plans show a continual desire to emphasize natural history in relation to Western culture, even at one point including a plan to bring the mummy of Ramses II over from Egypt.[29] Ultimately, Barnum

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[24] Ibid., 235.

[25] P. T. Barnum, "What the Fair Should Be," *The North American Review* 150, no. 400 (Mar. 1890): 400.

[26] Betts, John Rickards, "P.T. Barnum and the Popularization of Natural History," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20, no. 3 (Jun.-Sep. 1959): 358.

[27] Ibid., 356.

[28] Ibid., 358.

[29] Barnum, "What the Fair Should Be," 401.

served to wake United States citizens up to the importance of natural history, not just United States natural history, but to an awareness of the natural history of Western Europe as well.

Funding/Philanthropy

At this point in time, museums were funding by private donors. Gratacap clarifies this in writing, "The earliest museums were all private affairs prepared with some relevancy to the owner's tastes or the prevailing fashion of collectors."[30] Wealthy members of society would gather pieces for their own collection to demonstrate taste. Gratacap explains this overflow. "Books and libraries and statues in museums were rapidly accumulated. It was a liberal prince, a rich merchant, a trading monarch, a distinguished physician, or the egotism as well as the enlightenment of a noble, that started the first growth of museums."[31] Gratacap goes on to explain, "Once started, the flame of desire spread quickly, and, everywhere fed by the oil of rivalry, men and women in high or in influential stations collected and collected and collected, turning their homes into storehouses of curiosities and maddening arrays of impossible associations."[32] Ancient Greek and Roman pieces were in particular demand.[33] Eventually, the overflow of these collections were donated or given temporary loan to natural history museums. In time, natural history museums procured more public involvement, such as the $200,000 city appropriations allocated for the American Museum of Natural History in New York.[34] While they continued to receive numerous private donations, many museums were also funded publicly.

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[30] L.P. Gratacap, "Natural History Museums (I)," Science, New Series 8, no. 184 (Jul. 8, 1898): 34.
[31] Ibid., 33.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] "The American Museum of Natural History," *Science*, New Series 27, no. 439 (May 29, 1903): 876.

Imitative Period (1857--1895)

At this time, the United States began to openly recognize the superiority of European culture in certain areas. When compared with European museums and their sister institutions, United States' natural history museums were severely underdeveloped. Gratacap claims, "The Museum of Natural History in London is regarded to-day as the most perfect representation of an ideal museum of natural history in the world; after it the museum in Berlin, and in about equal rivalry for the second place on the Continent, those of Vienna and Paris."[35] In order for the United States' natural history museums to be successful, their founders turned to Europe as a model to follow. Carl Mitman was one of these men. Mitman was particularly interested in the Deutches Museum in Munich and the Science Museum in London. Speaking of him, Henson writes, "He absorbed every new idea and technique he could uncover, and he became even more determined to place the United States National Museum on equal footing with the great museums of Europe."[36] Many other museum workers were doing the same. The United States formalized its early natural history museums after the great museum success stories of Europe through exhibitions that focused on the Western tradition, the institution of European curation methods, and the establishment of new museums within regions that were accessible to citizens coming from less affluent backgrounds. Rather than display original artifacts in their exhibitions, United States natural history museums typically used replicas.[37] These pieces were affordable models of the original artifacts from Western European museums. At this point, the United States only loosely connected itself to Europe as a means to attain higher quality museums. The United States was not on good terms with Western Europe. Rather, the Western tradition was simply

[35] Gratacap, "Natural History Museums (II)," 64.
[36] Henson, "Objects of Curious Research," S250.
[37] Harris, "Gilded Age Revisited," 553.

recognized as a crucial component to a proper education. The United States merely attempted to learn from Europe and their cultural institutions. While the United States did not directly identify itself with Europe at this point, it became the location for discussions to take place about how the two should relate. Conn addresses the form these conversations took at the Philadelphia Commercial Museum. He writes, “Alternately, often simultaneously wary and enthusiastic, bellicose, and irenic, racist and humanitarian, the various positions in the debate over America’s role in the world were embodied in the Commercial Museum and its ancillary activities.”[38] While remaining isolated, the United States began to evaluate the usefulness of aligning itself more closely with Europe, and museums were one forum where this debate found a voice.

