Collaborating with Chicago Urban Communities: The Unforeseen Challenges of Better Museum Practices

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Collaborating with Chicago Urban Communities: The Unforeseen Challenges of Better Museum Practices

Abstract
This thesis focuses on better museum practices, social justice museums, and the unforeseen challenges that museums encounter when collaborating and consulting with communities. More specifically, this project looks at the National Public Housing Museum (NPHM) and the exhibit Report to the Public: An Untold Story of the Conservative Vice Lords (CVL), which was co-created with the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Both Chicago institutions worked with public housing residents and the former CVL, a 1960s gang, to give voice to two often unheard communities. Through an anthropological and museum studies perspective, this thesis summarizes the history of museum practice as well as the history of Chicago public housing and the CVL. By conducting interviews with staff at these museums and referencing published material and unpublished audio transcriptions of interviews, this thesis examines better museum practices and whether or not these museums were able to provide the community a platform to combat common stereotypes and challenge the way people think about both public housing residents and gang members. This project also offers recommendations for both museums in order to help them and other institutions improve the methods they use when working with communities.

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Collaborating with Chicago Urban Communities:  
The Unforeseen Challenges of Better Museum Practices

A Thesis

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the Faculty of Social Sciences

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by

Dionisia Ann Mathios

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Advisor: Dr. Christina Kreps
Abstract

This thesis focuses on better museum practices, social justice museums, and the unforeseen challenges that museums encounter when collaborating and consulting with communities. More specifically, this project looks at the National Public Housing Museum (NPHM) and the exhibit *Report to the Public: An Untold Story of the Conservative Vice Lords* (CVL), which was co-created with the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Both Chicago institutions worked with public housing residents and the former CVL, a 1960s gang, to give voice to two often unheard communities. Through an anthropological and museum studies perspective, this thesis summarizes the history of museum practice as well as the history of Chicago public housing and the CVL. By conducting interviews with staff at these museums and referencing published material and unpublished audio transcriptions of interviews, this thesis examines better museum practices and whether or not these museums were able to provide the community a platform to combat common stereotypes and challenge the way people think about both public housing residents and gang members. This project also offers recommendations for both museums in order to help them and other institutions improve the methods they use when working with communities.
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Chapter One: Introduction

According to Richard Kurin, an American cultural anthropologist and museum professional, representations of peoples, cultures, and institutions do not just happen (1997). They can be mediated, negotiated, and brokered often through complex processes with myriad challenges and constraints imposed by all those involved, who have their own interests and concerns. In the end, a series of decisions can be made to represent someone, some place, or something in a particular way. As explained by Ivan Karp and Steven P. Lavine, “Every museum exhibition, whatever its overt subject, inevitably draws on the cultural assumptions and resources of people who make it. Decisions are made to emphasize one element and to downplay others, to assert some truths and to ignore others” (1991:1). These decisions often vary according to culture and over time, place, and type of museum or exhibit. In today’s museums, staff often reach out to community members for input on exhibitions. In the past, however, this was not typically the way in which museum staff created representations in exhibitions.

Before the 1970s, museum practices were largely seen as exclusive and catering to a select sector of the public that frequently alienated or excluded certain groups, such as minorities or those from the so-called lower classes. Several changes have taken place
in museums since the 1970s. For example, there has been a shift in the locus of power away from museums to the public or communities they serve. This gives communities a greater voice in exhibit production processes, and greater control over the management of their own cultural heritage (Ross 2004). It is important to note, however, that these changes were not something that happened overnight. Instead they were often developed gradually or in stages. Museums are still continuously reforming and improving these practices today.

It is more common for museums today to build ongoing, permanent relationships with communities for the purpose of applying a collective vision for the benefit of a given community (Black 2005). Although museums have been trying to change the ways in which they involve the public in exhibit development, this process is by no means perfect. The challenges of representation, understanding people and how they interact, and the idea of social responsibility are key issues in museum studies today (Crooke 2006). Elizabeth Crooke, professor of museum studies, argues that the very idea of the museum can be challenged through community involvement. In order to learn how to better collaborate with and engage communities, this thesis examines what museums have been doing in terms of how they represent a particular person, communities, and/or place.

This thesis focuses on museums, exhibitions, and programming that represent communities that are often underrepresented in museums. By focusing on case studies of this kind, this thesis hopes to show how museums can use the method of collaboration to improve the ways in which they develop exhibitions and can help give agency to and empower previously ignored individuals and groups. This project applied ethnographic
methods to the study of the National Public Housing Museum (NPHM) and the exhibit *Report to the Public: An Untold Story of the Conservative Vice Lords*, which was created with the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. The methods used to carry out this project will be explained in Chapter 2. This will include my research questions, the methods used for analyzing interviews, archival material, published articles, and my limitations.

My first research question was about the special emphasis and practices at both institutions. Secondly, I questioned how involving the communities that were being represented in the museum/exhibit improved the narrative and overall message of the exhibition. With this question, I also inquired about whether or not this involvement empowered community members, if it encouraged people to think differently about the community being represented, and if the institutions were successful in combating common stereotypes associated with these groups. Lastly, I asked how the process of collaboration and community engagement positively impacted or created challenges for the museum institutions involved with the development of the National Public Housing Museum and the exhibit *Report to the Public*.

Chapter 3, Background and Literature Review, presents an overview of the relevant literature of museum studies on topics, such as, consultation and collaboration, reflexive museology, and new museology. This chapter discusses the evolution of neighborhood and community museums as well as provides examples of these types of institutions. This chapter defines social justice museums and how they relate to my case studies. Chapter 3 closes with specific examples of Chicago museums that are using better practices and goes into the background history of Chicago public housing and the Conservative Vice Lords. Chapter 4, Theoretical Framework, discusses anthropological
frameworks (heritage, kin, community, etc.) and how they relate to this thesis. This chapter also summarizes the anthropology of Public Housing and Gangs and discusses the various scholarly work done on public housing and gangs thus far.

I use the NPHM and the Report to the Public exhibition as case studies in Chapter 5 to show how collaboration with museum institutions has, and can continue, to empower the communities being represented in exhibitions. These case studies are a good example of how collaboration with the general public can bring awareness to social injustice, give voice to the generally excluded, and provide a place for education and reflection. This chapter will also touch on the various unforeseen challenges these institutions encountered when collaborating with former public housing residents and gang members. Additionally, this is where I offer my recommendations for the NPHM and evaluate the work done for Report to the Public. Chapter 5 concludes by discussing what the source community neighborhoods from my case studies are like today in order to access their need for socially responsible museums. To close, Chapter 6 explains how this thesis can contribute to anthropology and museum studies and provides my further research.

**Case Studies: The National Public Housing Museum & Report to the Public: An Untold Story of the Conservative Vice Lords**

When thinking about museums, people do not commonly think of exhibitions being about public housing residents or gangs. The National Public Housing Museum (NPHM) and the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, however, have created a museum and an exhibit about public housing residents and the Conservative Vice Lords, a 1960s gang. The NPHM has been incorporated since 2007 and is currently being developed (reference Appendix A for timeline). In 2015, the NPHM plans to have its first
exhibition at their 1322 West Taylor Street location, which is the final building left standing from the Chicago Housing Authority’s Jane Addams Homes developments. The NPHM was incorporated to assist former public housing residents in getting their positive stories to reach a greater audience. Through former residents’ stories, visitors to this museum will gain a sense of what it was like to live in Chicago public housing, as well as public housing projects throughout the country. Like the Tenement Museum in New York, the NPHM will recreate housing units, provide photographs, and share firsthand accounts of resident experiences and memories. The NPHM strives to change society's perception of public housing due to the media and news portraying public housing in an often negative way. This museum will focus on these incredible stories.

The NPHM’s intended mission is to foster the values of diversity, tolerance, citizen participation, and social equity (National Public Housing Museum 2014a). By examining the many lessons learned of public housing through its successes and failures, the NPHM’s exhibitions and public forums hope to make important connections to today’s urban challenges. It wants to give people pause to think, to talk, and to take action on issues that shape us all: family, home, shelter, and community (National Public Housing Museum 2014a). This museum can be important to Chicago in making public housing a part of the conversation and educating its citizens on its history. It is drawing attention to the ongoing issues with public housing and bringing awareness to citizens that there needs to be a change.

Audrey Petty explains the need for greater awareness of public housing when she says, “…even though so many Chicago commuters were confronted daily with the high-rises’ facades along the Dan Ryan and Eisenhower Expressways, most of the city never
had any idea what life was actually like inside the buildings” (2013:13), even those who really needed to know about public housing conditions like Chicago’s former mayor Richard M. Daley. Once, Mayor Daley held a press conference assailing people that did not pay their water bills, the largest being the Chicago Housing Authority and its public housing residents. He flippantly suggested that the city start charging public housing residents for showers. People in most public housing high-rises, however, did not have showers, just baths, showing just how little detail Daley knew about the CHA buildings themselves (Petty 2013:13).

With help from the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum in Chicago and former members of the Conservative Vice Lords (CVL), including CVL spokesman Bobby Gore and Benneth Lee, former CVL, the exhibit Report to the Public: An Untold Story of the Conservative Vice Lords (2012-2014) was created (see Appendix A for timeline). To create the exhibit, the Hull-House Museum held several community meetings with the CVL. Here, the Hull-House staff worked with the CVL to help co-curate an exhibition showcasing their history and experiences. This exhibit told the story of the 1960s gang the CVL, which originated in the North Lawndale neighborhood of Chicago (see Appendix B). The CVL fought for the life of their community. With funding from major foundations, they organized youth, protested unfair housing policies and working conditions, opened small businesses, and fought for peace and racial equality. Regarded by some as innovative grassroots organizers and others as violent criminals, the history of the CVL provides a lens for understanding the potential of grassroots organizing in urban communities.
Through former gang members’ stories, photographs, CVL memorabilia, city grant documents, newspaper clippings, and audio recordings this exhibit explained what it was like to transform a violent street gang into a community organization that focused on violence prevention, cleaning up the neighborhood, providing legitimate jobs through local businesses, and the varying definitions of gangs. As explained by Lisa Junkin, the manager of this exhibition, the exhibit encouraged people to think differently about gang members and recognize that they and all people can affect positive social change (personal interview, August 2, 2013).

The NPHM and CVL exhibits unearth the past and record the memory of these community experiences, both traumatic and inspiring. These exhibitions can be a space for questioning the past, which can influence discourse on the present. This thesis explores how better museum practices can influence museum professionals as well as the communities involved with the exhibits. By examining the methods of collaboration and community engagement at the NPHM and the Report to the Public exhibit, this thesis can inform aspiring museum professionals of the various challenges that can arise when using these methods as well as what they can do to improve them.

Rationale for the Study

I chose to evaluate the National Public Housing Museum (NPHM) and the Report to the Public exhibit in order to gain insight into how they collaborated and engaged the communities involved in the exhibits, and in the case with the NPHM, how they are still currently doing this. Initially I chose the CVL exhibit because during the spring of 2011, while working towards my undergraduate degrees in anthropology and criminology, law, and justice at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), I had the opportunity to work
with the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum on the early stages of development of this exhibit. Through the class “History of Chicago Gangs”, taught by Professor Dr. John Hagedorn, three undergraduate students, a PhD candidate, and I were asked to work with the exhibit staff for the fifteen-week semester doing research. This included obtaining photographs from archives and attending community meetings held at the Hull-House with former CVL members. During this time, I was also asked to visit *History Coming Home* (2010-2011), which was a preview of the NPHM that showed at the Chicago Tourism Center. I was asked to go to this exhibit because the *Report to the Public* exhibit hoped to present history in a similar manner. Overall, visiting this exhibit in 2011 sparked my interest in what the NPHM could become. With this, I felt it would be a fitting additional case study to my thesis because of their use of collaboration and community engagement. Additionally, I chose these case studies because they use or have used these methods with communities that are not commonly represented in museums or exhibits. Since my involvement in 2011, I have developed a personal interest in how museums are starting to work with socially marginalized groups, such as gangs and public housing communities.

From my experience as an undergraduate in 2011, I was able to work together with people that are different from myself and see the power dynamics that are often behind exhibition development. I realized the power museums can have in terms of influencing society and this inspired me to continue my education and pursue a degree in museum and heritage studies. My experience showed me that museums can have the power to act as agents of change for often marginalized groups. Exhibitions can
stimulate an ongoing dialogue and address issues that a given community faces, raising awareness on these issues to visitors.

This thesis concerns museums and representations of public housing residents and gangs in Chicago. Often, these topics elicit a great deal of emotion and instigate debate. Although I would like to refrain from the continuation of drawing attention to difference, I am a white, middle class, female that grew up in the suburbs of Chicago. My very own grandparents fled the city of Chicago in hopes to live a better life in the suburbs. I by no means know what it is like to be a gang member or a public housing resident, but my research has allowed me to come close to understanding what it is like. I do not speak for these communities, but about them and what I have learned from my experiences and conversations. This thesis is intended to show how museums can help dispel hate, stereotypes, and counter the continuing marginalization of particular groups of people.

**Goals of Study**

This thesis looks at collaboration and community engagement and hopes to present useful case studies for other museums to learn from. The challenges these institutions encountered, and are currently encountering, when working with under-represented populations offers a model that other museums can follow to make powerful and lasting relationships with communities. The community should become an important part of a museum’s agenda. These case studies are examples of museums that have created a platform to spark conversations about deeper social issues.

With this study I hope to help people gain a different perspective on these often marginalized groups. Overall, this study illustrates that, although collaboration and community engagement can result in many difficulties for the people involved, it still can
create a positive impact on communities and can help improve museums. These methods help to move museums towards creating a place for serving their community and allows for access to history, collections, and education for all individuals in society. These methods allow museums to be effective in creating exhibitions that are stimulating and provide a sense of engagement. These case studies can help illustrate this point. They kindle the imagination, foster inquiry, and allow viewers to make their own judgments (Klobe 2012).
Chapter Two: Methods

Research Questions

The three questions that guided my research relate to the National Public Housing Museum (NPH) staff, the Report to the Public exhibit, and the ways in which collaboration and community engagement influence museum professionals and the communities with which they work.

1. How do the special emphasis and practices in these institutions set them apart from other institutions?

2. How does involving the communities that are to be represented in the museum/exhibit improve the narrative and overall message of the exhibition?
   a. Does this involvement empower these community members?
   b. How do these exhibits encourage people to think differently about these communities?
   c. How was the museum or exhibit successful in combating common stereotypes associated with the groups represented?
3. How does the process of collaboration and community engagement positively impact or create challenges for the museum institution involved with the development of an exhibit?

**Museum Ethnography**

Museum ethnography can be a method for examining and writing about museum situations (Ames 1992). It is applying ethnographic research methods to the study of museums and exhibits. Going behind the scenes of a museum can allow researchers to look at the way professional identities can be implicated in designing and realizing a new exhibition through both the objects and the text that are included in an exhibit (Bouquet 2012). Museum ethnography involves studying the organization of museums and their role in the community. According to Michael Ames, museum ethnography is a way of defamiliarizing the familiar and studying in our backyard (1992). It is about studying the museum as an artifact in itself and the culture of museums. In this research project, the Hull-House Museum and the National Public Housing Museum were my field sites and the “cultures” under investigation.

Museum ethnography was one of the methods I used for this project. Ethnographic methods can be used to study and document the process of making an exhibit. This thesis has been influenced by scholars that also use these methods such as Sharon MacDonald. MacDonald’s work aimed to study the construction of a science museum exhibition, exploring agendas, and assumptions involved in creating science for the public (MacDonald 2002). She studied the constraints involved in representing and understanding science. She also probed the complexities of the fundamental domains of museum collections (Bouquet 2012). Just as MacDonald studied the constraints involved
in representing and understanding science, I studied the constraints experienced when museum professionals tried to represent and understand public housing residents and gang members.

Ethnographic research is one way of exploring social relations and cultural meanings in all their complexity at a particular time and in a particular place or places (Bouquet 2012). Visual methods, such as participant observation, can be at the core of ethnographic research and can be used in combination with conversation and interviews. Working with key cultural consultants is also important. The general aim of ethnographic analysis is to explain actions and ideas that might at first sight appear inexplicable and to grasp the texture of a particular life world. Examples involved major areas of museum work: collections and collecting (O’Hanlon 1993), exhibition-making (MacDonald 2002), and guided tours for the public (Katriel 1997). These ethnographies demonstrate the scope and diversity of this approach to museums across a variety of sites.

Ames also suggests taking a holistic approach to the study of museums, which is to view a culture from many viewpoints and micro level aspects (1992). This contextualizing approach often involves the ethnographer gaining access to a society that they are not a part of and learning to see and understand it from the inside, to gain an insider point of view (Bouquet 2012). This holistic approach to understanding social life depends on goodwill and trust, which requires a relatively extended period of time in the “field” with return visits anticipated.

During my research in 2013, I interviewed people involved with the development of the exhibits as well as interviewed and textually analyzed outsiders’ viewpoints in order to gain a more holistic understanding of how these exhibits were created and seen.
by outsiders. Since my involvement with these institutions from an early stage in their development in 2011, I have gained a unique understanding by starting as a complete outsider and slowly becoming more of an insider.

**Methods**

On August 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} of 2013, I administered three face-to-face, structured interviews with museum professionals at the NPHM and Hull-House. As previously explained, I chose these individuals due to my previous involvement with their exhibition work. In this type of interview, in the presence of the interviewer, each informant or respondent is exposed to the same stimuli, which are often questions (Bernard 2006). The idea in structured interviewing is generally the same: to control the input that triggers people’s responses so that their output can be reliably compared. Anthropology uses the accounts of single individuals or key informants when conducting interviews (LeCompte and Schensul 2010). On August 1\textsuperscript{st}, I conducted my interviews with Todd Palmer, former Curator/Director of Creativity and Public Engagement at the NPHM, and Matthew Leo, former Staff Researcher at the NPHM. On August 2\textsuperscript{nd}, I interviewed Lisa Junkin, Interim Director at the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. The key informants that I interviewed are knowledgeable about the museum they work at and are “experts” in specific areas of museum work (LeCompte and Schensul 2010). They were able to explain the ways of their institution and can be seen as representatives of or as typifying all staff members.

One method for conducting structured interviews is to use a questionnaire. Each questionnaire that I used consisted of up to eleven open-ended questions that exposed my participants to the same questions that were only minimally altered in order to be more
appropriate for specific participants (See questions in Appendix C). According to Ellen Taylor-Powell, the use of open-ended questions allows the respondents to provide their own answers and gives them the ability to creatively express their own thoughts (1998). This is important to my thesis because I wanted to learn about how these institutions used the methods of collaboration to engage the population that they are representing. I wanted to hear about their experience within the museum.

As well as conducting interviews, I also relied on archival research to address my questions on the institutions’ special emphasis and practices. Through Lisa Junkin at the Hull-House Museum, I obtained three transcribed interviews with Bobby Gore, former CVL spokesman, Benneth Lee, former CVL member, and a third interview with Gore and Lee together. Because these interviews belong to the Hull-House Museum and were conducted with proper approval from both Gore and Lee, Junkin gave me permission to use both former CVL’s real names in this thesis (personal communication, October 1, 2014). Unfortunately, Gore, who passed away February 12, 2013, and Lee were unable to participate in face-to-face interviews due to personal and health reasons.

The transcriptions, however, provided qualitative data that addressed my research questions. These materials helped me see what the communities took away from the project. They provided a better understanding of their role with creating the exhibit as well as provided insights to their lives and overall experience. Along with the transcriptions, I also analyzed newspaper articles and published reviews that pertain to the NPHM (in terms of exhibits they have created thus far that are explained later in my analysis) and the *Report to the Public* exhibits. When going through these sources, I was mainly in search of reactions to the exhibits. These texts were obtained by searching
Chicago Newspaper archives through the University of Denver library website with keywords like “National Public Housing Museum”, “Report to the Public”, and “Conservative Vice Lords exhibit.”

I used domain and discourse analysis and the grounded-theory approach to analyze these texts and archival materials. These types of analyses are similar in that they both seek to aggregate similar tangible items into categories, factors, or patterns of related items (LeCompte and Schensul 2010). The emergence of themes is what familiarizes researchers with their data, certain overall ideas, topics, or central tendencies. These categories are given names that represent a class of relatively similar items. After identifying patterns, researchers then look for ways that patterns themselves are linked or related to one another. To summarize, Margaret D. LeCompte and Jean J. Schensul describe domain and discourse analysis as items, patterns, and structures that operationalize variables, factors, and domains (2010:207).

