INTRODUCTION READING

Inquiries and big ideas
1) How have museums in the United States evolved over time?
2) What tensions and struggles have occurred within and among museums?

Part 1: Page 1 – 8 (top section on page 8)
Introduction

Evolving Purposes
--originally palaces by and for the elite and their collections—“hierarchical,” “paternalistic,” “moralizing”
--becoming today a place of “exchange, encounter, and education”
--from “authoritative” interpreter to “many voiced” interpretations
--WW I displays of letters of soldiers; 20s growth in numbers; 30s WPA and socially progressive causes; 40s WW II patriotism, some anti-Japanese propaganda; 50s return to tradition and conservatism; 60s and 70s radical changes for some; more hands-on, less hierarchical especially in children’s and science museums; 80s and 90s culture wars; 21st century emphasis on education and community engagement
--growing larger and offering more activities
--more sophisticated exhibiting techniques including technology
--more diverse audiences and funding sources, including admission fees and entrepreneurial sites (restaurants and gift shops)

Tensions and Struggles
--traditionalists and social progressives (preservation or progress and innovation)
--conservatives and multi-culturalists (who speaks? whose space?)

Exemplars and/or Quotes (page #s)
--“At the turn of the 20th century...some [museums] were progressive and allied themselves with movements for social reform. Others were concerned with upholding and preserving tradition” (3).
--“...opposing visions...are part of America’s larger, endless battle over the meaning of its own past. And museums are a battleground” (8).
A Brief History of Evolution—The Museum’s; Reaching and Teaching the Masses

Evolving Purposes
--display, entertainment, education; private collections to public places
--post Civil War museums as a place to form “an educated class”
--free public lectures for public school teachers (19aughts)
--pride of wealthy philanthropists; a means of showing off their wealth by displaying their collections
--children’s story hours and loans of specimens to schools, factories, and army bases (19teens)
--influence of world fairs “extravagant displays” (de Young; Palace of Fine Arts)

Tensions and Struggles
--“mixed messages”: open every day with free admission but architecture intimidating to working class people + public park locations “off limits to people of color”; de jure segregation in the South and de facto discrimination in the North
--children should be quiet; visitors should not touch objects of art
--problem of an “overeducated public” for elite classes who might be disturbed by critical thinkers protesting injustice (my addition) (12)

Exemplars and/or Quotes (page #s)
--1773 Charleston (South Carolina) Library Society collects animals, plants, and minerals
--1786 artist Charles Willson Peale opens his “collection of curiosities” in his Philadelphia home to the public
--P. T. Barnum opens American Museum in New York with “mermaid” skeleton (8)
--basements of libraries and colleges as sites for collections
--19th century: New York’s Museum of Natural History and Metropolitan Museum of Art;
Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts; Detroit Institute of the Arts; Hampton Institute in Virginia
(nation’s first African American museum, 1868) (9)
--1899 Brooklyn Children’s Museum (“first museum dedicated to youth education” (9)
--1896 John Dewey’s Lab School at the University of Chicago, which used museum trips as part of its curriculum; Dewey promoted “learn by doing” principle (9)
--1907 Boston Museum of Fine Arts introduces docent program to explain works of art (11)
--1915 Cleveland Museum of Art sets up first internal education department
--Benjamin Ives Gilman of Boston Museum of Fine Arts decries education for the masses in favor of serving upper class educated audience (13)
--John Cotton Dana Newark Museum director creates exhibitions for working classes in the 20s (“merchandise from five and dime stores and scale models of NJ river systems” 13)
--Museum of Science and Industry (1926)
Evolving Purposes

- Social engagement during Great Depression
- 1930s questioning elitism of museums
- WW II promotion of patriotism; how to grow victory gardens but also anti-Japanese propaganda; serve Red Cross and Navy, e.g., research on camouflage
- Post-WW II conservatism derides Dewey's populism
- Post-war prosperity raises interest in education and culture
- Middle class women volunteer; 50s school children go on field trips
- Concern for security during the Cold War; preservation of the collection; McCarthyism "blacklists" progressive artists and educators
- 1957 Sputnik launches "space race"; proliferation of science museums (federal government and universities)

Tensions and Struggles

- Competition from entertainment industry (television; theme parks; shopping malls)
- Staid museum environments

Exemplars and/or Quotes (Page #s)

- Modern architecture more accessible to popular tastes
- Renewed role of education in the 30s
- FDR's Works Progress Administration (WPA) promoted art centers, such as Walker Art Center in Minneapolis; more "classes for the masses" and racially integrated spaces
- 1950s promotion of individualism, motherhood, and nuclear family, e.g., "Family of Man" exhibition organized by the Museum of Modern Art in New York and "The Farmer's Year" organized by the Farmer's Museum in Cooperstown, NY
- Exploratorium (1969) -- "learn by doing" comes back in fashion in 60s
EVOLVING PURPOSES
--60s finds art and history museums behind the times
--late 60s, museums begin to respond to the times—community festivals; mobile art vans
--establishment of new community museums, new buildings, new audiences
--70s community outreach programs in “senior centers, hospitals, prisons, and juvenile justice centers...neighborhood festivals, YMCAs, local libraries, & shopping malls” (21) + “reinvigorated their presence in schools”
--“cultural tourism” of middle class older people
--museums linked to urban “revitalization” plans, serving as an anchor (e.g., YBCA, etc.)
--professionalization of museum staff
--80s/90s diversity demanded in audiences and funding sources (entrepreneurial spaces)
--90s technology enhanced exhibitions
--accessibility for people with disabilities
--“name” architects (“starchitects”) designing buildings as city icons
--9/11/01 museums as places of solace during time of collective trauma

TENSIONS AND STRUGGLES
--fortress building and then paternalism [Metropolitan Museum of Art “Harlem on My Mind” paternalistic attempt at response to changing times (1969)]
--instead of destroying the old, building the new, and then revising the old
--deaccession scandals
--typical museum goer in the 80s: female, white, 30s, college educated, who visited museums as a child and does not match the growing people of color demographic; multiculturalism vs. traditional dominant mono-culture; “mosaic of distinct traditions vs. ‘melting pot’”
--competition from the virtual world

EXEMPLARS and/or QUOTES (page #s)
--Smithsonian opens Anacostia Neighborhood Museum in low income African American community in D.C., 1967 (20)
--Community activist and first director of Anacostia John R. Kinard: museums can serve as “a catalyst for social change” (21)
--NEA & NEH (est. in 1965) provide new source of funding for museums in 1971 (21)
--establishment of Institute of Museum Services (now Inst. of Museums & Library Services)
--Excellence and Equity report (1992) museums must widen their mission & audiences (24)
--Lonnie G. Bunch, then Chicago Historical Society president: “Museums all over the country are working to create opportunities that allow visitors to see our institutions as places of healing, education, affirmation, and reflection, cultural entities that are ripe with contemporary resonance; and sources for historical knowledge...for people wrestling with despair and uncertainty” (26).