Exhibitions Emphasize Western Culture

While exhibitions of North American artifacts were prevalent within the natural history museums of the early 1890s, they were not the primary focus. The museum’s primary focus was on displays from the European tradition. There was a certain sense of awe surrounding these European exhibitions. Period rooms were one method to spread European culture. “A series of museum installations--of natural history in the United States . . . demonstrated the power and significance of historic rooms and evocative settings. They were obvious sources of inspiration.”[39] Museum curators and institute directors planned these United States natural history museum exhibits with the underlying supposition that visitors must have an awareness of history as understood from a Western perspective. As Cain explain, “This notion--that visitors should absorb information whether or not they intended to do so--indicated reformers’ resolute . .

[38] Steven Conn, “Museums and the American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926,” Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998: 118.

[39] Neil Harris, "Period Rooms and the American Art Museum," *Winterthur Portfolio* 46, no. 2 (Summer, 2012): 123.

. conviction that curators best knew what was important for the public to learn."[40] In this case, it had become crucial for the public to understand both the European world and the uniqueness of natural history within the United States, so the curators focused on these emphases in their presentations and exhibitions.

Implementation of European Methods

In addition to catering to exhibition tastes to showcase the European tradition, museum curators and institute directors in the United States also sought to implement European curation methods, in particular turning "to the methods of German 'scientific' history."[41] In Europe, there was an increased awareness in the usefulness of museum research and importance of scientific displays. In this usage, "scientific" is defined as more systematized procedures and more care in organization. One of these methods in particular was the implementation of a bulletin at the American Natural History Museum. Gratacap, a museum reformer, asserted the need for the bulletin. He wrote, "It would indeed be very obvious to any thoughtful mind that the Museum could not long maintain a self-respecting attitude toward the world of science, nor bring itself into correlation with its own expectations if it did not have a scientific publication."[42]

George Brown Goode was the predominant figure in the implementation of European methods to natural history museums in the United States.[43] He is often labeled "the father of the history of American science."[44] While he made revisions to the European curation methods, the general concepts were preserved and maintained. At this point, a movement towards

[40] Victoria Cain, ""Attraction, Attention, and Desire": Consumer Culture as Pedagogical Paradigm in Museums in the United States, 1900-1930," *Paedagogica Historica* 48, no. 5 (October 2012): 758.

[41] Henson, "Objects of Curious Research," S256.

[42] Gratacap, L.P, "The Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History," *Science* 11, no. 282 (1900): 808.

[43] Orosz, *Curators and Culture,* 239.

[44] Henson "Objects of Curious Research," S255.

professionalism had been established. An air of seriousness and scientific processes overtook museum procedures and exhibition philosophies.

For example, in the early 1890s, there was also a great deal of discussion amongst scientific journals regarding the need to be able to transport specimens for natural history museums with greater ease and at a lower cost. "It is sought to throw the blame upon the countries in question, whereas the trouble arises solely from the fact that the United States have not yet advanced far enough to have a *parcel post*, as is in operation among other countries."[45] The United States' design for a parcel post that would be sufficient to transport natural history specimens replicated the parcel post which they saw in Europe.

Positioning of Future Museums

In Europe, the practice of developing museums in areas of poverty took precedent over founding new museums near wealthy donors. An unidentified author writes in an 1886 *Science* article, "If the institute is to do the good work is ought to do, and can do, it must, be placed, if not geographically, at least morally, at the East End of the town; that is, it must build in a poor quarter. Even in common fairness, the poor have a right to the site of the next museum."[46] The same article features a call for the United States to follow Europe's model by building museums in regions that are accessible to less affluent members of society.[47] Additionally, at this time, many of the physical buildings for the cultural institutions reflected values and styles of Western European culture.

Cultural Appropriation Period (1895--)

[45] Philip P. Calvert, "Postage on Natural History Specimens," *Science,* New Series 23, no. 573 (Jan. 26, 1894): 49.

[46] "The Modern Museum," *Science* 8, no. 192 (Oct. 8, 1886): 316.

[47] Ibid.