Similarly, the grounded-theory approach is a set of techniques for: (1) identifying categories and concepts that emerge from text; and (2) linking the concepts into substantive and formal theories (Bernard 2006). This approach was developed by sociologists and is widely used to analyze ethnographic interview data. When I analyzed my data and sources, I found these techniques to be most helpful for my analysis chapter. I additionally found this approach useful when writing my Background and Literature Review and Theoretical Framework chapters. The mechanics for this methodology are: (1) data collection and (2) identifying potential analytic categories or potential themes. (3) Once categories emerge, the researcher pulls the data from those categories and compares them. (4) The researcher thinks about how these categories relate and (5) uses
the relations among categories to build theoretical models. (6) Lastly, the researcher presents the analysis using quotes from the text that illuminate the theory (Bernard 2006). The key to making it all work, according to Russell Bernard (2006), is called memoing. This process requires one to keep running notes about the coding and about potential hypotheses and new directions for the research. Grounded theory is an iterative process by which the analyst becomes more and more grounded in the data. Memoing allows the analyst to understand more and more deeply how the text relates to one’s research.

In order to code my text, I chose categories that pertain to my above stated research questions and assigned a number to each portion of text that pertained to my questions. This way, when trying to answer my questions in my analysis, I could quickly pull from the text potential answers to these questions. The following are the categories I used with assigned numbers that match the numbering above for my questions:

1. Special emphasis and practices
2. Narrative and message improvement
   2a. Empowers communities
   2b. Encourages people to think differently
   2c. Combats stereotypes
3. Collaboration and community engagement (positive and negative outcomes)

I chose these codes to keep everything consistent and easy to understand. To identify these categories in the text, I highlighted the text and noted a number next to the text.


Limitations

While conducting my fieldwork on August 1st and 2nd of 2013, I did not use questionnaires with visitors because the Report to the Public exhibit was closed and the NPHM was not open at the time of my research. Additionally, I planned to interview two students that worked on research for the Report to the Public exhibit, but after several attempts to contact them, I still had not heard back from them. In addition to the museums I visited, North Lawndale (see map of Chicago neighborhoods in Appendix B) was another field site that I visited while doing research on August 1st, 2013. Along with interviews and archival research, I hoped to incorporate the use of various exhibition panels on display in North Lawndale into my research. These panels were replicas of the panels that were used in the exhibit and served as a tribute to the CVL and the work they did for their community. They were put on display to inspire current residents to make a difference in their community and to end violence. The panels were on display at several businesses that were originally opened and operated by the CVL. Lisa Junkin explained to me that she thought there were panels at “African Lion & CV Ladies Creative Salon” at 3946 W. 16th Street, “A Time of Change” at 1600 S. Pulaski, “Art & Soul” at 3742 W. 16th Street, and “Youth Organization United” at 4350 W. 16th Street (personal communication, June 26, 2013).

I hoped to do tracking and timing on how North Lawndale residents in the community interacted with these panels as well as conduct interviews with people while doing participant observations on the interactions with the panels. Upon my arrival to North Lawndale, however, I found that the panels were not as prominently on display as I hoped. I saw the panel on display at “African Lion & CV Ladies Creative Salon” at 3946 W. 16th Street.
W. 16th Street and, although the panel was at the salon, it was not displayed in a manner so that customers could read it. For the most part, it was out of site from the waiting room. At this visit, I met with a man that the woman at the front desk described to me as the person in charge of the panel. While talking with him, he explained that he usually tries to move the panel around in order for more residents to be able to see it. He explained, as far as he knew, that the other panels were no longer on display throughout North Lawndale.

While I was at the African Lion & CV Ladies Creative Salon on August 1st, no one appeared to be interacting with the panel. It was not until I started reading it that kids and other customers of the salon became interested in it as well. Since the panel was not being interacted with and was not on display in a more permanent fashion, I did not think it would be useful to do tracking and timing on the panel. Additionally, as I will describe in my background section, North Lawndale is still experiencing issues of poverty, a lack of services, unemployment, and an increase in criminalization of African American youth. As a newcomer and an outsider, visiting North Lawndale was not necessarily safe for me. Due to these issues, I did not conduct any research on the panels. Overall, my visit was still successful because I got to spend time in North Lawndale and see some of the businesses created by the Conservative Vice Lords in the 1960s. Furthermore, these limitations helped me focus my research on collaboration and community engagement as well as the overall impact of these exhibits.
Chapter Three: Background & Literature Review

As previously stated, it can be helpful to examine what museums have been doing in terms of what methods they use to represent someone, communities, or someplace. To illustrate the importance of several topics in museum studies, such as consultation and collaboration, reflexive museology, and new museology, I will introduce the *Into the Heart of Africa* exhibit and the various lessons learned from studying this controversial exhibit. Following this discussion, I will define neighborhood and community museums as well as provide examples of these types of museums. Lastly, because many community museums often exist to empower individuals and communities, I will also define and discuss social justice museums. This chapter closes by summarizing specific examples of Chicago museums adapting better institutional practices. This chapter will start by generally discussing the changes in practice to specifically discussing examples that more closely pertain to my case studies. The end of this chapter goes into the background and history of Chicago public housing and the Conservative Vice Lords.

*Into the Heart of Africa* showed at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Canada from November 1989 until August 1990. The exhibit was intended to be a critical examination of the role Canada played in the colonization of Africa. The exhibit was
curated by cultural anthropologist Jeanne Cannizzo and attempted to display ROM’s African collection in a critical and ironic manner (Butler 1999). *Into the Heart of Africa* can be seen as an example of an exhibition that was negatively perceived due to unbalanced power, conflicting perspectives, and a lack of understanding issues associated with different ethnic groups (Butler 1999). This exhibit also lacked consultation and collaboration, which left Cannizzo, for the most part, in charge of making important decisions about the exhibit including design, whose story to tell, what perspective to use, appropriate text, and interpretation. *Into the Heart of Africa* led to a court injunction against demonstrators due to the numerous protests over this exhibit; cancellation of the exhibition’s tour to other venues, intimidation and threats to Cannizzo, and ultimately her resignation from her post as a university lecturer (Simpson 1996).

Shelley Butler, professor of anthropology, dissected *Into the Heart of Africa* in her ethnography on this controversy and tries to shed some light onto what went wrong. She thinks that many people visiting natural history museums expect exhibits to present the truth and to present literal text. Butler explains, “If a museum said that this and that was so, then it was a statement of truth” (Butler 2007:7). This common belief could have contributed to visitors seeing the exhibit as racist. According to Butler, a number of factors contributed to the exhibition being misinterpreted, including the overall misunderstanding of irony indicated through the use of quotation marks; the expectation visitors have about the truth of exhibitions in museums and the varying education levels of visitors (2007:26).

If consultation or some kind of collaboration could have been done prior to and during the process of creating the *Into the Heart of Africa* exhibit, possibly the
controversy could have been avoided (Simpson 1996; Butler 2007). As explained by Moira G. Simpson, museum theorist and consultant, curatorial staff have become much more aware of the need to address the social and cultural needs of diverse audiences and to explore the subject of cultural diversity through exhibits and programs (1996:51). Consultation work, or the action or process of formally meeting and discussing with an expert in order to seek advice, is now routinely undertaken in the planning of new exhibits to be developed which reflect the wishes and interests of communities themselves. Through consultation with communities represented in exhibits, museums can provide a means to counteract many of the problematic aspects of exhibits (Simpson 1996:51).

Collaborative projects, or the action of museums working with communities to produce or create something, provide illustrations of a method of research and exhibit interpretation that is increasingly common in museums as they develop new, more inclusive relationships working with communities that the museum has in the past merely studied (Simpson 1996:56). Collaboration between museums and communities enables exhibits to be developed which reflect the wishes and interests of communities themselves. Community involvement in the exhibit planning process can take a number of forms. These include: photographic documentation, various forms of research, advice to museum staff who are curating an exhibit, ratification of plans, texts, images, etc., guest curatorship by individuals or groups within the community, or curatorship in entirety by community participants (Simpson 1996:51).

Jeanne Cannizzo should have consulted the African communities in the area in order to understand their perspectives as well as their reactions to the content of the
Perhaps a single focus group could have prevented this exhibit from offending so many people. Although this exhibit represents some negative effects museums can have on people, it is important to note that museum professionals have learned from ROM’s mistakes. By examining “what went wrong,” for example like in this case, museum staff can possibly better serve their communities in the future by recognizing “red flags”.

**Reflexive Museology**

Butler also explains in her ethnography the importance of reflexive museology and the practice of involving community members. Reflexive museology focuses on the way in which we critically think about museum practices of collecting, classifying, and displaying material culture (Ames 1992). This practice shows how exhibits can be informed by cultural, historical, institutional, and political ideologies, biases, and assumptions of the people who make exhibits. Recently, there has been a growing recognition of alternative and diverse models of museums, curatorial practices, and concepts of cultural heritage preservation within the international museum community (Kreps 2003). This recognition can be a part of the continuing process of decolonizing and democratizing museums and museum practices. Museum practices are continuously being transformed or reconsidered to be more culturally appropriate and relative to the needs, interests, and cultural particulars of specific communities.

Similarly, Sharon MacDonald, professor of cultural anthropology at the University of York, explains that greater reflexivity, in the form of greater attention to the process by which knowledge is produced and disseminated, and to the partial and positioned nature of knowledge itself has become an important part of museum studies
Reflexivity has been part of a growing body of work that has sought to “deconstruct” cultural products, such as text or exhibitions. Through this type of deconstruction, the politics and the strategies by which cultural products were positioned as “objective” or “true” reveal the historical, social, and political contexts in which certain kinds of knowledge reigned and others were marginalized or ignored.

Reflexive practice can offer a critique of the dominant voices of museum professionals or the historically dominant voice in academia or popular media. Being reflexive can allow museum professionals the chance to reflect on their practices in order to look back on why and for whom they created an exhibit. This practice can also help them see their own positionality among others and understand how their gender, class, education, and power can be seen in the representations of the ‘other’ (Ames 1992). As Ames said over twenty years ago, “We need to study ourselves, our own exotic customs and traditions, like we study others; view ourselves as ‘the Natives’” (1992:10).

**New Museology**

For most of the twentieth century, the primary role of museums was to collect objects, classify, document and conserve them, and put them on display (Black 2005). Since the rise of new museology beginning in the 1970s, museums have become more people centered rather than object centered (Kreps 2003). The social role of museums and their need to be socially relevant and responsible as an institution of civil society is paramount to “new museology”. Today, museums are focusing on broadening their audience bases, reflecting on their communities, and enhancing their role as learning institutions.
Graham Black, professor of museum and heritage management at Nottingham Trent University, explains that in order for museums to be engaging, the audience needs to view their visit as a journey and as a conversation that they want to take part in that will engage their minds (2005). Museums need to bind themselves, by promise or contract, to respond to the needs and expectations of all their visitors and support people in their exploration. Black asserts that museums should be able to deal with the controversial and engender, at times, heated debate. A “one size fits all” approach, which was the very basis of most past and current museum exhibitions, will not work in presenting collections to current audiences (Black 2005). Museums should seek to provide both a palette of display approaches and a layering of content to meet the needs of their audiences and support their engagement with the collection.

Peter Davis, emeritus professor at Newcastle University, asserts that new museology is a combination of changing attitudes and practices in museums, which have been adopted from the late 1960s (2011:62). Davis uses Dierdre Stam’s definition of new museology saying that it specifically questions the traditional museum approaches to issues of value, meaning, control, interpretation, authority, and authenticity. New museology focuses on the implication that the primary concern for new theories and techniques to enable museums to communicate more effectively with their visitors (Vergo 1989). It is a radical reassessment of the roles of museums within society. This encompasses views about responsibility and being open to criticism and multivocality (Davis 2011).

New museology encourages the reflexivity and critique of museums and their practices. It strives to examine differences, and especially inequalities of ethnicity,
gender, sexuality, and class (MacDonald 2006). New museology acknowledges underlying assumptions and value systems that can reinforce unequal power dynamics (Marstine 2006). For example, museums following new museology approaches provide better representations of women in exhibitions, multidisciplinary displays, themes that promote inquiry, community involvement, outreach, setting long-term goals, and the celebration of other cultures, to name a few (Davis 2011:64).

As explained by Tom Klobe, professor emeritus and founding director of the University of Hawaii Art Gallery, “People are the reason for the existence of museums, and people are the reason for what museums do” (2012:67). The concept of collaboration is integral to the planning and the manner of working in museums. Klobe stresses that individuals, departments, institutions, and communities should be brought together. Museum professionals, as a result of new museology, have been increasingly using the method of collaboration to develop the narrative of exhibits.

As museum audiences change, previously excluded communities are often demanding representation and opportunities for direct involvement with museums (Black 2005). For museums, the perception of communities has shifted from being looked at as users and choosers to makers and shapers in museums (Cornwall and Gaventa 2001). Museums are now talking to and working with the communities they exhibit more than in the past. By using collaboration, communities can offer museums their unique story and perspective, gaining a sense of agency over what story is told. The communities may be able to begin to be empowered by museums to speak for themselves (Ames 1992). When referring to “community”, it is important to note that communities are not homogenous. Crooke argues that there has been a shift towards understanding the public as diverse,
plural, and active, rather than as a relatively homogenous and rather passive mass
(2006:8). Consequently there is no one person or group that can speak for a community.
There is no such thing as ‘the community’ because community members often have many
different perspectives, beliefs, and needs. Diversity is community.

**Neighborhood & Community Museums**

The past two decades have seen significant changes in the field of museology,
perhaps none as significant as the development of ecomuseums and community based
museums (Simpson 1996). The ecomuseum concept developed in France during the late
1960s and early 1970s and, as Peter Davis explains, emerged in two very different forms
(2011:68). First, known as the discovery ecomuseum, this version was based on
ecological principles and closely allied to the nature reserve movement in France.
Second, as the ecomuseum concept spread to other countries during the 1970s and 1980s,
another version formed. This variety referred to ecomuseums as either a community
museum or a development museum, which was geared more closely to the needs of
communities. The later seems to be most often used when American scholars reference
an ecomuseum, as illustrated below.

An ecomuseum, as explained by Nancy Fuller of the Smithsonian Institution
Center for Education and Museum Studies, is an agent for managing change that links
education, culture, and power (1992:328). It is a place that enables communities to learn
about themselves and their needs, and to act upon that knowledge. This notion extends
the mission of a museum to include responsibility for human dignity. The ecomuseum
concept establishes a role for the museum as a mediator in the process of cultural
transition (Fuller 1992). These types of museums are community learning centers that
link the past with the present as a strategy to deal with the future needs of a particular society.

The ecomuseum is a tool for economic, social, and political growth and development of the society from which the museum springs. It is a type of museum that focuses on place and looks beyond the walls of the museum to nurture cultural, natural, and built heritage as interlinked and interdependent (Crooke 2007:17). An ecomuseum is not confined to a single building and its collections are viewed from much broader perspectives (Fuller 1992:330). The collections can consist of audiovisual materials, paper documentation, physical sites, traditional ceremonies, oral histories, and social relationships. To promote the goal of autonomy, ecomuseums focus on programming in which individuals learn the skills necessary to work successfully in daily life, rather than on the creation of an end product. Projects are tailored to community specific needs.

Due to the second wave of ecomuseums, a focus on community grew popular in museums. The development of the ecomuseum has enabled members of communities to become much more actively involved in the process of making representations and turned the focus upon those who in the past, were so often neglected by collectors and curators of social history (Simpson 1996:71). Central to the ecomuseum is the participation of members of the community. Arising from a similar desire to create museums, which better serve their communities in which they are situated, as seen in ecomuseums, the neighborhood museum was developed in the United States during the 1970s (Simpson 1996:72). The earliest examples were often affiliated with mainstream museums, which intended to serve a broader, less specific audience. Neighborhood, ethnic-specific, or
culture-specific museums, however, were established to serve very specific communities in the museum locality, primarily urban areas.

As explained by Moira G. Simpson the term ‘community-focused’ seems to address accurately and appropriately the mandate of several mainstream museums that have become increasingly more community-focused (1996:80). In recognition of these changes, for the sake of clarity, Simpson utilizes the term ‘neighborhood museum’ to refer to those museums which developed as outposts of mainstream American institutions in the 1970s, and ‘community museum’ to include museums established by immigrant populations and their descendants, as well as those established by indigenous people in North America, Australia, and New Zealand. This thesis will adopt Simpson’s definitions of the two terms for clarity purposes as well.

In the following, I present examples of neighborhood and community museums that incorporated collaborative and engaging methods into their museum practices. These examples are important to my thesis because they show that although the populations being represented in my case studies are often seen as atypical, the methods used to represent them were not necessarily uncommon. For example, the Anacostia Community Museum in the Anacostia neighborhood of Washington, D.C., which predominately consists of African American citizens, can be seen as a museum that since its inception embraced community participation and collaboration. According to Portia James, this museum:

has received a good deal of attention from museum professionals and its public audience - as a museum producing African American exhibitions and educational materials for a national audience; and currently as a museum seeking to build networks of similar institutions offering models of community-based research and exhibition development. [2005:339]
Before I go into greater detail on the Anacostia Community Museum, I think it is important to first summarize African American history and the development of African American museums. In the late 1960s, the history of African Americans was simply absent, whether out of willful action on the part of some or benign neglect on the part of others (Ruffins 1992:506). In *Museums and Communities* Ivan Karp uses the work of James Baldwin, African American essayist and playwright, and Edmund Barry Gaither, director and curator of the Museum of the National Center for Afro-American Artists, to describe this absence with regards to museums (1992). Karp explains:

James Baldwin elegantly describes how African Americans have subjectively experienced the public denial of their identity which Edmund Barry Gaither calls “silences”, in way that illuminates the suspicion many African Americans and other minority peoples feel toward museums. [1992:23]

Karp goes on to say that the silences do more than simply deny African American existence. A hierarchy of cultures is erected in which those worth examining are separated from those that deserve to be ignored (Karp 1992:24). Large, historically important museums now have to face the consequences of their history of silence, Karp stresses.

Since the 1960s there has been a revolution in the study of African life, history, and culture. Over the last twenty years, scholars in a variety of disciplines have enlarged and in some cases radically changed our view of the American social landscape and the fundamental role of African Americans within it. According to Fath Davis Ruffins, curator of Home and Community Life at the National Museum of American History, “African Americans were once thought only to be reactive victims of the American experiment; we now know them to have been catalysts for change since the republic’s
earliest days” (1992:506). African American communities are often no longer content to remain passive recipients of museum activities (Karp 1992). At the very least, they demand to be included in the celebration of cultural achievement. African American people, whose numbers exceed thirty million, have become a meaningful political force able to wield considerable muscle and influence in many urban areas (Gaither 1992:56).

Every ethnic group has a distinctive experience and deserves celebration and analysis. African Americans have a unique history within the United States because no other ethnic group has been victimized by state constitutional amendments denying them the right to vote and to share public facilities, as were African American people in the late –nineteenth-century South (Ruffins 1992). While discrimination existed against certain religious groups and people of foreign origins, segregation laws were formally enacted in many states for the specific purpose of controlling the social and political access and economic opportunities of one ethnic group: African Americans.

The history of African American people is very different from that of other immigrant groups. As said by Simpson:

While many immigrants may have been forced to leave their homeland due to poverty, war, religious or cultural persecution and other social, economic, or cultural pressures, most chose to settle and create a new home in the United States of America, seeing it as a land of new opportunities and hope for the future. [1996:90]

In contrast, the African ancestors of the African American population were taken from their homes, transported in appalling conditions across the Atlantic and forced into slavery for white owners in the Americas. Until the 1960s, African American history and culture had been neglected within the education system and museums (Simpson 1996).
The cultural needs of African American communities were not being met by primarily white, mainstream cultural institutions.

Black Americans have developed various narrative versions of their past (Ruffins 1992). These narratives can be called interior, since they were created by African Americans about their own experience. Ruffins explains that “At the same time, there are versions of the African American past that have been developed within political, educational, religious, and media circles that communicate “American” mass cultural narratives about the African American past” (1992:512). Although these narratives may not be wholly negative, they do include racial stereotypes and these interpretations can be referred to as exterior, in the sense that they are produced by people who are not African Americans. Edmund Barry Gaither affirms that the rise in African Americans, as well as Hispanics, in the United States population will inevitably give way to a more pluralistic view of who is American (1992:56-57). Gaither emphasizes that America must assert its inclusiveness and embrace the reality that folk can be simultaneously African American and American.

