The Decolonizing/Indigenizing Museums movement of the last 50 years grows out of early and ongoing cultural resistance to colonialism, slavery, and genocide. The current movement seeks wider access to museums and the dismantling of elite power and privilege within them, posing key questions: “Who funds and rules? Who collects and displays? Who interprets and promotes? Who visits and participates?” From tribal museums on reservations and ethnic museums in urban environments to The National Museum of the American Indian and The National Museum of African American History and Culture, museums, formerly bastions of imperial culture, are responding more honestly and authentically to diverse cultures. The movement reflects the needs of grassroots communities with multiple goals and strategies (see page 2).

Leslie Simon, February 13, 2019

Influences and Inspirations

Books and Articles


Websites

MASS Action (Museum as Site for Social Action): [https://www.museumaction.org/](https://www.museumaction.org/)


The Incluseum: [https://incluseum.com/about](https://incluseum.com/about)

Thanks also to Nikki Myers-Lim (Pomo), Executive Director, California Indian Museum & Cultural Center.
**Repatriation and Ethical Acquisitions**
- acknowledge how explorers, soldiers, missionaries, and traders looted cultural legacies
- examine the role of federal and state policy in dispossessing native people of cultural heritage materials
- return stolen art and objects to countries and peoples of origin
- observe UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property and Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act

**Authentic Interpretation**
- add native perspectives to collections data
- validate oral traditions and oral histories of indigenous people
- acknowledge the multiplicity of interpretations among formerly silenced voices

**Accountability for Brutal Historical Legacies**
- document the violence perpetrated by war, slavery, colonialism, and genocidal practices
- address the experience and ongoing effects of historical trauma
- create participatory spaces and programs for contested memories
- acknowledge indigenous people as stewards of the land
- celebrate the resistance and resilience of indigenous people
- provide counter narratives to the "bringing of western civilization" by highlighting native innovations and traditional ecological knowledge

**Inclusive Practices**
- collaborate and co-create with indigenous and other marginalized communities
- engage native speakers and scholars in civic discourse
- reflect "pathways through time" by representing tribal communities past, present, and future
- evaluate cultural practices: Is the record about the collectors or the cultural artists? Are there efforts to share authority over objects?
- exhibit work of underrepresented artists and communities
- revise the "canon" to correct discriminatory and devaluing practices
- address the impact of intersecting identities on collecting, curatorial, educational, engagement, and development decisions (See "Diversity of Museum Staff and Board")

**Diversity of Museum Staff and Board**
- increase the number of people of color, women, LGBTQ people, people with disabilities, working class people, and other underrepresented groups on museum staffs and boards
- ensure equitable salaries and distribution of decision-making power
- challenge and dismantle individual and institutional oppressive practices
- offer trainings to staff and board, including anti-oppression education and conflict resolution

**Community Engagement**
- provide exhibitions and programming relevant to diverse communities
- create opportunities for visitor participation and contribution
- reach out to diverse communities to create exhibitions and programs that give back to communities

**Critique of Cultural Tourism and Gentrification/Displacement**
- assess the impact of blockbuster shows on diversity of museum audience/attendance
- analyze the role of museums in cultural tourism and its effect on gentrification/displacement
- participate in neighborhood revitalization efforts that do not displace working class people

**Accessibility**
- fund free admission to public museums across the country (Smithsonian Model)
- ensure universal access and universal design for people of diverse abilities
- support tribal museums; ethnic museums; women's museums; LGBTQ museums; labor museums; immigrant and refugee museums; museums of homelessness; museums of holocausts
- offer multiple locations and sites, such as eco-museums, neighborhood storefronts; mobile exhibitions; pop up museums; street museums in empty lots; museums in homes