Arguably, a new wave of thinking developed in the late 1890s. Previously, America sought to mimic Europe as a cultural model. However, at the turn of the century, the United States began to be depicted by natural history museums as a crucial part of the European tradition. As a key player in the Western world, United States citizens were taught about the great classical works within the Western canon. The goal was to inform the public about America's significance within the framework of Western Europe. In "The Making of the Museum," Lucas explains the philosophy of the day, "One great aim of a museum should be to impart knowledge to the visitor who is not looking for it."[48] Viewed in the context of the Gilded Age, the uninterested or unsuspecting visitor was to come to understand the significance of the United States within the narrative of the Western world. In 1917, Scales fully captured the understanding of United States citizens of their own scholastic achievement and relationship to Western Europe when she wrote, "And though it is obvious that there is not in all Italians a bent toward painting, nor is there music in all Germans, nor a literary gift in every Englishman, yet there is undoubtedly a diversity of gifts--whether of tongues or of arts--and America has become the potential heir to them all."[49] Thus, during this phase, the United States came to see itself as the cultural recipient of the Western tradition and its natural history museums as surpassing their Western European contemporaries.

United States' Natural History Resources

While the natural history museums of Western Europe began with a wealth of artifacts, the United States' natural history museums came to recognize that they had something unique to offer through their immense natural history resources.[50] As one *Science* article author puts it,

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[48] F.A. Lucas, "The Making of a Museum," *Science* 11, no. 280 (May 11, 1900): 756.
[49] Scales, "The Museum's Part in the Making of Americans," 191.
[50] Gratacap, "Natural History Museums (I)," 35.

"Whereas the time of great discoveries has begun in America, it is over in Europe."[51] Exhibits at the American Museum of Natural History began to heavily feature fossil mammals excavated in the country's backyard.[52] The United States welcomed its rich natural history legacy and incorporated it into part of its identity as a nation.

Greater Exposure

Up to this point, natural history museums were mostly run for an audience of natural history scholars. "The exhibits in our museums twenty or twenty-five years ago were largely of a character that reached no class of people as they should be reached but catered principally to naturalists."[53] Museums were no longer to be a haven for the rich and intellectually curious. Rather, they reached out to every class. "This movement was closely linked with the principle that knowledge should not be confined within the disciplined bounds of a narrow scholar caste of class and privilege, but should be popularized so as to benefit all of the people."[54] This movement was very popular. "The Americans, however, have begun to make their treasures in natural science accessible to the public, as well as to the specialist, in a way which in many respects deserved admiration and imitation."[55] The historical societies worked to widen their base. They wanted the public to assimilate the information presented by the museums.[56] To do so, museum educators began to see the need to simultaneously advertise and educate.[57] The

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[51] "Museums of Natural History in the United States," 194.

[52] Henry F. Osborn, "The Collection of Fossil Mammals in the American Museum of Natural History, New York," *Science* 21, no. 536 (May 12, 1893): 261.

[53] Henry L. Ward, "The Anthropological Exhibits in the American Museum of Natural History," *Science*, New Series 25, no. 645 (May 10, 1907): 745.

[54] Solan Weeks, "The Development of the Museum Movement in America," *Michigan History* 45, no. 1. (March 1962): 33.

[55] "Museums of Natural History in the United States," 191.

[56] Ward, "The Anthropological Exhibits in the American Museum of Natural History," 746.

[57] Victoria Cain, "Attraction, Attention, and Desire," 758.

success of consumerism became a model for museum advertisement. Consumerism marketing had produced a great deal of efficacy in the target audience of natural history museums, namely "immigrants, citydwellers, labourers."[58] Museums copied the methods used to market products to the general public. Cain emphasizes the particular importance of natural history museums in this endeavor. Though many museum workers promoted "pedagogy influenced by consumer capitalism, Cain writes, "Staff members in public natural history museums promoted the paradigm particularly enthusiastically."[59] Since there were no age limits, museums were able to reach a larger audience than schools.[60] However, even with this, museums singled children out among the targeted audiences.[61] Museum workers implemented special days to encourage families to attend the museum. They instituted story hours as outreach programs. Natural history museums became a popular place for schools to hold field trips. United States natural history museums had an important story to tell and their citizens needed to hear it.