The earliest black museums were established on university campuses and were intended to provide students with information concerning natural history and other cultures of the world (Simpson 1996:90-91). The political fervor of the Civil Rights Movement gave a new resolve to black Americans to take control over their lives and counteract the alienation that they experienced in relation to mainstream educational and cultural institutions. Because most African American museums were established after 1960, these institutions are still at the outset of their development and are therefore freer to evolve new or different forms (Gaither 1992:60). Unlike general museums, museums
that commit themselves to fostering a specific ethnic group treat their cultural heritage

neither as a short-term focus nor as an aspect of a larger story. Gaither explains:

Free from historical association with discrimination and prejudice, these museums
are able to provide a forum for the discussion of cultural issues and for the
development of criticism without becoming bogged down in racism, which often
attends European American museums’ engagement of controversial issues.
[1992:60]

The close relationship between African American museums and their communities
permits the museums to validate the communities’ experiences. For this reason, Gaither
clarifies, the museums programs often have a familiarity and a truthfulness that cause the
communities to feel a strong bond of kinship with the institutions.

In terms of collecting material culture, Moira G. Simpson clarifies:

The situation of collecting early historical material for museums is particularly
acute for black communities who, as a result of slave history, have virtually no
material relating to their African origins and little personal material of a historical
nature other than paper and photographs documenting the arrival and life of the
salves in the North American continent. [Simpson 1996:82]

These collections reflect both the limits of personal possessions which slaves were able to
own and, in the past, the general lack of interest in preserving the history and material
culture of slaves. Simpson explains that, as a consequence of these factors, many of the
museums established by immigrant communities are historical in focus and dominated by
artifacts which demonstrate movable cultural property: knowledge and skills.

Now, there are over 100 African American museums in the United States,
including the National Museum of African American History and Culture, which was
1965, scholars in various fields have debated and worked to determine the precise
elements of African American life, history, and culture (Ruffins 1992). In musicology,
archaeology, folklore, anthropology, literature, history, and other disciples, extraordinary volumes have been published documenting the rich cultural life, complex political and social traditions, and convoluted history of African Americans.

As said by Ruffins, the preservation of African American history, including material culture, has been uneven, regardless to this explosion of scholarly interest (1992:508). He clarifies that although the history and culture of African Americas are deeply embedded in American life, the sense that this has been lost or stolen or has strayed remains strong, especially with the general public, to whom this new scholarship has not penetrated. This sense of loss, he says, is particularly sharp among the staffs and supporters of African American museums, who may be more aware of what might have been saved from earlier times. This difference between interior and exterior views makes manifest the biculturality of African Americans. W.E.B. Du Bois, an African American scholar and activist, noted the notion that African Americans live in not one but two American cultures (1903). Ruffins further explains that this sense of duality is an important modality to consider when looking at extant collections of African American life, history, and culture (1992:512).

While the history of African American preservation efforts is quite long (starting as far back as 1820 with interior views of African American history), and while there are important collections of nineteenth-century origin in both large and small institutions, there is still a strong mandate to preserve twentieth-century African American culture (Ruffins 1992). Ruffins suggests that, in the twentieth-century, a greater collection of oral and musical culture, art, and artifacts should be built so that future generations of scholars can use them to understand their own era (1992:592). Knowing how uneven the
collection of African American history has been, Ruffins urges accountability for what African Americans do today. He hopes that the lives, history, and culture of African Americans of today’s era will be richly documented, while our collections of the past will still be reflective of our generation’s notions of the African American past.

Two examples of topics within African American history that have an insufficient history and material culture are public housing and gang membership. According to the Chicago Housing Authority Quarterly Report, 4\textsuperscript{th} Quarter of 2014, the majority of current heads of households in both public housing and the Housing Choice Voucher Programs are mostly African American, but the number of White and Hispanic heads of households in public housing has increased since 2000 (2014:21). 47,765 heads of household are African American, while Hispanics are 5,525, White, non-Hispanic are 2,984, Asian are 1,224, and Other are 144 (2014:21).

The National Gang Center reported that from 1996-2011, there were a greater percentage of both Hispanic/Latino and African American gangs, as reported by law enforcement agencies (2015:5). In 2011, larger cities had 39 percent African American gang members and 45.5 percent Hispanic/Latino. White members were 9.7 percent and Other was 5.8 percent. To exemplify how little demographic information is available on gangs, I was not able to find credible sources for Chicago gang demographics specifically and I could not find any percentages after 2011. Overall, this thesis hopes to contribute to the study of African American history of the twentieth and twenty-first century by presenting information on the lives of public housing residents and gangs, especially the Conservative Vice Lords.
In addition, this thesis is important because it records examples of museums that relate to African American history and culture. An exceptional example of an African American museum that was there to preserve and serve the surrounding community is the Anacostia Community Museum. Founded in 1967, this museum is one out of nineteen museums of the Smithsonian and was the first federally funded African American museum in the United States (Bass 2006; Ruffins 1992). This museum is an example of a neighborhood museum as defined by Moira G. Simpson.

The museum was intended to bring aspects of the Smithsonian museums, located on the National Mall, to the Anacostia neighborhood, with the hope that community members from the neighborhood would visit the main Smithsonian museums. It was an outreach effort to bring more African Americans to the National Mall. By creating an outpost to the Smithsonian that was more community oriented, the Smithsonian hoped to become more integrated with the society around it. As Nancy Fuller argues, “it is better to change the museum into an institution that serves the needs of the public, rather than try to change public perceptions of what museums are about” (1992:329). The Smithsonian wanted to be an institution in the service of society and its development.

Soon after its establishment, the museum was highlighted as a potential model for neighborhood access and involvement, and the principles behind it fed into the discourse of ‘new museology’ that focus on the democratization of museum action (James 2005:339). The museum developed along its own independent lines, quite different from many official museums at the time (James 2005; Crooke 2007). Its focus on programming rather than collecting served to set it apart from the Smithsonian mainstream (Ruffins 1992). In its first ten years, the museum sponsored a remarkable
series of exhibitions and educational programs, premiering a new or borrowed exhibition nearly every month.

When John Kinard became director of the Anacostia Museum he brought with him a deep love for African American people, a profound understanding of African American communities, and a sense that an African American museum ought to be the product of a dialogue with its immediate neighbors (Gaither 1992:60). Kinard did not first look to the museum field for guidance and sanction of his subject matter, but instead he talked to people in the community and discovered their concerns and issues. He framed an informed and constructive response to their reality and thereby helped teach them to see and understand their own positionality more clearly.

The exhibitions at the Anacostia Community Museum have served as a forum for dialogue about the museum itself and its particular way of seeing the world (James 2005). Following the inaugural exhibit, which was an eclectic mix of art and artifacts from the Smithsonian, local residents and the museum advisory board members expressed a desire to have a museum that was relevant to Anacostia’s experiences and history (Smithsonian Institution 2014). This sparked a slate of exhibits and public programs that focused on African American history, community issues, local history, and the arts that were developed. The original exhibit, which has remained untitled, included a small space capsule, an art section, a small petting zoo, a section of touchable objects, and a dance and performance area (Ruffins 1992). The collection of objects reflected a central Smithsonian view: The purpose of the Anacostia Museum was to serve as a neighborhood outpost of the Smithsonian Institution.
The Anacostia Community Museum involved local community activists and leaders in an informal advisory board in order to help obtain input on exhibits and activities. Advisory boards typically consist of individuals invited to take part in discussions with museum staff to advise about the content of exhibits, to approve plans, to read and comment on texts, and so on (Simpson 1996:54). The committees can consist of staff, academics, cultural representatives, or community members in general. These boards are usually a two-way dialogue requiring negotiation, compromise, and trust. The extent of the board’s authority varies greatly from museum to museum but, while committees have an important role to play, curatorial staff normally retain overall responsibility for the exhibit content. At the Anacostia Community Museum, their board was populated by local groups and management structures (Crooke 2007:10). They were kept simple, initially having no curatorial or research personnel and no departments present. Most importantly, the informal advisory committees consisted of every agency and organization in the neighborhood, offering a good cross-section of the Anacostia neighborhood (James 2005). About 35-50 people usually attended a given meeting.

The Anacostia Community Museum’s first independently produced exhibition opened November 22 1967 (Ruffins 1992). Entitled Doodles in Dimensions this exhibit was a set of sculptures produced by a local African American designer Ralph Tate. The Anacostia staff produced exhibits such as Out of Africa (1979) and the Anna J. Cooper exhibition (1981) both of which reflected the ways in which African American history was beginning to appear in national, publicly supported institutions (Ruffins 1992). Out of Africa presented the diasporic view of African Americans and the slavery experience. Anna J. Cooper’s exhibit, A Voice from the South, uncovered the life of an African
American educator and clubwoman of national significance who had lived and worked in Washington.

One of the Anacostia Community Museum’s most well-known exhibitions was *Rats: Man’s Invited Affliction* (1969-1970). To draw awareness to urban problems, this exhibit traveled to other cities and was even the subject of a television show (Alexander and Alexander 2008). This exhibit made clear the life cycle of the rat. It illustrated its evil role as destroyer of food, disease carrier, and attacker of small children. The exhibit preached control of these pests through community action for cleanliness, proper food storage, and building construction (Alexander and Alexander 2008:287). The centerpiece of the exhibit was a large cage in which rats prowled threw discarded junk and garbage equipped with holes where a visitor could view a rat eye-to-eye.

This exhibit brought new meaning and relevance to exhibitions (Gaither 1992). What is typically considered a tragedy in urban neighborhoods for impoverished urban dwellers was made a subject for examination in the museum. The museum, through exhibits like *Rats*, was able to provide community members with an experience that enabled them to talk about their lives and to take greater responsibility for the reconstruction of their neighborhoods, community, and families. This exhibit highlighted a problem which was very relevant to the people in the neighborhood, and provided information concerning action necessary to deal with the problem (Simpson 1996:93). Because of this exhibit, it was decided that future exhibits should continue to deal with contemporary issues of relevance to the residents of Anacostia whether social, political, and economic issues or cultural and historical.
The work at the Anacostia Community Museum established the museum as a model for neighborhood museums and has been a principal force in the African American museum movement. It believes that active citizen participation in the documentation and use of cultural and historic assets is a powerful instrument in creating and maintaining a sense of community and civic involvement (Smithsonian Institution 2014). The Anacostia Community Museum staff pioneered new ways of involving the community and developed unusual programs for children, teenagers, and adults (Ruffins 1992). For example, Zora Martin Felton, head of the Education Department, worked actively with groups of neighborhood teenagers involving them in nearly every aspect of the museum. The teenagers helped to prepare exhibitions, developed programs, served as docents, and planned trips to countries such as Senegal (Ruffins 1992). Over the years, some of these young people became adult museum volunteers and others went on to college major and professional careers that were spurred by their work at the Anacostia Museum.

Like the example above, the District Six Museum was created for the benefit of the community. The District Six Museum in Cape Town, South Africa opened in December of 1994 and intervenes with the cultural and political work of reconstructing community. The District Six Foundation was founded in 1989 as a memorial to the forced movement of 60,000 inhabitants of various races in District Six during Apartheid in South Africa during the 1970s (Rassool 2006). This museum can be seen as an example of a community museum that was created to rebuild a sense of community in an area that was torn apart by forced relocation of its residents. It was created in order to share their local histories.
A strong motivational factor for community museums is often to educate the younger members of the community in the traditional knowledge, skills, beliefs, and values of the religious or cultural group, and to preserve and promote a sense of cultural identity at a personal and community level (Simpson 1996:76). The histories and experiences of the community have now been made public, and rather than remain unspoken, the community voice has become a building block to plan for the future (Crooke 2007). District Six is very much considered as an engagement with contemporary issues as well. It is a mode of expression and has an active part in the reuse of District Six.

The museum’s mission is to connect people with each other and activate the community to be a joint community (Prince Claus Fund 2014). The programs at the District Six Museum do not only deal with the past, but also engage local people in active regeneration and development, in housing and environmental planning, in music, literature and art events, and in public action. In order to create the content for the exhibitions, the ongoing contributions of former inhabitants gave this community access to modes of cultural and historical expression from which the community had previously been excluded (Rassool 2006). The District Six Museum nurtures respect for dignity, identity, continuity and co-existence of races.

Another example of a community museum is the Tenement Museum in New York. This museum worked with the immigrant community of Manhattan’s Lower East Side to preserve and interpret the personal experiences of what life was like in public housing as well as what role it played in shaping immigrant identity. It is an example of
a museum that honors public housing and could be used as a fine model for the National Public Housing Museum.

The Tenement Museum was founded in 1988 and was built at the 97 Orchard Street tenements, which was the home to nearly 7,000 working class immigrants around 1863 (Lower East Side Tenement Museum 2013). The location was discovered by Anita Jacobson and Ruth Abram, who wanted to create a museum to help people understand what happened to the immigrants after they left Ellis Island (Homberger 2005). To their surprise, they found the upper floors of these tenements left untouched, with the original furniture, crates of ginger ale, and other items left behind creating a time capsule for Jacobson and Abram (Lower East Side Tenement Museum 2004).

The Tenement Museum’s mission is to preserve and interpret the history of immigration through the personal experiences of the generations of newcomers who settled in and built lives on Manhattan’s Lower East Side (Lower East Side Tenement Museum 2013). The museum is intended to enhance appreciation for the profound role immigration has played and continues to play in shaping America’s evolving national identity. It promotes tolerance and historical perspective through the presentation and interpretation of the variety of urban immigrant and migrant experiences (Kugelmass 2000). Through guided tours that recreate the tenements, the museum helps visitors explore what life was like for immigrants and how the neighborhoods changed because of immigration. This museum is a living reminder of how complex the lives of immigrant residents often were at this time.

Museum Founder and President Ruth J. Abram developed the Museum with an eye toward nurturing a greater appreciation of groups often ethnically, economically, and
religiously divided (The Lower East Side Tenement Museum 2004:9-12). She viewed the tenement as the ideal place in which to encourage discussions of issues key to our democracy and national identity. The Museum is devoted to bringing together people with divergent views. It is a response to those who argue that strong ethnic and religious identities interfere with assimilation and must be abandoned. Abram hopes to motivate visitors to consider what programs, policies, customs, and attitudes that persist as obstacles to such families today.

On November 17, 1988 the Museum opened with an exhibition of Depression-era tenement photographs by Arnold Eagle (Lower East Side Tenement Museum 2004:14). Over the next five years, the Museum featured an exhibit on the tragic 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, in which 146 garment workers died, and held African American and Chinese heritage walking tours. Meanwhile, research began on the former residents, owners, and shopkeepers of 97 Orchard Street (Lower East Side Tenement Museum 2004). Researchers were able to identify names of some of those who had lived in the 97 Orchard Street building and were able to conduct recorded interviews and collect donated personal memorabilia for the museum. Census material, court and voter records, and countless other documents also shed light on the families, while a public search turned up former residents and descendants who supplied the museum with additional details.

“Hard Time Stories and Morning Glories” premiered in 1994 and showcased the newly restored apartments. For the first time, an American house museum was honoring the struggles, strategies, and triumphs of our urban, working-class immigrant forebears (Lower East Side Tenement Museum 2004:17). “Piecing It Together: Immigrants in the Garment Industry” was an exhibit that hoped to start a conversation on how to work
together to combat sweatshop phenomenon. In terms of programs, the Museum held English language classes and also partnered with *The New York Times* to create “The New York Times Guide for Immigrants to New York City” (Lower East Side Tenement Museum 2004). This guide was available in Spanish, Chinese, and English and answered the most frequently asked questions of immigrants. Additionally, it provided referrals to immigrant service organizations. Furthermore, the Museum organized the International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, including the District Six Museum and the Gulag Museum, to help inspire visitors to become actively engaged in issues from slavery to poverty.

The museum currently holds events like Tenement Talks which is an evening series of lectures, readings, panel discussions, films and other programs at the museum that provide historical and contemporary perspectives on New York City’s rich culture (Lower East Side Tenement Museum 2015). Topics of discussion include race, fashion, immigration, and personal histories and memories. Exhibits discuss the challenges of making a new life, working for a better future, and starting a family with limited means. Today’s immigrants, like their predecessors, are challenging the Museum to provide new answers to old questions (Lower East Side Tenement Museum 2004:52). The Museum questions: Who is American? What does it mean to be a citizen? What is our responsibility to those in need? What should “home” look like?

These examples show how communities are using and working with museums to have a say in what and how people, places, and objects are presented. Museum leaders need to look for common ground with the communities they serve and cement lasting relationships. Furthermore, working with the community strengthens a museum’s efforts
and makes them appear more transparent. Museums benefit from the cooperative planning, shared costs, and publicity that working together generates (Klobe 2012). By working together, leverage, visibility, and impact can be attained by the communities through the exhibitions at the museum. The demand for public accountability, including involving their communities in more direct collaboration, has increased in museums in the light of global expectations for a greater degree of public participation and deliberation in civil society (Lynch 2011b:441). The partnerships between museums and communities can build public confidence in an institution and often bring increased corporate and government funding for cultural institutions.

These new practices have helped reshape the role of the museum and the public’s understanding and appreciation of local history as a crucial community resource. These practices stand in contrast to the ones used in the Into the Heart of Africa exhibit, and show how museums have implemented approaches that try to be more inclusive. Opening museums to the community can create the support of lifelong learning and structured education provisions (Black 2005). It can enhance access, diversify audiences and reflect the make-up of a museum’s community, and support regeneration initiatives.

Although consultation and collaborative methods are common in museums today, as expressed above, there can still be several unforeseen challenges to these methods, as I will explain further in my analysis. Issues can arise, for example, because of the inherent diversity among individual community members. In such meetings it becomes apparent that distinctions and anxieties around conventional markers of identity, i.e. class, education, cultural capital, disability, and accent can influence the individuals level of comfort or involvement with the museum staff (Mason, Whitehead, and Graham
2013:171). In addition, staff can witness “threshold anxiety” from visitors that do not normally come to the museum (Mason, Whitehead, and Graham 2013:171). In the end, the common referent of place and a shared interest seem to make these differences less of a challenge, but this may not always be the case.

According to Moira G. Simpson, despite museums becoming more community oriented, not all curatorial staff are convinced of the value of such interaction. According to Simpson, “Some curators wish to avoid the difficulty of dealing with the divergent views found within any community, while others simply prefer to retain control of the project, so maintaining the traditional role of curator” (1996:68). In addition, curators often express concern about community collaboration in the exhibition development process due to the nostalgia that people tend to experience when thinking of the past and the lifestyle that they or their ancestors left behind. Members of a community will often wish to show only the positive aspects of their culture (Simpson 1996). They also may present a romanticized vision of the past.

Bernadette T. Lynch further explains the great deal of frustration and tension for museum staff members when discussing collaboration (2011a). She explains that “In such ‘collaborative’ situations between museums and community partners, decisions frequently tend to be rushed through on the basis of the institution’s agenda or strategic plan, thereby manipulating the illusion of consensus” (Lynch 2011a:146). Consequently, there has been a growing discomfort and dissonance about the perceived benefits of ‘participation’ in a number of cases. With this, it becomes clear why some museums often choose to not include community in hopes to maintain control and professionalism. In order to learn from these challenges, Lynch urges museums workers to consider and
recognize their positions when working with community collaborators in order to prevent superficial interactions (2011a).

Furthermore, it may be important to note that when researching examples of good neighborhood and community museums, like the examples above, writers tend to also focus primarily on the positive experiences and outcomes of involving the community. This thesis, however, focuses on the positive, but also focuses on the difficulties encountered when working with communities. Several examples of the difficulties faced by museums will be presented in my analysis chapter through interviews conducted with my case studies staff.

**Social Justice Museums**

The following is a brief definition of a social justice museum. In my analysis, I use my case studies to further explain these concepts. In terms of my case studies, creating socially relevant exhibits is important and necessary if these museums are concerned with taking on a social justice responsibility, as I will further discuss in this thesis.

According to Elizabeth Crooke, the idea of community as a form of social action has grown over the past decades in museums (2007). When considering community as social action, museums often encounter communities of resistance, often in the form of protest and as underpinning the formation of a democracy (Crooke 2007:28). Community groups have used heritage and museum activity as a vehicle for protest and as integral to their social and political campaigns, often by re-defining their culture or history. These are the same principles that underpin the debates in museum studies concerning social responsibilities, diversity, social justice, human rights, and democracy.
to move to the core of museum thinking and practice (Sandell 2002:1-2). By creating more socially relevant museums that empower communities through action, social justice museums can do more than create only institutional changes. This provides the opportunity for museums to be agents of progressive social change outside the core of the museum.