Technological Advances

After pulling tools and resources from Western Europe, the United States did not merely cease to evolve their methodology during this period. "From a comparisons of reports it would seem that museum lectures are vastly better attended in the United States than in Great Britain, but the lavish use of lantern sliders here doubtless accounts for a part of the difference."[62] Taxidermy was another area where the United States' natural history museums began to reign supreme.[63] In addition, the United States continued to focus on their publications. They made

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[58] Ibid., 754.
[59] Ibid., 745.
[60] Ibid., 751.
[61] Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, "Innovative niche scientists: Women's role in reframing North American museums, 1880-1930," *Centaurus* 55, no. 2 (2013): 161.
[62] "The American Museum of Natural History," 874.
[63] Gratacap, "Natural History Museums (II)," 61.

advances in their research ahead of the work of many others. "The series of publications that have proceeded from the Smithsonian Institution, the National Museum, and the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Cambridge, form a library of research and generous compilations almost unrivalled.[64] The United States' natural history museums focused on honing its professional skills through its emphasis on technology.

Association With Western Ancestry

The United States now had a personal stake in European history. It had come a significant way from its complete disassociation with European culture during the century following the Revolutionary War. Natural history museums were far beyond their quiet reproduction of European curation methods and emphases. Now, United States natural history museums fully embraced its established identity. While foundations of European culture still dominated United States thought, it was a new representation of European culture with an undoubtedly United States' touch. In writing of the sudden excellence of United States natural history museums, Orosz details, "Their headlong rise to prominence in the international community of museums was so unexpected that it tended to make all in America that had gone before, at best, seem merely prologue."[65] The role of America in the field of natural museum work had changed drastically.

Acquisition of Original Works

Natural history museums had now become sophisticated enough to enter the world of acquisitions. Temporary loans and replicas of famous artifacts would no longer suffice. The American natural history museum began to acquire artifacts for itself. In speaking of the Harvard Museum of Natural History, Gratacap writes, "Celebrated collections of the Old World, constant

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64 Ibid., 64.
65 Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 238.

accessions from the new, were pouring in the museum at Cambridge."[66] It had created an identity solid enough to fight for the right to own materials that were considered valuable to the Western world. It was no longer England's illegitimate child. It had become Western Europe's firstborn son and heir.

Cultivation of National Tastes

At this point, the United States had aligned itself closely with Western Europe. It had matured enough to develop its own sense of self, based on the European tradition. United States' natural history museums now went forward with a unique eye. This eye sought to put exhibits together that portrayed the United States as strong and independent. Exhibits began to feature many North American artifacts. By 1903, a list of displays in New York's American Museum of Natural History shows an emphasis on items such as ruined homes from Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico, bird specimens from Virginia, and mammal collections from "the Alaskan peninsula."[67] Harris elaborates on this concept, "Americans were presented with a new tabula rasa; but it was now taste that took the place of morality."[68] American citizens actively controlled the decision-making process for future exhibitions. Museum workers sought to make museums "an example of true American spirit."[69] Rather than following the European crowd in exhibition tastes, United States natural history museums became trendsetters in the process. Indeed, in some ways, the European natural history museums began to look to the United States for acquisitions and exhibit design. "It is beyond question that the future development of geology and paleontology will be essentially influenced by America; but it seems to me, that for zoology also, a model institution for the future, in many respects, has been created in the celebrated Agassiz

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[66] L.P. Gratacap, "Formative Museum Period," *Science* 14, no. 344 (1901): 168-178.
[67] "The American Museum of Natural History," 875.
[68] Harris, "Gilded Age Revisited," 558.
[69] Scales, "The Museum's Part in the Making of Americans," 193.

museum in Cambridge, near Boston, which probably will not be without influence on the development of museums of natural history in Europe."[70]

Conclusion

American natural history museums flourished as a place where United States citizens could unite under their common nationality. This was the premise by which museums during the Gilded Age were founded and funded. However, there was an alternative agenda behind much of the early museum work. To historical societies and intellectual founders, museums could also be used to educate the American people regarding the Western tradition. Museums were initially seen as a bridge to identify the United States more closely with Europe. These museums replicated European culture and curation techniques. Just like the exhibitions that they presented, they were a poor copy of an original masterpiece. The methodologies used to improve museum practices were the widening of audiences, the specificity of museum marketing, the emphasis on Western tradition exhibitions, and the use of European curation methods. In time, these natural history museums came to be considered as equal to or better than their European counterparts in terms of collection and methodology. While once a mere replication of Western Europe's museum methods, cultural distinctions, and theories, the United States came to see itself as the culminating work of European history and teaching.