Heritage has been linked to campaigns for change that have focused on education, home, and housing, as well as issues of human rights, social justice, and equality (Crooke 2007:37). The underpinning methodology used to achieve these aims centers on the concept of empowerment. Empowerment is key in making affective social justice museums. Elizabeth Crooke explains that the empowerment agenda suggests a particular approach to social and political relations, one that shapes the nature of negotiation, participation, and control between groups (2007:37). To be empowered suggests that people have power to act and shape their own circumstances, whether that is living conditions, public services, or cultural representations. Crooke points out that empowerment is not the sole occurrence that can help a community achieve change (2007:38). The community needs the many resources necessary to do this. They cannot be empowered if no one is listening. For the communities involved with museums, the museum should be the first step in feeling empowered. The museum should listen and act as a stepping stone for these communities to be heard by a greater audience.

In this thesis, I consider both the NPHM and the Report to the Public exhibit as social justice spaces, or at least in the case of the NPHM, a potential social justice space. Although the NPHM is not open yet, the ideas and possible topics of interest for this museum can and should, in my opinion, address difficult, often provocative, and moral
stories of public housing. Additionally, the *Report to the Public* exhibit has demonstrated that this space was a place to inspire social activism and told an often avoided story of Chicago history. There is no doubt that these spaces heavily rely on the communities with which they consult and collaborate with, but because of their mission to tell a story left largely unheard for the purposes of empowerment and change, I consider them social justice spaces.

It is not just the heritage or story that is being told within the museum that is relevant or important for empowerment in social justice museums (Crooke 2007:39). It is how and why a museum is being used to communicate that message. This is a contemporary as well as a historical phenomenon and museum studies professionals need to ask themselves how they should respond to this, Crooke asserts. She suggests that active critique can be one possibility. This is important to my thesis, because after interviewing museum professionals at the NPHM and Hull-House as well as analyzing several published documents pertaining to the exhibits they do, I offer recommendations as well as critique.

**Better Museum Practices in Chicago**

Since my case studies for this thesis are located in Chicago, I will briefly discuss examples of other museums in Chicago that have also adopted better museum practice, programs, and goals to their mission, as explained above. Both the Chicago Historical Society and the Chicago Botanic Gardens, for example, collaborate and engage community members through exhibitions and programming. The following will show that, although the populations my case studies work with are unique, the methods for which they collaborated and engaged their communities were not.
In keeping with reflexive practice and new museology approaches, the Chicago Historical Society applied consultation and collaborative methods to their institution. This museum is an example of a mainstream museum and heritage organization that adopted these frameworks and practices to try to empower citizens and give them greater control over how their identities are constructed, defined, and presented. The Society solicited and included input from residents of the city’s diverse communities and, like many other cultural and educational institutions around the late 1980s, embarked upon a journey of self-reflection to craft a new mission that responds to the needs of a changing American society (Lewis 1994). In 1989, it adopted a new mission to interpret and present the history of Chicago to the city’s diverse public groups and respond to their identified needs. This museum embraced the challenge of telling a more inclusive history of Chicago that would encompass the city’s diverse urban population.

Through collaborations with scholars, community and neighborhood leaders, and everyday citizens, the Society took important steps towards meeting its goals. Additionally, the Society engaged a group of nationally prominent academic historians to redefine its collecting scope, to develop an exhibition program, and to interpret Chicago’s and the nation’s histories (Lewis 1994).

In response to the newly defined mission, the Society inaugurated the biennial exhibition series, Prologue for the New Century, to examine aspects of the city’s history during the last 100 years and asks visitors to consider ramifications of that history for the 21st century (Lewis 1994). The first exhibition in the series, A City Comes of Age: Chicago in the 1890s, opened in 1990. The central question the staff faced was: Whose history do we tell? At the time, historical scholarship on class, race, gender, and ethnicity
offered some answers and allowed the exhibition staff to interpret 1890s Chicago more broadly than before. One issue they faced was that most of the Society’s collection related to elite, white businessmen (Lewis 1994). The collection did not reflect the breadth and diversity of Chicago’s 1890s citizenry and its alternative visions of the city. To overcome this problem, they looked outside the institution to neighborhoods and communities for help. The greatest help came from forging relationships with a group of individuals who had taken personal responsibility for preserving their community or neighborhood’s history. These “keepers of culture,” frequently but not always associated with a school, church, or activity center, shared their historical knowledge and provided important artifacts to tell a broader history of 1890s Chicago (Lewis 1994).

From this experience, the staff learned two valuable lessons. First, the Society’s collections did not document a broadly defined history of the city (Lewis 1994). Second, communities often had their own collections of historical artifacts and other resources and were eager to work with the Society. The response from communities was overwhelming and what made this even more special was that with every object came a personal story, not just one from a curator. These narratives were astonishingly vivid and rich in perspectives and details that were not found in previous written accounts of history of the period (Lewis 1994). These memories again raised a fundamental question to the staff: What role do these memories play in the exhibition? They chose to rely on the collected memories from community members and to incorporate them into the exhibit. To do this, they used a seven-station video installation. These videos incorporated stories from African American and Japanese American communities. The end of the exhibit also included memory cards for visitors to share even more memories.
and experiences with the Society. Overall, this exhibit helped museum staff understand the value of everyday citizens’ memories as historical perspectives and to recognize their power as bridges from the past to the present and the future (Lewis 1994). Now the staff at the Society was deciding who tells the story instead of whose story is told.

Since the biennial exhibition series was so successful for the staff and the communities involved, the Society was asked to develop a project that dealt directly with issues of pluralism and accessibility of cultural resources for nontraditional audiences (Lewis 1994). The Society saw this as an opportunity to build on their recent exhibition experiences and further its mission. They wanted to move staff into the diverse neighborhoods that constitute Chicago in order to expand on their collections and further integrate public memory. The next exhibition *Neighborhoods: Keepers of Culture* (December 10, 1995 to August 4, 1996) linked the society with residents of Chicago’s West Rogers Park, Near West Side, Lower West Side, and Douglas Grand Boulevard (Lewis 1994; Zumba 1999).

The four main goals of this project were to establish rapport with Chicago neighborhoods including the social, economic, and political factors that had influenced their development to the present; second, to provide neighborhood residents with the “tools of the historian” by training them to collect, document, and interpret their own histories; third, to stimulate cross-cultural dialogue among different neighborhoods about their histories with special emphasis on social change in the past and the present; and fourth, to develop long-standing relationships with neighborhoods as an avenue for enhancing and broadening future exhibitions, public, and educational programs, and
collecting efforts (Lewis 1994). The goals for this exhibit provided a model for the new direction museums can take.

Another example of a Chicago museum that is engaging its communities, including communities with high rates of gang activity, and offering the skills needed to reach a common goal is the Chicago Botanic Gardens. The Botanic Gardens started the Windy City Harvest program in 2008, which is a hands on, nine-month certificate training program in sustainable urban horticulture and agriculture. Run through the Richard J. Daley College and funded by the United States Department of Agriculture, this project seeks to rejuvenate food deserts on the city’s West and South Sides by teaching students about sustainable urban agriculture. Students can take additional 14-week evening courses (e.g., Local Foods Business and Entrepreneurship) and are also eligible to become incubator farmers, also known as beginner farmers, for up to two years at Windy City Harvest’s Legends Farm (Chicago Botanic Gardens 2014). The program often attracts a diverse group of students: career changers, young adults with a history of incarceration, and those with significant barriers to employment.

One student that was particularly influenced by this museum program is Darius Jones (Bentley 2013). Jones grew up selling drugs in West Garfield Park and, after spending more than a year in a maximum-security facility; he was ready to trade in the gang life to become a gardener. Jones explains that, even though he found work after getting out of prison, the workday was only eight hours. This often left him with plenty of time to fall back into his old crowd, making him feel pressured to return to gang life. Jones felt that his situation kept him from being able to change. Signing up for the Windy City Harvest program opened his eyes to a different way of life. Through the
program, Jones interned as a manager for the Pilsen farmers market and is now the sales coordinator (Bentley 2013:2). Through the knowledge and experience Jones received from the Chicago Botanic Gardens program, he was also able to launch Urban Aggies, an incubator for urban agriculture enterprises. He hopes to sell his produce to Inspiration Cafe, a neighborhood restaurant that employs formerly incarcerated individuals and serves people struggling with homelessness and poverty. As Jones explains, the far West Side of Chicago is still facing problems with gang violence and poverty, but he is thankful for the support and knowledge he has received (Bentley 2013:3). Several new farmers markets have begun in Jones’ neighborhood, which is a trend he would be proud to help continue.

**History of Chicago Public Housing**

To better understand the populations with which my case studies worked with, I will summarize their history. It is important to discuss their formation as groups and their adaptations over time. Both public housing residents and gang members have felt and continue to feel marginalized in cities like Chicago. Because of this, they are in need of social justice museums to help them tell their story. Their stories are not typically heard and deserve to be, which is why I chose to include their history in this thesis. As the NPHM and the *Report to the Public* exhibit strive to dispel misconceptions associated with public housing and gangs, this thesis also tries to tell a more accurate story and history of these groups.

Problems in public housing often flood the nightly news: rampant gang drug dealing, turf wars, and gun violence (Petty 2013). Public housing residents are often portrayed as lazy, drug addicts and gang affiliates. This negativity continues to reinforce
dramatic stereotypes about public housing and the behavior of the tenants. At one time, however, these were rich, vital neighborhoods. Public housing was a lively, spirited place, whose residents, at least many of them, could imagine living nowhere else (Petty 2013:12). All of this eventually changed and violence frayed the sense of community for many residents.

Shootings came to define public housing and the residents of these homes are often represented, by the media and in popular American culture, as an excessively violent social problem. The media, Petty suggests, perhaps contributed more to the razing of the high rises than their sub-standard maintenance (Petty 2013:12). These portrayals often represent public housing and its residents with a total disregard of the reality of these homes. Public housing was established to provide decent and safe rental housing for eligible low-income families, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. It was intended to remove dank, crowded housing neighborhoods and to provide better options for families in hopes of solving housing problems in cities. This section will look specifically at the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) initiatives for public housing and will describe the history of CHA, including demographic shifts and racial tensions, and the downfall of CHA buildings.

In order to understand the formation of CHA and its intentions, understanding Chicago’s historical demographic shifts and racial tensions can be important. Chicago has the third largest urban African American population in the nation, which was the result of the huge influx of African Americans during both Great Migrations north (Black Demographics 2013). The first Great Migration (1910–1930), consisted of about 1.6 million migrants who left mostly rural areas to migrate to northern industrial cities (Frey
After a lull during the Great Depression, a second Great Migration (1940 to 1970) occurred in which 5 million or more people moved from the South. The largest percent of people came from Mississippi, but many also came from other south central states such as Louisiana, Arkansas, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Texas. Most migrants were attracted to the city’s railway companies, steel mills, and meatpacking houses. As a result of the first Great Migration, Chicago’s “Black Belt” took shape at the turn of the twentieth century (Petty 2013:18).

The growing population of African Americans was relegated to zones that did not expand to accommodate newcomers and this space was referred to as the Black Belt (Petty 2013:18). Black Chicagoans were hemmed in principally in areas on the South Side and secondarily on the West Side. Although there were adequate homes in these sections, such as in the southernmost section, the core of the Black Belt was a slum. Along with the high rates of overcrowding, many of these people were living in poverty. These tenements were often dilapidated and rat-infested. They often did not have plumbing and had one bathroom per floor. Building inspections and garbage collection were typically below the minimum mandatory requirements for healthy sanitation. This increased the threat of disease. From 1940-1960, the infant mortality rate in the Black Belt was 16 percent higher than the rest of the city (Hirsch 1998:18). The Black Belt was also a low priority for the police and rates of violence and crime were high.

Along with the racially restrictive covenants forcing African Americans into the Black Belt, there were also ethnic tensions between different immigrant groups and African Americans. Thousands of African Americans that came to Chicago’s South Side had settled in neighborhoods made up of European immigrants, which were near jobs in
the stockyards and meatpacking plants (Hagedorn 2013). Post-World War I tensions frequently caused friction between the different ethnic groups, especially in the competitive labor and housing markets. The Irish became established in these neighborhoods first, and fiercely defended their territory and political power against all newcomers. Overcrowding and increased African American militancy could be seen as contributing to the visible racial friction (Hagedorn 2013). A combination of the formation of ethnic gangs and neglect of the Chicago police strained inter-racial relationships.

A major historical event that illustrated discrimination against African Americans was the Chicago Race Riots of 1919. Racial tensions between whites and blacks exploded in five days of violence that started on July 27, 1919 and ended August 3, 1919 (Essig 2004). That day, Eugene Williams, an African American youth, was struck on the head with a stone by a group of white men and drowned to death at a segregated Chicago beach (Hagedorn 2013). Tensions escalated when a white police officer did not arrest the white man responsible for William's death, but arrested a black man instead. The riot lasted for nearly a week, ending only after the government deployed nearly 6,000 National Guard troops (New York Times 1919). Most of the rioting, murder, and arson were the result of ethnic whites attacking the African American population in the city's Black Belt. The government stationed the troops around the Black Belt to prevent further white attacks. African Americans suffered most of the casualties and property damage. By the night of July 30, most of the violence had ended, but arson remained a problem. Newspaper accounts noted more than 30 fires started in the Black Belt before noon on July 31 (New York Times 1919). A total of 38 people died: 23 African Americans and
15 whites (Hagedorn 2013). A total of 537 were injured and two-thirds were African Americans. After this, many African Americans moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin because of the danger.

After 1919, racial discrimination and tension did not subside. In 1927, the Chicago Real Estate Board drafted a standard restrictive housing covenant to ban African Americans from renting or purchasing housing. Approximately 85 percent of Chicago property fell under covenant restrictions, which limited African Americans to a handful of neighborhoods and made already overcrowded and unsanitary slums worse (Petty 2013:212). On October 29, 1929, the stock market crashed and the Great Depression began. The consequences of massive unemployment and homelessness spurred Federal and municipal agencies to innovate new forms of public housing and other forms of economic assistance (Petty 2013). In 1934, intellectual and housing activist Catherine Bauer published *Modern Housing*, a call to replace urban slums with planned housing modeled after European urban reconstruction following World War I (Petty 2013). Bauer’s writing shaped plans for public housing for decades following. In the same year, Congress passed the National Housing Act in response to widespread foreclosures and evictions at the height of the Great Depression. The National Housing Act launched the Federal Housing Administration and put programs in place to make housing more affordable.

A few years later, Congress passed the Housing Act of 1937, also known as the Wagner-Steagall Act (Petty 2013). The law granted funds to municipal housing agencies to provide housing assistance to low-income citizens. Out of this act, the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) was founded and Elizabeth Wood, a visionary housing
advocate and friend of Catherine Bauer, became the first director. Three projects opened in 1938: Jane Addams Houses located on the Near West Side for 1,027 families, Julia C. Lathrop Homes on the North Side for 925 families, and Trumbull Park Homes on the far South Side for 426 families (Choldin 2005). All three of these developments were for white citizens and were two story brick row houses or three and four story apartment buildings. These buildings were not like the high rises we see later in public housing design. From 1939 until 1945, World War II occurred and the expansion of industry during the war induced many southern African Americans to move to Chicago (Petty 2013). During the war, the CHA was redirected to build housing for workers in the war industry and returning veterans. This included a housing development built for African American war workers, Altgeld Gardens.

In 1941, construction was completed on the Ida B. Wells Homes, the first CHA public housing development for African Americans (Petty 2013:19). By this time, the Black Belt was dangerously overcrowded and these homes formed a highly coveted address for African Americans. The Ida B. Wells Homes consisted of a sixteen hundred-unit complex of two-, three-, and four-story brick row houses and mid and high rise apartment buildings. They were located in the Douglas neighborhood, which created a great deal of optimism. More than eighteen thousand families filed applications to live there. By 1948, the United States Supreme Court ruled against racial restrictive covenants (Crosby 1951). Many white people in Chicago and many powerful city officials resented this ruling. After World War II, whites began moving to the suburbs, and the restrictive covenants that had prohibited blacks from living in most neighborhoods were no longer holding back these individuals (McClelland 2013).
Federal Housing Act of 1949 provided additional funding for public housing and the CHA proposed housing developments to be built all over the city.

The city alderman, however, rejected many plans for public housing in their wards (Petty 2013). According to Audrey Petty, Associate professor of English at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Mayor Richard J. Daley intended to use public housing to continue segregation of the city (Petty 2013). She notes that the Dan Ryan Expressway was erected in 1962, in tandem with the construction of Robert Taylor Homes, effectively keeping white ethnic neighborhoods on one side of the fourteen-lane expressway and the new public housing on the other. To deal with the growing diversity of Chicago, Daley used public housing as a containment strategy. So, although racial discrimination was decreasing, politicians intended to keep African Americans in certain zones.

Initially, the CHA’s intention was to provide transitional housing for the working poor. CHA wanted to get these families out of the overcrowded slums and give them a fresh start and many of these families were African Americans. Along with the high demand to live in these homes came strict Federal rulemaking on the tenants (Petty 2013). Although these requirements were intended to be helpful, they created a lot of unintended consequences. For example, mothers that were on aid from the government were not allowed to have an unmarried man present in the house (Chicago Housing Authority 2013). This limited the household income because, at the time, the man was usually the breadwinner. With this, women were often struggling to pay rent, which was the money that went back into the homes for maintenance. With no money going towards maintenance of the building, they began to deteriorate. Other problematic
Federal rules contributed to a lack of resources for maintenance such as limitations put on household income for tenants. This rule restricted working families from public housing, leaving the poorest of the poor in public housing. Lastly, since city policies placed many of these developments in already deteriorating African American neighborhoods, there remained to be a disinvestment in these areas, which frequently led to further decay of the neighborhood. Because of a lack of maintenance and the deteriorating state of the neighborhood, families that could move out did. As these families left, gangs started moving in. Although the CHA claimed to have good intentions for public housing residents, the ways in which regulations were carried out made CHA intentions look ignorant to the greater situation.

Not until 1964 did Congress pass the Civil Rights Act, ending legalized segregation of schools, workplaces, and public facilities (Petty 2013:214-215). Following this act, several issues came to fruition within public housing and African Americans now had the power to speak their minds. If segregation was to end in schools, workplaces, and public facilities, why would it not end in housing? In 1966 Dorothy Gautreaux became the lead plaintiff in a lawsuit against the CHA that claimed that Chicago public housing violated the equal protection clause and the recently passed Civil Rights Act. In 1969, the Supreme Court ruled in *Gautreaux et al. v. CHA* that Chicago public housing was substandard and in violation of the equal protection clause and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The CHA was barred from building additional high-rises and from segregating public housing developments in predominately African American neighborhoods. This ruling began a decades long dismantling of Chicago’s high-rise public housing buildings. Around the same time, in 1965, Congress passed the
Department of Housing and Urban Development Act, establishing the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD was designed to reform and administer Federal housing and urban development programs (Petty 2013). In 1976, HUD was held responsible for some of the CHA’s discriminatory housing policies. With new secretaries in place, HUD improved its function in public housing.

City builders additionally had intentions that, at the time, seemed good, but in reality, could have also contributed to the downfall of many high-rises in Chicago. City planners were largely enamored with Le Corbusier’s vision of urban planning and his model for towers in the park (Petty 2013). In an effort to improve rational order on the perceived chaos of Chicago, high-rises became the iconic look for Chicago public housing as well as other major cities (Petty 2013). In reality, however, these buildings were seen as “prison-like,” sterile, lacking in human scale, and creating an unfriendly environment. Additionally, this structure often created a dangerous space for people in and around the high-rises. As the high-rises’ maintenance became neglected, broken elevators, backed-up incinerators, and pest infestation became a threat to the residents’ safety (Petty 2013). The stairwells were often frequented by vagrants and drug addicts and this created a threat to residents. Furthermore, the height of the buildings created a great look out for gang members because they could see from afar if police were coming, which created a deadly situation for innocent bystanders and the police. On July 17, 1970, two Chicago police officers, James Severin and Anthony Rizzato, were shot and killed while on patrol in the Cabrini-Green housing development by two snipers from a nearby high-rise (Petty 2013:215). This incident increased tensions between police and
high-rise residents throughout the city. From the 1970s onward, violent crime rates increased in public housing, especially in high-rises.

Along with Cabrini-Green, the Robert Taylor Homes were also notorious for having high crime rates. The Robert Taylor Homes were at one time the largest public housing development in the country (Venkatesh 2008). It stretched along a two-mile corridor and consisted of 28 high-rise buildings. It was located in Chicago’s Bronzeville neighborhood of Douglas (see Appendix B) and was a part of the city’s State Street Corridor developments. Robert Taylor Homes housed some of the poorest residents in the country. Like many other developments in Chicago, these homes were welcomed with great optimism. This optimism soon soured and African American activists became angry about the lack of maintenance and upkeep, and because the project was placed squarely in the middle of an already existing crowded ghetto (Venkatesh 2008).

Architects declared these buildings unwelcoming and practically uninhabitable from the outset, even though the design was based on the principles of the French urban-planner Le Corbusier. Law enforcement officials deemed these homes too dangerous to patrol. The police were unwilling to provide protection until tenants curbed their criminality and stopped hurling bottles or shooting guns out the windows whenever police showed up. Newspaper headlines referred to Robert Taylor as “Congo Hilton,” “Hellhole,” and “Fatherless World” (Venkatesh 2008:37). The buildings themselves began to fall apart, with at least a half dozen deaths caused by plunging elevators.

By the end of the 1980s, Robert Taylor was infamously referred to as the hub of Chicago’s gang and drug problem (Venkatesh 2008). The poorest parts of the city, like these developments, were where gangs made their money not only dealing drugs, but also
by extortion, gambling, prostitution, selling stolen property, and countless other schemes. Although politicians, academics, and law enforcement officials offered policy solutions, few gang members were willing to trade in their status and the prospect of big money for menial work. Also, these policies were not always successful and still kept Robert Taylor residents feeling desperate and reliant on gangs for needs and money that the government and politicians could not provide. This underground economy paid well for many gang members, but for the rest of the community, the payout was often drug addiction and public violence with only minimal help from gang members. Various unintended consequences came from public housing initiatives and many families were offered promises that regularly became nightmares. What happened at Robert Taylor was not unique and occurred in many other public housing developments of this time, such as, the Pruitt-Igoe Homes in St. Louis, Missouri and the Brewster-Douglass Housing Projects in Detroit, Michigan.

**Formation & History of the Conservative Vice Lords**

As previously stated, the increase in population pressures and ethnic tensions in Chicago neighborhoods often contributed to the formation of neighborhood gangs like the Egyptian Cobras, Imperial Chaplains, and Clovers who existed in North Lawndale (see Appendix B) perhaps as far back as the 1940s (Hagedorn 2013:3). At this time, new gangs were continuing to form, including gangs of all different ethnic backgrounds and races. North Lawndale was developed in 1857 and in 1889 the west portion of this neighborhood became part of the city of Chicago (Steans Family Foundation 2015). Originally, this neighborhood boomed as a haven for refugees from the Great Fire of 1871 and was primarily a Jewish ghetto (Encyclopedia of Chicago 2005).
neighborhood’s landscape was divided among two-flat apartments, Douglas Park, and massive industrial complexes.

As several growing industries developed in North Lawndale, such as Sears, a Western Electric Plant, Roebuck & Company, and numerous administrative headquarters, the population of North Lawndale doubled between 1910 and 1920 (Steans Family Foundation 2015). Half of the population consisted of Russian Jews and this area became known as the Jewish commercial street in Chicago. Between 1930 and 1950, the Russian Jews began to move into communities to the north, and by 1950, African Americans had begun to replace the Jewish residents. Many African Americans came from the southern states or were displaced from their South Side homes by urban renewal projects (Encyclopedia of Chicago 2005). In the 1950s, the spaces of the city began to be more sharply contested as the number of African Americans had grown so large that the Black Belt began to expand to Lawndale on the West side (Hagedorn 2015).

By the 1960s, North Lawndale was at an all-time population high of nearly 125,000 residents, which were 91 percent African American (Steans Family Foundation 2015:1). Despite dangerous residential overcrowding, no new private housing was built in North Lawndale (Encyclopedia of Chicago 2005). By 1957, the physical decline was so severe that Chicago’s Community Conservation Board recognized it as a conservation area. Adding to the degradation of this neighborhood, most new black residents could not find work as their Jewish predecessors had and tensions grew between the whites that commuted to North Lawndale for work and the black community that lived in North Lawndale.
In 1957, the Vice Lords were founded by several African American youths from North Lawndale that met while incarcerated in the Illinois State Training Schools for Boys in St. Charles, which is located in the far western suburbs of Chicago (unpublished audio transcription, October 25, 2012). This gang is predominately an African American gang, but ethnicities often crossed lines later in the gang’s history (Maguire 2008). The name "vice" was chosen at the Illinois State Training Schools for Boys when several African American youths looked up the term in the dictionary and found the meaning as "having a tight hold" (Dawley 1992). As the original Vice Lords group was released from incarceration, they quickly began to recruit other youths from North Lawndale and began engaging in conflicts with other gangs from various Chicago neighborhoods. Initially, they wanted to be something positive in the community, but they became a street gang because of the surrounding street gangs and the harassment they received (unpublished audio transcription, October 25, 2012). The Vice Lords prided themselves on loyalty and its members wanted to be a part of something that was headed in the right direction (Maguire 2008).

Benny Lee, Conservative Vice Lord, explains that his family was one of the first black families to move to the Austin area (see Appendix B) around Cicero and Jackson (unpublished audio transcriptions, 2012). In order to get anywhere, Lee had to walk through the white neighborhoods, which often meant they had to fight to get to school or the pool. Then, to get back home, he would often have to fight again. Back then, Lee describes watching TV. He would often watch Geronimo and cartoons with Apache Native Americans fighting the white men (unpublished audio transcription, 2012). When the Cicero Vice Lords, the prominent gang in the area during this time, approached Lee
and his friends to ask them what gang they belonged to, they responded that they were the Apache Vice Lords. At the time, they did not even consider themselves a gang, just a group of young kids. Lee explains that they chose this name because Geronimo was their hero. He says, “You know, we fightin’ these white boys like Geronimo done fight them white guys, we gonna be Apaches.” (unpublished audio transcriptions, 2012). Later, the name changed to the Insane Vice Lords, but, throughout history, “Vice Lords” in some manner has stuck around.

After the 1960s, North Lawndale experienced a series of economic and social disasters, which led to an increase in the isolation and segregation of this neighborhood (Steans Family Foundation 2015). Industries closed, riots ensued, and eventually the population began to decline. By 1964, the Vice Lords had grown significantly and law enforcement named them as a primary target for their various illegal activities, including robbery, theft, assaults, battery, intimidation, and extortion (Eghigian et al. 2006; Maguire 2008). It was not until 1966 that several older CVL decided they should change in order to make life better for the generations to come. By the 1970s, North Lawndale was experiencing housing deterioration and abandonment and, if you could leave, residents were moving out of North Lawndale (Steans Family Foundation 2015).

In 1966, the Vice Lords decided to transform themselves from a street gang to an organization dedicated to community improvement and empowerment. The Conservative Vice Lords Incorporated was a non-profit organization that was formed by older Vice Lords in 1967 (unpublished audio transcriptions, September 12, 2011). The CVL were not “gangbanging”, a term used to describe someone that participates in gang activity, which can include selling drugs or being involved in any illegal or violent activity.
Unlike street gangs that destroy communities, they were moving towards bettering the community. North Lawndale residents often had trouble with basic neighborhood maintenance, garbage pickup, and street cleaning. Bobby Gore, the former CVL spokesman, explains:

We had problems with quite a few things but when anyone came by; they’d just see a ‘filthy neighborhood.’ We were in a typical ghetto situation. So we decided that we should clean up after ourselves. We didn’t need them to clean up for us, we’d cleanup for ourselves. And that’s what we started doing. [unpublished audio transcription, September, 12, 2011:1]

In the late 1960s, the CVL sent proposals to the Rockefeller Foundation and successfully obtained funding to start what Dr. John Hagedorn, author and professor in criminology at the University of Illinois at Chicago, would consider to be an amazing set of programs that spanned over the next two years (Hagedorn 2013).

The Tenants’ Right Action Group was an organization created by the CVL to prevent violations of public housing rights and the Management Training Institute offered job training to citizens. The CVL also ran summer buses to take kids on retreats. Furthermore, under the slogan “grass, not glass!” the CVL began a campaign to beautify North Lawndale (Polsky 1969). Young boys and girls took up brooms and began to clean up. They opened several businesses including the Lawndale Pool Room, Teen Town, and two Tastee Freez ice cream stores. These spaces were intended to give teenagers a safe place to hangout. The African Lion was a clothing store and also sold art along with the studio Art & Soul. They even had an open house for police that included visits to Teen Town, The Lords’ headquarters, a recreation center for teens, and the Art & Soul gallery.

In opposition to set views on gang violence, the CVL were making a positive impact on their community and were setting an example for all of Chicago.
The story behind the formation of Art & Soul is especially important because its connection to the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), Chicago. In the summer of 1968, the MCA was entering into an unusual partnership with the CVL. This partnership produced an experimental art center called Art & Soul, at 3742 West Sixteenth Street (Zorach 2011). This center was not entirely outside the mainstream art world; it was a point of intersection: between the new aspirations of the late 1960s and forms of creativity born of the deprived condition of North Lawndale. It was formed between the young Black Arts Movement and older, established African American artists. Art & Soul served as a neighborhood art studio with classes for children, a library, freely available materials for artists, an artist residency, contests, readings, and exhibitions (Zorach 2011). Lawndale was, and continues to be, one of the poorest neighborhoods of Chicago. This project sought to bridge the divide between neglected neighborhoods and downtown cultural institutions. For its time, this project was quite revolutionary in the museum world, but, most importantly, it gave North Lawndale a safe place as well as the opportunity to learn, express themselves, and grow as artists.

Rebecca Zorach, associate professor of art history at the University of Chicago, explains, “At base it may have been just a fresh episode in the history of the periphery of mainstream art institutions. But it was a moment of optimism, coalition, and risk-taking that may have lessons for the future” (2011:67). She goes on to explain that institutional politics sometimes produced conflicts when working with various parties: the museum, the gang, and the broader local community. The risks taken by all sides were at times considerable and the project as a whole embodied many qualities now accepted not just as adjuncts to the creation of artworks, but also as components of the work of art itself.
Art & Soul might be seen as the precursor for more recent projects that go under the rubric of community art or collaboration (Zorach 2011). These risks taken in the late 1960s were similar to the case study in this thesis in which the CVL worked together with the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, which will be explained in greater detail later in Chapter 5.

While working hard to transform themselves, many other outside forces in Chicago were influencing the CVL. The civil rights movement of the 1960s often affected Chicago’s gangs and the CVL were active in forming a coalition with other gangs to fight for jobs and social change. As the gangs began to organize politically with African American revolutionary socialist organizations, such as the Black Panther Party, Mayor Richard J. Daley could see the future (Hagedorn 2013). Dr. Hagedorn explains that Daley had to choose to welcome the African American activists into the city or continue to fight against these organization and their demands.

The progress of the CVL programs were set back in the angry response to the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. As riots, fires, and racial tension continued, the CVL opened their offices up as a relief station (Maguire 2008; Hagedorn 2013:3). They passed out food and clothing and tried to keep the peace in North Lawndale, despite the public perception changing to believe that black leadership can no longer be trusted due to the violence and riots that occurred. At this time, law enforcement was frustrated with the lack of cooperation they received from Lawndale (Maguire 2008). Federal agents and police officers went to the CVL to help them solve current crimes and were angered by their lack of willingness to help.
The discrimination against African Americans and the accelerated tensions between the CVL, Mayor Daley, and the police due to the “War on Gangs” resulted in the cancellation of funding for the CVL programs and the imprisonment of many gang members (Hagedorn 2013). Robert J. Duran explains that the “War on Gangs” was a response to the negative image that was created of a gang member being the new “urban predators” (2013). Because of the “War on Gangs”, police were going after several gang leaders due to the growing tensions. In 1969, Bobby Gore (former CVL spokesman) was convicted for murder and the elimination of his leadership ended the continuation of the positive accomplishments of the CVL (Hagedorn 2013). Dr. Hagedorn believes that Gore was framed largely because of who he was and what he accomplished for his community. Going into the 1970s, the majority of African American leaders, of the Black Power Movement, street gangs, and non-profit organizations, were either in prison or killed off due to the “War on Gangs” (unpublished audio transcription, October 25, 2012). This caused African American groups to become less aggressive and the movement towards revitalization of black neighborhoods largely ended.

With CVL role models in prison, some North Lawndale residents reverted back to gangs, crime, and drugs trade. Many Vice Lords began selling heroin and cocaine to make money (Maguire 2008). Violence increased and many Vice Lords became addicted to heroin, including CVL Benny Lee. As the Vice Lords and their drug empire grew, many Vice Lord fractions formed. According to Lieutenant Nathan Hamilton of the Chicago Police Department, there are eight different Vice Lord gangs: Traveling Vice Lords, Conservative Vice Lords, Cicero Insane Vice Lords, Unknown Vice Lords, Rockwell Garden Vice Lords, Renegade Vice Lords, Horner Home Vice Lords, Four
Corner Hustler Vice Lords, Insane Vice Lords, and Undertaker Vice Lords (Maguire 2008). Willie Lloyd became the leader of the violent sects of Vice Lords who dealt with illegal commerce and worked to build a drug empire in North Lawndale.

Benny Lee explains that, aside from Gore being locked up, the CVL also failed because they did not receive the technical support they needed or the knowledge needed for how to run a non-profit organization (unpublished audio transcription, October 25, 2012). Because of this lack of support, the CVL was looked upon as a failure and as a front for a street gang doing illegal activity. There is no evidence, however, that the CVL used the money they received to buy guns or engage in any type of criminal activity (unpublished audio transcription, October 25, 2012). Benny Lee explains that the CVL and their fiscal agents can prove how every single dollar was spent.

Benny Lee and Dr. Hagedorn believe that if the CVL would have received the support they needed, North Lawndale would probably not be seeing the gang violence they see today. These programs would have been given the time needed to flourish and become successful in North Lawndale. Hagedorn states, “Their story has largely been forgotten and their accomplishments remain hidden from the present generation. A majority of Chicagoans are unaware of the momentous events that took place in one of Chicago's poorest black neighborhoods” (2013:1). The bold community programs of the CVL are an important part of Chicago history and, from learning this history, Chicago can understand more about the power of community grassroots organizing. Poverty, the lack of services, unemployment, and the increase in criminalization of African Americans are issues that North Lawndale still faces today.
Chapter Four: Theoretical Framework

Heritage, Memory, & Place

Often perceived as a ‘conveniently ambiguous’ concept, heritage has multiple definitions and approaches (Lowenthal 1998; Davison 2008; Harrison 2013). It might be used to describe anything from a solid building, monuments, and memorials, to the ethereal: songs, festivals, and languages (Harrison 2013). Laurajane Smith suggests that heritage can be about renewing memories and associations, sharing experiences with kin, or a folk group, to cement present and future social and familial relationships (2006). Heritage cannot only be about the past but can also be more than just material things. Rodney Harrison explains, “It is perhaps helpful in the first instance to point out that heritage is not a ‘thing’ or a historical movement, but refers to a set of attitudes to, and relationships with the past.” (2013:14; Walsh 1992; Harvey 2001, 2008; Smith 2006).

Heritage can be a process of engagement, an act of communication, and an act of making meaning in and for the present (Smith 2006). These stories and shared memories can sometimes be attached to material objects or family heirlooms, and while these ‘things’ are useful for making stories tangible - they are not in and of themselves heritage. According to Smith, the real sense of heritage, the real moment of heritage, is
when our emotions and sense of self are truly engaged (2006). It is not so much the possession of objects, but the act of passing on and receiving memories and knowledge.

According to Martha Sims and Martine Stephens, how members of the group who participate in a particular expression connect and interact with the beliefs stated or implied in written text are also important (2005). These stories can take on new meanings over time and reveal a sense of family identity. To explain this, anthropologists often refer to this as social construction theory, which is how we build our judgments and socially construct them. It occurs in the way that we then use, reshape, and recreate those memories and knowledge to help us make sense of and understand not only who we are, but also who we want to be (Smith 2006). Heritage can be a cultural and social process, which engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present.

When referencing published public housing stories and while I attended community meetings with Conservative Vice Lords, their stories, for the most part, are memories of the good times. They are memories about their relationships, empowerment, and social and holiday gatherings, for example. By hearing these stories, museum staff and visitors to the museum can start to look at past stereotypes and begin to see what is meaningful to them. Their voice gives outsiders a better understanding of who they are, i.e., their heritage.

According to Smith, places become heritage by the present day cultural processes and activities that are undertaken at and around places (Smith 2006:2-3). These places can then be identified as physically symbolic of particular cultural and social events, and thus give them value and meaning. Theory on heritage and place is important to this
thesis because public housing residents and gang members are strongly associated with place. The National Public Housing Museum (NPHM) and the Report to the Public exhibit are centered on the places that these groups interacted in and serve to recreate these places. The NPHM and the Report to the Public exhibit can provide a place for these groups, and others, to understand what life was really like for these individuals. Through shared memories, these exhibits preserve these groups’ heritage and memory. Museums can take intangible memories and heritage and bring them to life, giving them a new, tangible place and memory.

Heritage can be seen as a multi-layered performance, a performance of visiting, managing, interpretation, or conservation, that embodies acts of remembrance and commemoration while negotiating and constructing a sense of place, belonging, and understanding in the present (Smith 2006:3). At one level, heritage can be about the promotion of a consensus version of history by state-sanctioned cultural institutions and elites to regulate cultural and social tensions in the present. On the other hand, heritage may also be a resource that is used to challenge and redefine received values and identities by a range of groups. Heritage may be about reworking the meanings of the past as the cultural, social, and political needs of the present change (Smith 2006:4).

Heritage can be about negotiation, about using the past, and collective or individual memories, to negotiate new ways of being and expressing identity (Smith 2006:4). It may be about challenging the ways in which groups and communities are perceived and classified by others. Examples of community heritage projects demonstrate the importance that is placed on the preservation and display of heritage for the construction of identity and the representation of place as a means to try to bring
people together as active agents (Crooke 2007:22). Both the NPHM and the Report to the Public exhibit try to challenge the consensus version of what life was like for public housing residents and the assumption that gang members are all violent individuals incapable of change. By giving these groups a voice through these exhibits, a more accurate and empowering story emerges. These groups are able to “negotiate” new ways of being understood. Through individual memory, they can change the way the public sees them.

**Kin & Folk Groups: Anthropology of Public Housing and Gangs**

In order to understand heritage and identity in the public housing resident and Conservative Vice Lord communities, understanding more about gang formation, the creation of relationships, and definitions of belonging is helpful. For the past several decades, the topic of public housing and gangs has increased in popularity in academia and popular media. Much of this research has contributed to the literature on African American history. Books, films, and even museums have been created on public housing and gangs that could, and in some cases, have informed the National Public Housing Museum and Report to the Public. These media can inform the way in which the museum tells the story of these groups history, culture, policies, architecture and design, media images, and the situation these groups are in today, among many other areas of their lives. The implication of this for museum practice is that these media should be considered when creating museum content and could offer suggestions for great exhibits.

Audrey Petty’s book *High Rise Stories: Voices from Chicago Public Housing* not only allows former public housing residents tell their experiences living in public housing, but it also helps outsiders gain a better understanding of what life was like for
former residents (2013). Petty explains, “For many outsiders, the disappeared buildings of Chicago public housing are too often considered in purely symbolic terms, with former residents easily categorized as troublemakers or victims. The truths of the matter belie such facile conclusions” (Petty 2013:22). The narrators in *High Rise Stories* describe the promise, the failure, and the success of the high rises. By telling former public housing residents’ stories, stereotypes and common misconceptions about public housing residents can be contested.

To many outsiders’ surprise, the stories former public housing residents tell, although dark at times, are mostly about the good times they had and the feelings of community they felt while living in public housing. *High Rise Stories* is similar to the documentary “The Pruitt-Igoe Myth: An Urban History” that tells the story of the St. Louis, Missouri Pruitt-Igoe public housing developments (Freidrichs 2012). These stories, told through the first hand narratives of former residents, are mostly about community and displacement. They are also often about poverty in the wake of gentrification, giving voice to those who have long been ignored (Petty 2013). These stories give voice to the hopes and struggles these families experienced while trying to attain “The American Dream” or the ideal that every US citizen should have an equal opportunity to achieve success and prosperity through hard work, determination, and initiative.

When studying public housing residents and gangs, basic concepts in anthropology such as kinship can be helpful when forming a greater understanding about a given group. Kinship is a term used in anthropology that describes family ties through blood and marriage. The relationships among relatives possess certain mutual rights and
obligations. According to Margaret Small, when kin connections cannot be made, people frequently create new nuclear units of their own (2000). People often imprint lines of kinship on friends and colleagues, transferring familial expectations onto those with whom they share time but not blood, genes, or vows. As Small explains, people are often pushed by a culture that favors independence and self-reliance, but the social animal within us nonetheless seeks connections even if they are bloodless and fragile (2000:88).