[70] "Museums of Natural History in the United States," 195.

Appendix: Prominent Natural History Museums

Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia (1812)

Charles Willson Peale established the Academy of Natural Sciences with little precedent to model his institution after. However, one of his clear objectives in doing so was to create a strong presence for the humanities and scientific advancement. In a personal letter, Peale wrote, “I wish Philadelphia to be the seat of Arts & Science in America.”[71] This statement speaks to more than merely his intentions for Philadelphia. Rather, it also signifies that there was an increased awareness of the lacking scholastic achievements in the United States. In a separate letter to Thomas Jefferson, Peale addresses a colleague’s belief that the Legislature will put money aside for the betterment of the fine arts. Peale critiques his colleague by writing, “If he knew the constitutions of our Country better he would loose all hopes from that quarter.”[72] Peale strongly asserts that the United States is not putting enough effort into the education of its citizens. The institution of the Academy of the Fine Arts was a move to educate the general public and encourage further studies.

American Museum of Natural History, New York (1869)

To this day, the American Museum of Natural History remains one of the most important museums in the United States. It was founded in 1869. The goal was for New York to eventually hold “the finest and largest museum in the country.”[73] One of the founders of the museum was a man named A.S. Bickmore. Speaking of this man, a *Science* article states, “He not only knew how to get some of the richest and most influential citizens interested in his work, but also

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[71] Peale and Fulton, "Extracts from the Correspondence of Charles Willson Peale,” 127.
[72] Ibid., 123.
[73] “The American Museum of Natural History,” *The American Naturalist* 4, no. 7 (Sep. 1870): 436.

formed, with the means at his disposal, an institution unrivalled in many respects."[74] Bickmore solicited private individuals to invest in his museum, and his work was exceedingly successful. By 1884, 15,000 people a week were attending the museum on average.[75] The museum had five scientific departments, covering "almost entirely the area of Natural History, and embrace Forestry, Mammalogy and Ornithology, Entomology, Invertebrate Paleontology, Invertebrate Zoology, Mineralogy and Economics, Ethnography and Archaeology."[76]

National Museum of Natural History, Washington D.C. (1910)

As of 2014, the Smithsonian Institution is considered to be "the world's largest museum and research complex" and is home to 19 museums and galleries.[77] One of the earliest of the Smithsonian's museums was the National Museum of Natural History. The focus of this museum was predominantly on "the importance placed on the role of science and technology in establishing the United States as a world power."[78] With more support than its sister institutions, the National Museum of Natural History grew exponentially in its first decade "from 193,362 items in 1882 to 2,863,894 items in 1889."[79] The National Museum of Natural History featured numerous international collections. The ethnologist, Otis Tufton Mason was formidable in designing these collections. In her exposition on the Smithsonian, Henson writes of Mason, "Mason brought to his work an underlying belief in the evolution of cultures, and he devised a scheme for classifying the stages of cultural development from savagery to civilization."[80] There was recognition across the country that humans were evolving. This evolution took the form of

[74] Museums of Natural History in the United States," 193.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Gratacap, "Natural History Museums (II)," 63.
[77] "Smithsonian," Smithsonian. http://www.si.edu/museums (accessed May 9, 2014).
[78] Henson, "Objects of Curious Research," S250.
[79] Ibid., S258
[80] Ibid., S254.

educational betterment. These natural history museum exhibitions were one area that separated United States citizens as a people of higher stock and greater achievement. Gratacap expounds on this idea by writing, “The museum of science is that form of the museum which now engrossingly attracts notice…because science…is penetrating everywhere, and before the solvent powers of its touch and its genius the world, the universe and even the life of man fall into orderly and necessary arrays of evolutionary stages.”[81] Ultimately, this emphasis on the evolution of cultures was used to push the United States to the forefront as the rightful successor of Western cultural history.

[81] Gratacap, “Natural History Museums (I),” 32.

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