When defining these groups through a folkloric lenses, anthropologists often define these groups as folk groups.

According to Martha Sims and Martine Stephens, no matter how loosely or informally defined, a folk group requires special knowledge of its language, behavior, and rules-spoken or unspoken (2005). These types of communication convey and express the group’s attitudes, beliefs, values, and worldview to other members of the group and often to outsiders. Folk groups often form out of necessity, obligation or circumstance, proximity, regular interaction or shared interests or skills (Sims and Stephens 2005). In societies where individuals are separated from their kin, there is a proliferation of folk groups, which are also referred to as common interest associations. Common interest associations, which are similar to folk groups, can be associations that result from an act of joining based on sharing particular activities, objectives, values, and beliefs (Small 2000). These associations are flexible by nature and appear in both cities and traditional villages.

Public housing residents and gangs can be seen as folk groups or common interest associations. Although public housing residents often lived with family, they still formed associations with other residents that were not their kin. These relationships were
important to residents because they relied on one another for support and protection. In places like public housing and segregated neighborhoods, the reliance on non-kin relationships helped contribute to the formation of gangs. David C. Brotherton and Luis Barrios define gangs as a group of individuals of often marginalized social class, racial, or ethnic groups (2004:23). These groups aim to provide its members with a resistant identity, an opportunity to be individually and collectively empowered. Gangs often form to deal with specific challenges that arose out of post-industrial cities. This membership can provide individuals with a voice to speak back to and challenge the dominant culture. With this, public housing residents and gang members, like the Conservative Vice Lords, often form these relationships seeking connectedness, which help to better understand their shared heritage, formation of memory, and strong associations with place.

Anthropologist James Diego Vigil completed many on-site evaluations of the Los Angeles Housing Authority and its connection with family life and gang membership within the Pico Gardens developments. In his book The Projects: Gang and Non-Gang Families in East Los Angeles, (2007) Vigil described how he discovered aspects about the lives of the people who make up the projects. This includes looking at household heads, family dynamics, and gang membership. The main objective of his research was to examine what factors make some families more vulnerable to gang membership, and why gang resistance was evidenced in similarly situated non-gang-involved families (Vigil 2007).

Providing rich, in-depth interviews and observations, Vigil examines the wide variations in income and social capital that exist among the ostensibly poor, mostly
Mexican American residents. He documents how families connect and interact with social agencies in greater East Los Angeles to help chart the routines and rhythms of the lives of public housing residents. By studying life in Pico Gardens, Vigil adds to the anthropological discourse on how human agency interacts with structural factors to produce the reality that families living in public housing developments contend with daily.

Often researchers that focus on gangs find themselves doing their fieldwork in public housing complexes, as Vigil did. Another example of a researcher that has done similar work is University of Chicago’s sociologist Sudhir Venkatesh (2008). Although a sociologist, Venkatesh also used practices that are cornerstones in doing anthropological research, such as ethnographic fieldwork. He submerged himself within Chicago’s public housing and closely interacted with crack-selling gang members and the tightly knit and highly organized community of the Robert Taylor Homes. Venkatesh has written a unique insider perspective of what social and economic events occurred within these public housing high-rises, which I will explain in greater detail in the “History of Public Housing” section of this chapter.

The work of Philippe Bourgois has offered a perspective from the point of view of anthropology as well. He gained the trust and friendship from gang members living in tenement apartments in East Harlem, otherwise known as El Barrio, and was able to understand the complex ideologies, symbols, modes of interaction, values, and beliefs of the inner-city street culture (Bourgois 1995). Unlike most other firsthand accounts of street life, In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio (1995) contributes to social science the understanding of the relationship between culture and economy and between
men and women with changing family values. He shows how extraordinary the Puerto Rican experience in New York has been in terms of cultural reforms that have continued to expand, and have influenced the lives of second and third generation immigrants around a constant theme of dignity and autonomy (Bourgois 1995:11). Through critical discussions on race, class, and gender, Bourgois hopes to begin to come to grips with the problems of the inner city. From an applied perspective, his work can provide insight into poverty and segregation among dealers and addicts that may experience rapid structural change in the context of political and ideological oppression (Bourgois 1995:11, 327).

Thomas Ward’s ethnography on the MS-13 of Los Angeles is another powerful and engaging overview of gang dynamics through the lens of anthropology. *Gangsters without Borders: An Ethnography of a Salvadoran Street Gang* presents the severity of the marginalization felt by Salvadoran immigrants (Ward 2013). His ethnography debunks myths about gangs in the United States and delivers an intimate account of gang members' lives before, during, and after their involvement with gangs. As an applied anthropologist, Ward has contributed to solving the predicament of preserving the identities of gang member informants and his work can be helpful for academics, law enforcement, and public officials alike to gain a better understanding of the larger context that contributed to the emergence of the MS-13. He offers practical solutions to try to end gang crime and violence and stresses that they require “smart policies”. Ward advocates for strong efforts toward prevention and intervention, i.e., keeping adolescences out of gangs and helping active members find positive alternatives (2013:197). Additionally, Ward explains that there needs to be effective rehabilitation
programs for drug addicts and alcoholics, opportunities for employment, and psychological counseling. If there is one lesson to be learned that the above researchers could agree on, as Ward notes, it would be that there are no quick fixes or easy solutions for the problems that gangs create or the problems that create gangs (Wyrick & Howell 2004:21).

Robert J. Duran, former gang member turned scholar, spent five years in Denver, Colorado and Ogden, Utah conducting 145 interviews with gang members, law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and other relevant individuals (Duran 2013). By using ethnographic research methods, he recasts gang members to not be seen solely as criminals, but as gang members that have adapted to the racial oppression of colonization in the American Southwest (Duran 2013). In *Gang Life in Two Cities: An Insider’s Journey* Duran constructs a comparative outline of the emergence and criminalization of Latino youth groups, the ideals and worlds they create, and the reasons for their persistence (Duran 2013). Duran encourages cultural activists and current and former gang members to pursue grassroots empowerment and he proposes new solutions to racial oppression that challenge and truly alter the conditions of gang life. He pushes former gang members to play a role in reducing gang violence.

Although he is not an anthropologist, the research done by the University of Illinois at Chicago professor, criminologist, and gang expert John Hagedorn has influenced my work and allowed me to have a better understanding on gang members, and most specifically the Conservative Vice Lords. Dr. Hagedorn’s research emphasizes the importance of understanding gangs through their history and eliminating gang stereotypes. In *People and Folks: Gangs, Crime and the Underclass in a Rustbelt City* he
reinforces the message that gang members are people too (1998:215). Like you and me, they are trying to figure out how to survive in these new, uncertain, post-industrial times. Hagedorn believes that gangs are spontaneous products of local communities and can be best understood by analyzing local conditions and group processes (1998). Hagedorn reminds the universities of their role as critical analysts and encourages collaborative gang research.

After doing research on gangs, Hagedorn realized that gang members often want to participate in meaningful programs (1998:214). Hagedorn suggests that gang programs should train and hire former local gang members as staff, utilize older gang members as consultants, and make sure input from former gang members is genuine. Another realization of Hagedorn’s was that quality research on gangs is necessary if we are to go beyond the law enforcement paradigm. In other words, we must go beyond police focusing on the “means” of policing rather than its “ends” to better understand gang activity in order to make adequate policies. This suggests that police focus on strategies that identify underlying problems in order to stop gang activity.

Furthermore, Hagedorn stresses that the method of collaboration can produce good research (1998). Without participation from gang members or the people living in gang inhabited communities, like public housing, there cannot be a guarantee that gang research will help anything but the researcher’s career. While working with Hagedorn on the CVL exhibition, his findings were helpful in the exhibition development. The CVL were involved with the development process and were our direct consultants for the narrative and content.
As explained by Robert R. MacDonald, director emeritus of the Museum of the City of New York, heritage sites, museums, and galleries are increasingly being viewed as sites for dialogue and exchange (2005:195). As a result, the last decade or so has witnessed a growing number of exhibitions that have been designed to be provocative and to challenge people’s perceptions and accepted ways of engagement. An example of an organization that challenges perceptions and ways of engagement is LA Gang Tours in Las Angeles, California. This organization is also reaching out to former gang members and is asking them to take part in telling their story.

While doing my research, I had the opportunity to speak with the founder Alfred Lomas about this his organization and his hopes to one day create a museum in Los Angeles about local gang history (personal communication, September 2012). LA Gang Tours is a social program created to help raise consciousness and greater awareness of problems communities face today. Lomas, through guided tours on buses, wants to educate society on gang life and explain that gang members often do want a better way of life and are capable of change. On tour and while traveling around LA, Alfred Lomas and other former gang members speak to visitors about their experience being in a gang while traveling around LA. The tour bus stops at local graffiti sites, the Watts Arts Gallery, and Graff Lab.

The goal of LA Gang Tours is to use the profits from the tours to create jobs and provide opportunities for the residents of South Central, Los Angeles (LA Gang Tours 2014). They believe that educating people from around the world about the Los Angeles inner city lifestyle, specifically about gang involvement and solutions, can be a vital step towards a peaceful existence. By collaborating with former gang members to raise
awareness, Lomas feels he can give these individuals hope and an opportunity to find a solution to bettering their lives. Since I last spoke with Lomas in January of 2013, a museum on local LA gang history was still in the process of being established. There is no set date for the opening.

David Thelen expands on the approach LA Gang Tours has employed to tell an often unheard story in “Learning Communities: Lessons in Co-Creating the Civic Museum” (2005). He explains that California museums employ street gang members as docents and often create partnerships with community groups to deal with issues like gangs, youth, and law enforcement. In LA, community-based, often ethnic, and problem-oriented groups provide a spectacular display of how to make partnerships work (Thelen 2005:336). Thelen says that partnerships with community groups become crucial means for museums to discover civic potential within the museum. If LA Gang Tours is successful in creating a museum, I think this space would have the ability to form these partnerships, as they already have through LA Gang Tours.

Due to the negative portrayal of public housing residents and gang members, many people think that these individuals and groups are disordered, ruled by violence, drug addicts, and presumed evil, almost as if they are domestic terrorists. Stereotyping can be defined as a reduction of images and ideas to a simple and manageable form, rather than simple ignorance or lack of ‘real’ knowledge, it is a method of processing information (Gilman 1985:19). According to Sander Gilman, the objects in our world are reduced to images. No matter how well articulated these images are constantly altered by our interaction with realities upon which they are based. The function of stereotypes is to perpetuate an artificial sense of difference between ‘self’ and ‘other’ (Gilman 1985:18).
While speaking with Alfred Lomas, founder of L.A. Gang Tours, he explained to me that there are two myths that are commonly associated with gangs. The first is that gang members do not want to help their communities (personal communication, September 2012). The second is that gang members do not want to get out of the gang lifestyle. These common stereotypes about gang members that are seen in popular media and the news can influence people to believe that these individuals do not want help when they may want help. By creating the National Public Housing Museum and the Report to the Public exhibition, the public can be able to learn about the specific stories of these groups. Through their stories, the public can reassess what they already know and they can learn about what life is really like for them.

**Social Disorganization & Subculture Theory**

When studying public housing residents and gangs, social disorganization theory and subculture theory have been used by criminologists and sociologists to explain gang behavior in communities and these theories have contributed to the tarnishing of their reputation. Often referred to as “white flight”, an exodus of white individuals from central city areas occurred from the 1940s until the 1970s (Frey 2004:1-3). In cities, this gave rise to the development of the segregated ghetto and an increased population from which to draw gang members (Miller 1975). Social disorganization theory examines the consequences when a community is unable to conform to common values and to solve the problems of its residents, which includes those in public housing. Those neighborhoods that suffer from extreme disorganization are characterized by extensive deterioration, social disorder, and greater violence (Erickson 2010). According to Patricia Erickson, it is believed that gangs exert greater control in these neighborhoods.
because social institutions fail to function as agencies of social control. Closely connected and derived from social disorganization theory is subculture theory. A subculture is an identifiable group within a society that has patterns of behavior and norms that set that group apart from other groups within the society (Erickson 2010:812). Gangs can be a consequence or component of a subculture, which are thought to enforce delinquent norms of one sort or another on all its members (Hagedorn 1998).

Social disorganization and subculture theory can be important, but historically have not been a primary interest of research conducted by anthropologists (Erickson 2010). Sociologists, for example, are mostly interested in normal and aberrant behavior, making these theories more appropriate for their field of study, while anthropologists explore and examine the relationship between social conditions and the presence of gangs. When looking at these theories more closely, one can see that public housing residents and gangs can be seen as subcultures that have formed due to poor public policies and a long standing history of segregation in this country, especially in Chicago. This thesis, however, will not use social disorganization theory because it often assumes these individuals are inherently bad before ever learning anything about them.

Community

Vered Amit, anthropologist and sociologist, does research on groups of people by learning about their community characteristics. He has written about how groups across the United Kingdom, Norway, Canada, and Central Europe have used community in order to understand more about themselves (2002). In these examples, the importance of developing a sense of place, building social networks, and both recognizing and acknowledging shared characteristics, such as a common history, religion, sport, or
employment (Crooke 2006). These common developments consider the role of sentiment, emotion, and nostalgia in the formation of group identities. Shared features become cherished marks of community, identity, and a conscious decision is made to use these experiences to create unity. In communities where a sense of place is central, the distribution of place can become a key threat and people often will then pull together to construct a narrative of belonging to counteract this (Crooke 2006). The construction of community thus brings security to its makers and uncertainty to those who feel they do not belong.

These aspects illustrate the intangible construction of community. Critical to the success of cultural codes, rituals, and symbols of belonging is their selectivity and ability to be recognized by those in the group and those who do not belong. Being easily identifiable is important to the survival of the community because this illustrates the unity and coming together as much as it shows their division and exclusion. Public housing residents and the CVL can be seen by people outside these communities as having a strong sense of belonging due to the cultural codes, rituals, and symbols that they share as a community. These cultural codes are important to museums because they offer tangible objects for symbolizing community and expressing heritage and their sense of belonging. Instead of being disorganized, one can see how, through folk groups, community forms and is in fact organized and beneficial to all in the community. In the “Analysis” chapter of this thesis, I will go into further detail regarding the challenges the NPHM and the Hull-House Museum experienced with collecting objects for their exhibits.

Michel Foucault argued that the dominant structures of Western societies reproduce themselves by working insidiously rather than spectacularly upon the human
subject and especially the human body (1990). Human beings often internalize the systems of repression and reproduce them by conforming to certain ideas of what is normal and what is deviant. Foucault explains in greater detail, “power does not emanate from some central or hierarchical structure but flows through society in a sort of capillary action: Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere” (1990:93). Thus, our ideas about madness, criminality, or sexuality are regulated through institutions of certain ideological regimes. This conception of power is useful when focusing on the repressive aspects of everyday life, but it does not, however, explain how formations of different groups come together to create a social fabric (Loomba 2005).

Similar to the ideas of Foucault, Eric Gable in “The City, Race, and the Creation of a Common History at the Virginia Historical Society” explains the concept of imagined communities, which was first used by Benedict Anderson (2013). In a more general sense, Gable was concerned with what community means for museums, how communities work in the museum, and how museums work in communities to make the city better (2013:32-33). He assumed that the viewing of a city as a singular community is as much a work of the collective imagination as it is an actual physical place with people who recognize one another in ways that harken to nationalism and nations. In other words, cities as imagined communities can in a sense be conjured into being by acts of the imagination. Imagined community is an implicit correlative of how people who inhabit a space come to think of that space and their relationship to consociates. An example of this can be seen with the city of Chicago. This city has many separate and different neighborhoods. These communities, although in the city, identify separately
from the rest of Chicago. If someone asks you where you are from, you do not reply Chicago. Usually, a resident would state which neighborhood they come from, for example North Lawndale, Lincoln Park, or Logan Square. With this, the imagined Chicago would be one where everyone felt united and equal, which is far from the case.

Gable says that often, museums are ignoring a community in order to imagine another, more attractive, inspiring, and proud community. Gable says:

It is also at once an outcome of conscious efforts to shape the imagination by institutions such as museums. And this work of imagining can entail ignoring or overlooking communities, that is, not entering into dialogue with them, in favor of creating the potential for more utopian visions or projects. [2013:33]

Depending on what type of imagining a museum does, these institutions can continue to repress groups as well as make others think this is normal. It is putting up a false wall to become a more attractive city. As institutions of education, museums need to be aware of their imagined ideologies and the impact they have on society. When thinking about Chicago, in the past, exhibitions were largely presenting an imagined city. Not until recently, have these institutions been reaching out to ignored communities to present a more truthful presentation of the city.

This thesis argues that understanding public housing and gang history as well as their social conditions created by public policies can help researchers learn more about these folk groups. Rather than looking at what sets these folk groups apart from society and focusing on their “disorganization,” my research focuses on how and why these groups came to be. By focusing on this, these groups can begin to be better understood and not be looked at as disorganized, but rather quite organized. They will begin to look a lot like other folk groups. Social disorganization and subculture theory often continue
to “other” groups in society by trying to explain marginalized groups without first understanding how they see the world they live in and why. These theories presume “evil” in these communities and largely ignore historical prejudice that has contributed to their formation.

Museums can become cultural tools in the process of managing, defining, and governing heritage. According to Crooke, community and creating an inclusive community have become buzzwords in the arts and museum sectors (2006:170). Since the early 2000s there has seen a sizable increase in the literature on museums and their role and aspirations in relation to community and communities. Crooke suggests that the word “community” seems to have replaced “audience,” “public,” and “visitor”. In addition, Eric Gable asserts that community is an explicit term among museum professionals (2013:37-38). Usually the term is used when they talk about their publics. Some museum professionals, Gable explains, rarely refer to community and instead might talk of the public, their publics, their audience, or their consumers.

The growing concern to make museums relevant to the community has swiftly moved to combining museums with some of the key social policy issues, such as tackling exclusion, building cohesive communities, and contributing to the community regeneration. Rural and urban groups are coming together to explore their own history and heritage and are forming their own exhibitions and collections (Crooke 2007:16). These communities have become increasingly aware of the challenges facing younger people, rising unemployment, and experiences of exclusion. Members of such associations engage in various activities that promote local business, tourism, needs of women, and youth work in order to improve problems faced by a community.
The relationship that is developing between the community and the museum, either by museums attempting to engage better with their communities or by the community groups becoming more actively interested in heritage activity, encourages museum studies professionals to investigate the meaning and consequences of this relationship and what it may inform us about the role of museums today (Crooke 2006:170). The consideration of how museums can represent community identity looks at the way in which heritage symbolizes community and the role of the museum in building communities. In the case of the National Public Housing Museum and *Report to the Public*, this museum and exhibit are there to better their communities as well as to better surrounding Chicago communities. Through shared stories, they hope to inspire their communities and influence politicians and policy makers.

Some key areas of concern for museum studies and the museum sector are identity, representation, people, and the social responsibility of museums (Crooke 2006). Similarly, the discipline of community studies considers how understanding the dynamic of communities bring a greater appreciation for the formation of identity, the creation of relationships, and definitions of belonging. Community studies consider mainly how understanding dynamics of community will bring a greater appreciation of the formation of identity and definitions of belonging (Crooke 2007:27). Crooke points out that this area of community studies often links to writings in museum studies that have explored the meaning of objects in museums and the use of display as a means to express identity, represent culture, and define nations (2006). In many ways, it is important to create a public museum service that can be meaningful for a broader range of people, moving
away from the grand narrative, traditionally told in the national museums, and giving a greater recognition to local and community histories.

By understanding community, museums can better serve the public and are able to present more meaningful exhibitions for their community. The concept of community can also be prevalent in museum policy and planning because it helps museums create exhibitions that target a wider audience (Crooke 2007:27). The word “community” is used almost indiscriminately. There is rarely qualification of what the term means and how that community is identified. Rather than attempting to reduce the word “community” to a single definition, it is more useful to consider the multitude of characteristics associated with community (Crooke 2006).

Gerard Delanty, sociologist, emphasizes the range of experiences of community. He explains that communities have been based on ethnicity, religion, class or politics and may be large or small (Delanty 2003:2). They may be locally based and globally organized, affirmative or subversive in their relation to the established order. They may be traditional, modern, or even postmodern, reactionary and progressive. Crooke’s analysis of Delanty’s definition dispels myths associated with the term (2007:29). The range of experiences of community is not just about the past, or nurturing communal living that is considered lost and in the need of rebuilding, she clarifies.

Community is not necessarily tied to a single place. It is not always about association with a certain village or landscape and it can be geographically spread out, but linked by an agreed interest (Crooke 2006:172-173). Community manifested public housing and segregated neighborhoods. And arguably, these communities often have a
more tightly knit social fabric than rural areas or suburban sprawl communities in which members are or have more of an independent and isolated tendency.

In museum and heritage studies, community has been considered in numerous ways, from involving the people whose histories and cultures have inspired the formation of collections through to developing an awareness of the shared responses of people to exhibitions and collections (Crooke 2007:7). Advocates of community promote links between museums and community as mutually beneficial and of value to the sustainability of both. As explained earlier, others, however, question the reality of this idea of community and whether the goal of the community could ever bring the benefits its promoters anticipate (Crooke 2007:27).

The relationship between museums, heritage, and community can be considered in two ways, Crooke asserts. First, we can look to the rise of community within the official museum sector, which can be considered as the professional museum sector (Crooke 2007:8-9). This includes advisory bodies, central or local government funded museums, or private museums with accredited status. Secondly, to consider the interest in heritage and museum activity emerging from the communities themselves, and we can refer to this as the ‘unofficial’ museum sector. Often this community heritage engagement has not been triggered by policy guidelines or recommendations. Instead, it comes from members of the community and is inspired by their own perceptions of what they need and how this can best be achieved. The ways of considering community above are similar to the concepts behind ecomuseums and neighborhood and community museums as explained previously in Chapter Three.
Post-colonialism & Post-modernism

The term post-colonial has come to mean many things and encompass a broad range of topics, disciplines, and theoretical approaches (Kreps 2011). Post-colonial refers to the period which begins with the withdrawal of Western colonial rule in overseas territories and during which former colonies became independent, roughly the 1940s and 1950s (Kreps 2011:71). According to Harald Fischer-Tiné, professor of modern global history, post-colonialism is an academic discipline featuring methods of intellectual discourse that analyze, explain, and respond to the cultural legacies of colonialism and of imperialism, to the human consequences of controlling a country and establishing settlers for the economic exploitation of the native people and their land (2010). As critical theory, post-colonialism presents, explains, and illustrates the ideology and the praxis of neo-colonialism, with examples drawn from the humanities - history and political science, philosophy and Marxist theory, sociology, anthropology, and feminism, to name a few. As a genre of contemporary history, post-colonialism questions and reinvents the modes of cultural perception - the ways of viewing and of being viewed (Fischer-Tiné 2010:2). In anthropology, post-colonialism records human relations among the colonial nations and the subaltern peoples exploited by colonial rule. It addresses the experience of migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourse of Imperial Europe (Kreps 2011:71).

Post-colonial theory greatly influenced post-modern theory and in some ways is similar. Post-modern theory in anthropology originated in the 1960s along with the literary post-modern movement in general. Within this theoretical framework,
anthropologists wanted to dissect, interpret, and write cultural critiques within the many subfields of anthropology. In many ways, Clifford Geertz set the stage for post-modern anthropology. The major components of post-modern anthropology are an emphasis on including the opinions of the people being studied, a sense of relativism for the practices of other cultures, and the rejection of science and of grand universal schemes or theories which explain other cultures (Erickson and Murphy 2008:180-181). One issue discussed by post-modern anthropologists is about subjectivity and the idea that ethnographies are influenced by the disposition of the author. Geertz advocates that, “anthropological writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third order ones to boot” (Geertz 1973:15). With this, the importance of consultation and collaboration are increasingly important to post-modern anthropologists. In order to better interpret other cultures, one must talk to people and ask them questions. The reliance on participant observation will no longer be enough data to interpret a culture. It is also important to note that consultation and collaboration go beyond simply talking with individuals from other cultures. It is about action and working with others to achieve a common goal.

George E. Marcus and Michael M.J. Fischer explain that the work of Geertz has made interpretive anthropology the most influential style of anthropology among the wider intellectual public (Marcus and Fischer 1986). They, as well as Geertz, believed that the way forward was through interpretation. Marcus and Fischer also attempted to reform the way people approach anthropology and the ideas associated with the discipline. In their article “A Crisis of Representation in the Human Sciences,” they explain that 1986 was a time for reassessment of dominant ideas across the human sciences and the importance of studying a society and focusing on one particular aspect
of it. Furthermore, post-modernism influenced anthropologist Philippe Bourgois. He explains, “The explosion of post-modernist theory in anthropology in the 1980s and 1990s has critiqued the myth of ethnographic authority, and has denounced the hierarchical politics of representation that is inherent to anthropological endeavors” (Bourgois 1995:13). His relationships with his subjects were collaborative and also gave voices to his subjects, who were well aware of what role they played in his research.

As explained above, work on collaboration and multivocality are pivotal to my project. “One Voice to Many Voices? Displaying Polyvocality in an Art Gallery”, points out that one way of thinking about community engagement and participation concerns the idea of voice (Mason, Whitehead, and Graham 2013:164). New museology, as also explained elsewhere, highlights how voice and authorship are intimately connected to knowledge and authority. In most cases, museum are encouraged to give up some of their control and their authorial voice to allow the public or specific communities to speak for themselves and be heard in public space.

In Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh and T.J. Ferguson’s article “Memory Pieces and Footprints: Multivocality and the Meanings of Ancient Times and Ancestral Places among the Zuni and Hopi” they explore why anthropologists should understand how people use their past. They explain that the notion of contested past has grown to be an important topic in anthropological research in recent decades, linking such themes as nationalism, identity, museology, tourism, and war (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2006:148). The article stresses the shifting relationship between native people and anthropologists. They explain how anthropologists should understand the perspectives and interpretations of the people being studied in order to completely understand the past.
The authors state, “Our role as anthropologists, after all, is not merely discerning the past through scientific study but also understanding how people use the past to make meaning in their lives today” (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2006:150). The article also stresses the importance of collaboration and multivocality when doing research and representing cultures. In their research, they have improved their relationship with the people they study by collaborating with them and including their perspectives. This practice has made their research more accurate and much more powerful for the people being represented.

**Source Communities**

Source communities, the communities from which museum collections originate, have encouraged an assessment of the positioning of museums within Western colonial culture (Peers & Brown 2003). In the past several decades, source communities have challenged basic premises of conventional paradigms. During the great age of museum collecting which began in the mid-nineteenth century, this was a one-way relationship: objects and information about them went from peoples all over the world into museums which then consolidated knowledge as the basic of curatorial and institutional authority (Nicks 2003). Often, this relationship was predicated on another set of relationships, between the museums as institutions within imperial powers and source communities in colonized regions. Trudy Nicks explains in the introduction to *Museums and Source Communities* that within this context, ethnographic collections, in particular, were built on the premise that the peoples whose material heritage was being collected were dying out, and that remnants of their cultures should be preserved for the benefit of the future
generations (2003). These collections were assembled for dominant-society audiences, whether of specialist researchers or the general public.

This has changed, however, and these relationships have shifted to become much more of a two-way process, with information about historic artifacts now being returned to source communities and with community members often working with museums to record their perspectives on the continuing meanings of those artifacts (Nicks 2003). Now it is not unusual for museums to build relationships with specific communities and use their expertise for the development of relevant exhibitions (Crooke 2007:23) Source communities can now be seen as an important audience for exhibitions and museums now consider how their representations are perceived by and affect source communities.

In some instances source community members have come to be defined as authorities on their own cultures and material heritage. These changes have been given impetus by new forms of research and relationships, which involve the sharing of knowledge and power to meet the needs of both parties. Today, museums are urged to establish on-going dialogue and partnerships with communities and to define a framework for respectful collaboration in the restoration of that inherent human right, the right to be custodian of your own culture (Kreps 2011). In my case studies, the communities are supposed to have authority over the ways in which their story is told and also should have control over what objects are used to represent them.

Consultation and collaboration involves museums and community members working toward building a relationship of trust, often in cases where none has existed before and where there may be a significant legacy of distrust as a result of the dynamics of earlier anthropological and museum research projects (Nicks 2003). This was and
remains to be a challenge for the NPHM and the Hull-House due to the historical legacy of racism, segregation, and economic and educational differences within neighborhoods in Chicago. Consultation is often structured to provide outside support for the maintenance of institutional practices, and source community members are often wary of contributing to museum-led consultation exercises which do not lead to change within museums or benefits to their people. Bernadette Lynch notes that museums cannot fix society’s ills (2011a:159). Nonetheless museums can seize opportunities to collaborate in order to share experiences and collectively think through the difficult and urgent issues facing civil society. The museum can help people articulate their resistance to inequality and negotiate the meaning of citizenship and active agency.

While consultation with source communities is becoming fundamental to the new ways of working that we describe, it is of a kind that goes beyond simply asking for knowledge and advice, but altering the traditional relationship of power between museums and source communities. It asks for partnership rather than superficial involvement. Lynch states that “If museums are willing to accept differences, to let go some control and work to develop respectful solidarity between adversaries in the museum, then we may be able to exercise the moral courage required to change” (2011a:159). It is becoming clear that museums cannot change without the help of their community partners. According to Lynch, the aim of the democratic, participatory museum must be to practice trust, a radical trust in which the museum cannot control the outcome (2011a:160). Both institutions I study need to work hard to prove to their communities that they are on their side and working towards the same goals.
Conclusion

Understanding the formation and history of public housing residents and gangs as folk groups has allowed me to study their heritage and identity as well as understand their memories and ideas of place. It has allowed me to better understand why their representation in museums is important to helping them validate their identity and combat common stereotypes associated with these groups. From the literature review above, one can see how far the field of anthropology has come in conducting ethnographies and representing marginalized people and groups.

By approaching representations from a post-colonial and post-modern perspective, the incorporation of collaboration and community engagement with source communities into museum practice seems imperative. The work done at the museums I showcase in my case studies were influenced by these theories and have allowed these museums to understand these communities better. These new approaches hope to give the communities that anthropologists study agency. Additionally, when analyzing my interviews done with museum professionals, these practices are important to how I evaluate how the methods of collaboration and engagement have helped or hurt them create an appropriate representation of public housing and the Conservative Vice Lords.
Chapter Five: Analysis

National Public Housing Museum

While doing my research in 2013, I interviewed two staff members at the National Public Housing Museum (NPHM) that aspired to commemorate the often untold stories of public housing residents. By conducting these interviews, I hoped to gain better insight into the NPHM’s plans for the museum and what they saw as their main challenges in creating a museum that has the potential to encompass many difficult and complex topics. Before I begin discussing my findings from my interviews, I examine what exhibits the museum has created thus far to help raise funds and awareness about the museum opening. By doing this, this section hopes to present what the NPHM has done, my findings and critique, and then offer recommendations for the NPHM.

Since the NPHM’s incorporation, it has created two exhibits to introduce ideas that the museum plans to touch on. From 2010 until April 15, 2011, the first exhibition *History Coming Home* premiered at the Chicago Tourism Center located in the Chicago Loop area. While I was an undergraduate student at the University of Illinois at Chicago in 2011, this was the exhibit I was asked to visit in order to look at how the exhibit presented history. Along with its premier, the museum presented 15 public programs,
including a book signing and community conversations discussing race. This exhibit was essentially a preview of the museum. The exhibit discussed public policies, presented oral histories, and displayed artifacts from public housing by replicating certain public housing rooms, like a kitchen for example (National Public Housing Museum 2014a). Visitors were able to view artifacts donated from former public housing residents from several major cities, including Boy Scout paraphernalia of former Ohio Congressman Louis Stokes and a desk from Sunny Fischer, Executive Director of the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation in Chicago. Artifacts also came from cities like Boston, New Orleans, and Sacramento. Visitors were additionally introduced to local public housing luminaries like Chicago’s Restaurateur Dick Portillo, NBA guard Tony Allen, Senator Mattie Hunter, Pianist Reginald Robinson, and national luminaries including Bill Cosby, Lloyd Blankfein, Justice Sonia Sotomayor and President Jimmy Carter (National Public Housing Museum 2014a).

The story of public housing is complex, but in the NPHM’s first exhibit, they wanted to stress a simple message - everyone needs a home. The exhibit is about how home and shelter influences ones triumphs, resilience, inclusion, isolation, security, and opportunity. It is about how a home can shape who you are and who you become. When visiting this exhibit, I thought it was strange that the exhibit mainly focused on the 1950s and that it did not touch on public housing after that or the state of current public housing. I was surprised to see that the exhibit presented positive stories, showing happy residents. In 2011, I too was a part of the general public that had a preconceived negative perception of public housing. This exhibit changed my opinion of public housing.
Following this exhibit, *The Sound, the Soul, the Syncopation* premiered on November 15, 2012 to March 15, 2013 at Expo 72, a gallery space in the Chicago Loop area. Unfortunately, I was not able to attend this exhibit. As explained on the National Public Housing Museum’s website, the exhibit was the first comprehensive look at the music and the artists that have emerged from the nation’s public housing experience, cultivating artists in several genres including country, hip-hop, punk, jazz, gospel and pop (National Public Housing Museum 2014a). The relationship between music and society, as well as its undeniable cultural connection to the world, has been noted. For many, the relationship is even more unique when it comes from the community, specifically, public housing (Williams 2012). As explained in a review by Marc Pokempner with the Chicago Reader, this exhibit looked at how close-knit subsidized communities in Brooklyn, Houston, Detroit, and other cities have helped produce talent (2012). He found the exhibit not only attractive, but also engaging. Through a partnership with mobile music app Groovebug, the curators have equipped the space with iPads and headphones that play music by the highlighted artists.

The exhibit explained that from public housing communal spaces, Elvis found inspiration in Memphis, Barbra Streisand was stirred to make her way through song, and Lupe Fiasco found his identity on the streets of Chicago (National Public Housing Museum 2014a). In church choirs, piano lessons, street jams or marching bands, youth growing up in public housing have long found community - and sometimes, even fame. The story of this long unexamined aspect of public housing was told through experiences and visions of current and former public housing residents, urban leaders, and policymakers from around the country (National Public Housing Museum 2014a).
message of this exhibit was to tell visitors the positive stories that they might not have known and sheds light on the notable biographies.

**Interviews**

During my interviewing process, I met with Todd Palmer, curator/interim director, and Matthew Leo, research assistant at the NPHM. Since my interview in 2013 Palmer has changed his position within the institution. Additionally, Leo has left his position. At the close of this thesis, I will explain these changes as well as other alterations to the NPHM staff. To start our conversation, I asked Palmer and Leo what role they play at the NPHM and if they held a certain philosophy in museum practice. In response, Palmer said his goal as curator was to bring “museums of the street to the museums of the world” (personal interview, August 1, 2013). He wanted the untold stories of everyday citizens to be heard by all. He strived to “use museums to help protect place”, with public housing as the site. Furthermore, as stated in an interview with journalist Lauren Gurley of *South Side Weekly*, Palmer explained that “our goal is to create a more active and engaged public” (2014). He was interested in learning from the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum in terms of community curation and strived to use the NPHM to help protect public housing as a place.

Leo has a background in history and theology and carried out research for exhibits and programs at the NPHM. Based on research done under the leadership of Leo, which was then followed up by oral interviews, specific family stories were chosen to be shared in the museum. Leo considered himself to be a neophyte to the museum world, but was open-minded (personal interview, August 1, 2013). He learned about museum work on a daily basis while on the job.
When I asked Palmer what the NPHM has that other museums do not he stressed that the NPHM is different because “it is now, real, personal, and hard” (personal interview, August 1, 2013). It is different because public housing is a complex subject, and is currently taking some interesting turns, which, in my opinion, can and should influence exhibitions at the NPHM.

An example of new approaches to public housing can be seen in New York. Michael Kimmelman, architecture critic for the *New York Times*, wrote about how the Sugar Hill Development in Upper Manhattan has “outsize” ambitions. Developed to serve some of the very poorest New Yorkers, this building has a preschool for more than 100 children in conjunction with a museum of children’s art and storytelling (Kimmelman 2014). The museum will display the work of artists from the area along with that by kids. As explained by Kimmelman:

> This takes the project [Sugar Hill Development] beyond even exceptional subsidized housing, like Arbor House in South Bronx, which has a gym and a hydroponic farm on the roof, or Vie Verde, which pioneered links between good design and health care for an underserved neighborhood. [2014:1]

Like Via Verde, Sugar Hill is somewhat of an extravagance, according to Kimmelman. Sugar Hill is designed by marquee architect David Adjaye, a British star who also won the commission for the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington. With no concessions to timid taste, the project aspires to be a must-see. Kimmelman said, “…it posits a goal for what subsidized housing might look like, how it could lift a neighborhood and mold a generation” (2014:1). The building itself rises 13 stories, contains 124 units, and reflects the historic buildings in the neighborhood.
Although some neighbors say Adjaye’s building looks like a prison or an “arty fortress”, most people Kimmelman interviewed about the building like it (Kimmelman 2014:2). Adjaye, when asked, stated: “Why is it that this is ‘cool’ for rich people but ‘tough’ for poor people?” (Kimmelman 2014:2). Kimmelman explained that the development, in fact, is not nearly so imposing when seen next to some of the public housing towers “glowering” over surrounding streets. Still, Kimmelman expressed his concerns about Sugar Hill. He stated, “Providing poor families with small, distinctive but difficult living spaces to accommodate a striking façade throws the whole design into question, betraying the project’s basic mission” (2014:4). Although Adjaye has squeezed a lot into the building, there are often trade-offs when developing subsidized housing. Kimmelman stated that housing should not be one of them.

Broadway Housing Communities is the developer of Sugar Hill and is working hard to push the envelope. Ellen Baxter founded and directs the organization, which has six other projects across Upper Manhattan, all in renovated properties (Kimmelman 2014). Roughly one-quarter of the tenants in Ms. Baxter’s rent-stabilized buildings are paid to manage the front desks, 24/7, watching out for neighbors, “promoting trust and investment,” as Baxter described it (Kimmelman 2014:2). The school and the children’s museum are the foundation for Sugar Hill. The museum, to be finished next spring, is a gamble, Kimmelman explained, intended to become an extension of the school, a community anchor and gathering place. Everything will hinge on child and family centered programming (Kimmelman 2014). Overall, if this development is successful, it could provide a model for what subsidized housing might look like and how it can help a community. If the development is unsuccessful, however, Sugar Hill may become a
model for what not to do. It could become another instance where planners forgot what the most important aspect of subsidized housing is: adequate housing.

Elaine H. Gurian, consultant/advisor to museums, explained the important point that the boundaries between museums and other public institutions, sites, and spaces are blurring (2005:71). Our certainty about the definition of museums is disappearing and Gurian is hopeful that these many new museums will be welcomed. With this, there is the opportunity for the changed museum to make a more relevant contribution to our society. Gurian also explained that museums can be more than one type of place, which she refers to as a “blurring of boundaries” (Gurian 2005:71). The distinct edges of differing social service centers, schools, shopping malls, zoos, performance halls, archives, theaters, public parks, cafes, and museum will blur, and in some cases, already have blurred. An example of this can be seen with the Sugar Hill Development described above, blurring the definitions of public housing, a school, and a museum. Additionally, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is an example Gurian used of museum and religious memorial as well as museum and theater.

I hope the NPHM will be able to blur its boundaries as explained above. In an article by Ed Finkel, Sunny Fischer, former public housing resident, explained: “The museum and its education center will challenge the myths and the stereotypes [of public housing]” (2014:1). She explained that the museum plans to reach out to Chicago Public Schools and create a curriculum based on oral histories the museum has collected. The curriculum and the exhibits in the museum plan to be a basis for conversations about poverty, race, and many other social issues raised by the history of public housing. With this, the NPHM has an opportunity to blur the boundaries between a museum, school,
archive, and memorial. This blurring will help former and current public housing residents define who they are and will provide them structure and methods needed for collecting their past (Gurian 2005:76). Gurian explained that museums with broadened definitions can become important, and even more central, institutions of memory.

Public housing is not just good or bad and the museum is not taking a stance in the ongoing debate on public housing (Gurley 2014). Palmer asserted that by definition, museums cannot take a stance. He explained, “What is permanent is not community” (personal interview, August 1, 2013). He expressed that museums should be dialogic. For him, the museum is the “right place” to hear the debate about public housing. Palmer wanted to use these diverse stories to look at how people responded to what happened in public housing and try to learn from these stories in order to make a difference today, to protect and advocate for fair housing. Palmer thought this dialogue asked the more important question, “What are we going to do about public housing now?” (personal interview, August 1, 2013). Many former residents want to protect public housing, advocacy, and civil rights. The NPHM wants to create a place for social reflection, public dialogue, and education through the direct stories from former residents.

Public housing has had a long-standing history in Chicago, which has affected residents in a variety of ways. Palmer insisted that museum staff need to work with communities to help them express their different experiences and perspectives (personal interview, August 1, 2013). He also said that he was “interested to learn from the Hull-House [Museum] in terms of community curation” and community collaboration (personal interview, August 1, 2013).
Gurian has described how museums can provide communities with methods and structures for collecting their past, in order to study and alter current understandings accordingly, and pass accumulated wisdom on to future generations (2005:76-77). New and important research is helping to explain the importance of family, neighborhood, church, and other institutions that, when combined, can help us become individually safer, more disciplined and productive, and more communally responsible. According to Gurian, our collective opportunity is to ascertain how to create, restore, or re-create systems and organizations that can bring us greater measure of nonviolent human interaction.

To create the museum, staff at the NPHM are incorporating the many and diverse perspectives of scholars, architects, politicians, and museum professionals, as well as former residents. Similar to the practices at the Anacostia Community Museum, the NPHM also has a committee. Entitled the National Public Housing Museum Board, the goal of this committee is to preserve the stories and make a collection of oral histories on public housing. The stories collected are from board members themselves and former residents that are not on the board and are acting as volunteers. Through the NPHM website, anyone can submit their story or images that relate to public housing.

By involving people that come from different and complementary backgrounds, the museum strives to create a dialogue that includes as many different perspectives as possible (personal interview, August 1, 2013). Leo explained that the NPHM is different than other museums because it relies heavily on oral histories and documentation (personal interview, August 1, 2013). Although a heavy reliance on oral history is not that unusual in community museums, Leo did emphasize that by acquiring these histories
from board members themselves, the NPHM is unique. By having former residents on the board, I think they can have a greater appreciation and desire to preserve the many stories of public housing.

Up until late 2013, Leo stated that he worked closely with the committee members to gain their feedback and input during the planning of the museum and about its goals and programs. However, although Leo said he had “a positive feeling” about their planning process and the committee’s work in general, he recounted how some residents on the committee felt they were “not getting enough power or word in with the NPHM” (personal interview, August 1, 2013). This disagreement was causing tension, and was a challenge that Leo dealt with as a member of the staff. Such conflicts might continue to be a significant issue for the NPHM in the future as well if avoided.

Bernadette Lynch might consider the NPHM as a museum that is staying in their “comfort zone” (2011a). By not fully engaging with the residents, the museum is consequently supporting traditional power dynamics and authority over residents’ voices. This might lead to frustrations for the residents. It might also lead to residents not feeling a sense of ownership in the museum. Ideally, the NPHM should be a place where residents feel welcome to tell their story; and that inspires dialogue within and among communities.

This issue with the committee contradicts Palmer when he stated that he “wants to expose everything and everyone’s side of the story” regardless of how challenging this will be for the museum (personal interview, August 1, 2013). If the residents feel their story is not being heard by the committee, then the museum is not upholding one of its primary missions, which is to be a voice of the community. It seems, based on Leo’s
explanation of the lack of power felt by committee members to tell their story that the NPHM will continue to tell the story that has already been heard by politicians, architects, the media, and so forth rather than to present fresh stories told by community members. Without greater participation on the part of community members, the NPHM cannot claim to be a museum working for social justice.

Aside from this issue, Leo explained that “the different time periods of public housing have created a vast and obvious difference in opinions among the former and current residents” (personal interview, August 1, 2013). Many individuals who lived in public housing during the 1960s and 1970s do not share the same opinion of public housing residents in the late 1930s, or even the 1990s and 2000s. When discussing this, I asked Leo the time frame of the museum’s exhibits and he explained that they will end in 1974, but that there will be a space for a temporary exhibit that can touch on more current topics about public housing. As previously explained, public housing began to degrade starting in the later 1960s and early 1970s onward and violent crime became a significant problem in the 1980s. With this, I think it seems problematic that the NPHM would choose to leave these stories out of the museum. It could indicate to residents living in public housing after 1974 that their story is not as significant. Not only does this anger these former residents, but it also keeps the NPHM from telling a complete story of this history. This also contradicts Palmer’s purported goal of including everyone’s story. Nor does it support Palmer’s claim that the museum does not have a choice in what story they tell. If the former residents want this story included, then why is the museum making a choice to withhold it?
When I asked Leo why the staff is not including more recent history as well as recent stories, he stated that he could not give a precise answer to this question because it is “a very sticky subject in the museum” (personal interview, August 1, 2013). He also referred back to the temporary exhibit space and said that they hope to use this space to touch on current topics and will focus on the 1990s to the present. Since meeting with Leo, however, the NPHM has announced that their first exhibition *Four Apartments: Walls that Speak*, which is scheduled to premiere in 2015, will span a time period from 1938 to 2002 (National Public Housing Museum 2014a). The exhibit covers topics like social justice, race, and class through an experimental format that encourages participation and discussion. If this is the case when the exhibit premiers, then it appears that the NPHM now seems more aware of some of the possible issues they would encounter by ignoring topics that are more current and difficult to tell, like the ones listed above. Not until its opening day, however, will I be able to critically examine the topics the NPHM chose to touch on.

During our interview, Leo discussed whether or not the committee members felt empowered by being involved with the museum. Leo explained that although some residents on the committee felt empowered, many felt marginalized, “especially African Americans” (personal interview, August 1, 2013). Leo stated that “ethnically, residents [in Chicago public housing] are separate and different”. The public housing experiences for African Americans at Robert Taylor Homes and for Italian families at the Jane Addams Houses, for example, were different. The Robert Taylor Homes, Leo stressed, “Were very different from the Jane Addams Homes”. The buildings of the Robert Taylor Homes were placed in a previously segregated black neighborhood that did not offer
many opportunities for residents, for example. Leo went on to say that many African American residents felt disgruntled and disenfranchised during the degradation of public housing, especially the high rises (personal interview, August 1, 2013).

As much as the NPHM is trying very hard to involve everyone, every single story is different from the next, creating a story almost too complex to tell. To help combat this problem, Palmer hopes to incorporate personal oral histories with a unique hybrid of technology in the form of audio and video recordings (personal interview, August 1, 2013). Technology can help give exposure to more stories to help residents feel involved, as seen at the Chicago Historical Society’s *A City Comes of Age* exhibit mentioned in the “Background” chapter of this thesis.

The NPHM’s decision to incorporate various types of public housing complexes and contemporary public housing residents’ stories has shown that the collaborative approach to exhibition development has been, although difficult, positive and meaningful to the narrative and message of the museum. The museum has the right to choose certain public housing projects and set a certain time frame for the museum, but I think leaving out a group of residents that have often been let down by public housing and have experienced several hardships would only continue to marginalize these individuals. As long as the NPHM continues to recognize the various types of housing and time periods as well as these residents’ stories, the museum, in my opinion, will be successful in terms of telling a more holistic story of public housing. If the museum is going to be called the ‘National Public Housing Museum’ it should incorporate not only the diverse Chicago projects overtime, but also the varying demographics and locations of public housing throughout the country overtime.
Since my interview with Palmer, he explained to Journalist Lauren Gurley that the NPHM is a *national* museum that is using Chicago as a main case study (2014). Since the museum is in a real, former public housing building, the museum will have a greater ability to explain the stories of people that lived in nearby public housing buildings like Brooks Homes, Cabrini-Green, and the Altgeld Gardens. The close proximity of these homes to the former Jane Addams Homes will allow the museum to start a conversation about the many different public housing projects in Chicago (Gurley 2014). Palmer also said that the museum can start telling a national story because people will be surprised to learn that there are national figures, as explained below, such as Elvis, Bill Cosby, and Jimmy Carter, who grew up in public housing all over the country. According to Palmer, it is a national story that starts in Chicago. During the development of many public housing projects, many cities looked to Chicago. With this, Chicago is a relevant example on which to base a conversation about public housing.

In the same interview with Gurley, Palmer stated that the museum will explain the changing social policies that occurred in the fifties with political decisions that diverted money from cities to the suburbs (2014). In the fifties, the building at 1322 West Taylor Street was more than fifty percent white with many Italian families living there. This situation is different from that of the thirties when there was still a hopelessness in public housing during the Great Depression. In the fifties, when people started moving to the suburbs, there were still white people who were poor, as there are today, and they remember feeling that there was stigma attached to living in public housing that did not exist in the thirties (Gurley 2014). Then, in the sixties and seventies, black families started living in public housing. Many of these families were grateful for this housing
because there were not a lot of options for working class families. Public housing allowed these families to improve their living situations and they were, for the most part, happy (Gurley 2014). This explanation of the changes overtime and demographics makes me hopeful that the museum will incorporate an appropriate amount of diversity among its stories.

Leo could not say how the NPHM has encouraged people to think differently about public housing because the museum is not currently open (personal interview, August 1, 2013). He could, however, speak to how he thought the museum could be successful in combating common stereotypes of public housing. As previously stated, society has a poor perception of public housing due to the media. The NPHM is trying to focus on the positive aspects and the positive stories that came out of public housing (personal interview, August 1, 2013). They are looking at the people that were grateful for their housing and had a positive experience with it. For example, there was a large focus on musicians that emerged from public housing in their past exhibition *The Sound, the Soul, the Syncopation*, which was successful in highlighting the remarkable stories.

By focusing on the positive, the NPHM hopes to challenge the stereotypes associated with residents. The NPHM is focusing on the original intentions of public housing and, by sharing this original message, it will hopefully combat negativity. Leo felt that, thus far, this approach has been successful (personal interview, August 1, 2013). He explained that patrons that have visited the NPHM exhibits in the past, which I detail later in this chapter, “typically have a liberal stance coming into the exhibit and are ready to learn and change their mind” (personal interview, August 1, 2013). Leo explained, “Conservatives probably will not be attending this type of museum anyways.”
opinion, this is a problem in regards to combating stereotypes and reaching a greater audience. By knowing their audience, however, Leo thought they could be successful. The patrons coming are there to learn and see what is currently going on. They want to know what really happened. They are already interested in the topic and by building on this interest, negativity can be dispelled.

Chicago, and other cities affected by a strong public housing history, could shift away from focusing on the negativity that public housing brought these individuals and their city. As seen in “The Pruitt-Igoe Myth” documentary (Freidrichs 2012) and in Audrey Petty’s *High Rise Stories* (2013), this can help public housing residents feel empowered and help them be better understood. As explained on the National Public Housing Museum website, by focusing on the good, the museum can dispel the notion that these buildings failed people (National Public Housing Museum 2014b). This statement alone shows how little the NPHM knows about the history of public housing and the residents of these buildings, largely because in several instances these buildings did fail people. Aside from the buildings failing, these residents, like most people, carried on and adapted to the harsh living conditions they were up against.

With this, I suggest that cities should continue to collaborate with residents to better understand what these homes mean to individual residents, even if their opinions and experiences are not positive. Focusing on the positive can be a powerful way to learn more about public housing residents and human beings’ ability to survive, but the negative needs to be told in order to try to make a difference today for individuals still experiencing inadequate public housing services. The neglect and destruction in public housing that happened to many African American families in public housing is a part of
history and these individuals deserve to have their story heard. Would it truly be a national public housing museum if it did not mention African American public housing and the continued neglect of communities nation-wide?

When closing the interview with Leo, I asked him what other positive impacts he could see occurring as a result of the museum and if any programming will be involved. He explained that the NPHM has created a Youth Advisory Council (YAC) (personal interview, August 1, 2013). This program serves thirteen in-school youth, ages 14-21, who, at the time, were Chicago public housing residents. The youth represent communities across Chicago, including Dearborn Homes, Trumbull Park Homes, Stateway Gardens, and Harold Ickes Homes (National Public Housing Museum 2014a). As a part of this program, the YAC meets with the NPHM and goes to different museums and also visits colleges. YAC will also work with Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) as part of a violence counseling grant to promote anti-violence and to help them share this knowledge with their communities. Additionally, the museum will house the Center for Housing in Society, which will be a wing dedicated to scholarly research on public housing. Lastly, Leo commented that the museum has been busy fundraising for the past six years and has spent a lot of time and energy on this. Without these funds, programs like the ones explained above could not happen.

When Lauren Gurley discussed what other challenges the museum is facing, Palmer explained that there is a challenge in getting the public to enter the museum without preconceptions (2014). When people hear “public housing museum”, he expressed fear that the public will not understand why there is a museum about a history that seems to be about something that is bad. The NPHM is doing programming and has
been putting up sample exhibits all over Chicago to get public housing residents’ stories into the public sphere. He wants the public to see the NPHM’s vision. Similarly to the Holocaust Museum and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, the NPHM will raise consciousness about the issues that arose from public housing (Gurley 2014). This is to be a place where we think about our neighbors who are poor and the housing crisis that is striking many people of all economic groups, and how public housing fits into the future of our country.

Recommendations for the National Public Housing Museum

After examining what the NPHM has done thus far, in terms of exhibition topics, they appear to be creating exhibits that represent the positive stories of public housing. If these exhibits can represent a preview for what the NPHM plans to do, I would say that this museum could be effective in reaching their goal of telling remarkable and inspiring biographies. On the NPHM website, however, they state that their mission is to present exhibits that are “a living cultural experience on social justice and human rights that creatively re-imagine the future of our community” (National Public Housing Museum 2014b). The NPHM is “A place of stories that mine the vastly complex history of public and publicly subsidized housing in America”. However, I do not think these exhibits have spoken to these goals.

Today, as explained previously in this thesis, museums have become places to address contemporary topics that can sometimes create controversy due to exhibits often presenting an atypical perspective, or in other words, the minority. Lisa Yun Lee, visiting curator at the Hull-House Museum, asserts:
Public institutions have missions, but in order for them to also play a meaningful role in society as a site for restorative truth, they need to be informed by a sense of truth, morality and personal ethics which comes from the individuals who inhabit these spaces. This includes both staff and visitors. [2011:184]

She goes on to say that while many missions are crafted to last and endure through time, the nature of social justice is to challenge, change, and extend the horizon towards a better future. Social justice museums encourage critical thinking and questioning, which cultivate the emergence of a new political agent. These types of museums can be agents of social change.

Aside from some programming done for History Coming Home, the exhibits have not touched on social justice or human rights. The exhibits have been celebratory and about the extraordinary stories, not about the suffering and hardships that many families went through while living in public housing. These exhibits have not spoken of the complex stories, just the extraordinary. I hope that the NHPM plans to present topics that are harder to tell, that may create controversy or conflicting viewpoints. I suggest that the exhibits be more reflective and present the national story of public housing more critically. In order to understand and grow from what has happened in public housing, I think the museum should present a more balanced view of public housing. Ivan Karp points out that racial imagery and ethnocentrism can be communicated by what is not exhibited as well as by what is (1992:24). The museum should include the dark side of public housing in order to achieve social justice today. Only focusing on the positive, in my opinion, would continue to ignore what went wrong with public housing and the many families that suffered from poor policies.
In order for the NPHM museum to make exhibitions that can make a difference today, I suggest a few topics for temporary exhibitions and/or topics to be addressed in the permanent exhibits. First, I think it would be beneficial if the NPHM could develop a temporary exhibit on what the ideal public housing development might look like. To demonstrate that many perspectives are considered when creating these homes, the perspectives of the ideal home would be from former and current public housing residents, Chicago Housing Authority, City Planners, and so forth. I would set up the exhibit showing plans from Chicago Housing Authority, City Planners, non-public housing residents, and former residents. In the final portion of the exhibit, the ideal public housing for current residents would be shown. This way, visitors would be able to compare what non-residents think is ideal to what current residents actually need. In some instances, they might agree, and in some instances, they may not. This would show visitors how hard public housing development is and could also help visitors think about what they would want as well as realize what they would miss out on.

The idea for this exhibit comes from the Gary Hustwit documentary “Urbanized” (2011), which discusses design of cities and looks at the issues and strategies behind urban design. The film features some of the world’s foremost architects, planners, policymakers, builders, and thinkers as well as the everyday people living in housing projects. In the documentary, Alejandro Aravena, Founder and Executive Director of Elemental, explains how they are using participatory design in Santiago, Chile for their public housing project (Hustwit 2011). His design hopes to place people and their homes near jobs and opportunities, not to segregate them.
The strategy behind Elemental is to build the essential elements of a house. Through an open system of participatory design, where the home owner has a say in what the essential elements are, public resources and professional knowledge is used to build the first part of the house. During this stage residents expressed wanting windows, for example. Additionally, the residents, to the Aravena’s surprise, wanted a bathtub over a water heater because they would not have money to pay for the gas. The resident owns the house from this point. In the second phase, the families can expand and upgrade the house or they can choose to keep the house how they received it.

Aravena explains that “a housing project could perform as an investment and not as a mere social expense” (Hustwit 2011). Since the project started in 2001, the city has become safer and houses have gone up in value. But most importantly, the home owners are proud and grateful for the opportunity to help build their future. If the NPHM could incorporate the ideas behind participatory design and what Aravena has done at Elemental, possibly it could influence how Chicago Housing Authority is approaching public housing currently.

Next, I recommend that the NPHM create a temporary exhibit about the Plan for Transformation (Plan 10). Plan 10 was set forth to rehabilitate or replace the entire stock of public housing in Chicago, especially high rises (Chicago Housing Authority 2011). Whereas Richard J. Daley, mayor from 1955 until 1976, ushered in the revolution in high-rise public housing in Chicago his son Richard M. Daley, mayor from 1980 until 2010, was at the helm of its systematic dismantling. In sum, Mayor Richard M. Daley wanted to “rebuild people’s souls” (Petty 2013:20). Nearly nineteen thousand Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) units in 1998 failed viability inspection mandated by the
Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), meaning that under Federal
law, the CHA was required to demolish those units within five years. In 1999, the CHA
initiated the Plan for Transformation, also referred to as Plan 10 (Petty 2013).

Approved by HUD in 2000, the stated goals of Plan 10 are to renew the physical
structure of CHA properties, promote self-sufficiency for public housing residents, de-
concentrate poverty, and reform the administration of the CHA (Petty 2013). Other
intentions of Plan 10, according to the CHA website, are to reconnect community, rebuild
self-esteem of residents, and transform the residents’ role in Chicago, (Chicago Housing
Authority 2013). The Plan for Transformation has become known as the largest
renovation of public housing to this day and the CHA are working to reflect on lessons
learned from previous public housing initiatives. The plan hopes to incorporate mixed
income and racial neighborhoods, create flexibility in regulations created by Federal
funding, and actually implement all the objectives of the plan. Public housing residents
do not want any more broken promises. As of 2013, however, the city’s ten-year project
was officially behind schedule and the completion date for the plan has been extended to
2015 (Petty 2013:21).

From the start, many CHA residents responded to the Plan for Transformation
with skepticism and resistance (Petty 2013). Tenants banned together and voiced their
concerns. According to the CHA, however, this plan is working. As stated on their
website (http://www.thecha.org/about/plan-for-transformation/), Plan 10 is
communicating and collaborating with many diverse people involved with public housing
developments in order to address these concerns (Chicago Housing Authority 2013).
CHA formed the Working Group, which consists of stakeholders, residents, CHA, HUD,
city departments, political leaders, lawyers, and developers in order to plan the
developments as a collaborative team (Chicago Housing Authority 2013). This group
gets together and discusses what types of housing, aesthetics, rules, and services need to
come from public housing. The CHA also stresses, that in terms of needs, every single
family is looked at individually to meet its particular needs.

Collaboration means there should be a better process of informal discussion and
engagement with people, as opposed to formal, discrete public participation required by
regulation (Wood and Landry 2008). Residents should be able to voice their concerns
directly to the people in charge of public housing. The method of collaboration was not
always used by past city planners and architects and this practice is crucial for the success
of planning buildings that work for communities (Qadeer 2009). Everyone involved in
developing public housing needs to understand how communities work as well as what
they want and that is exactly what the CHA claims to be doing.

The CHA claims to have learned from its past mistakes. So what is delaying the
plan? There is no mention of Plan 10 being behind schedule on the CHA website, but
Audrey Petty explains that as of 2013:

Rebuilding has not kept pace with demolition, and a great number of displaced
families now find themselves in poor and underserved neighborhoods like
Roseland and Englewood (see Appendix B) on the city’s South Side, using
housing vouchers to rent privately owned homes, some more distressed and
dangerous than their former CHA-maintained properties. [2013:21]

By demolishing so many public housing homes and replacing the old homes with fewer
units, residents are forced back into overpopulated areas, which was what public housing
was initially created to prevent in the first place. In the film “The Field: Violence, Hip-
Hop, and Hope in Chicago” a resident of Chicago’s Englewood neighborhood refers to
his community as an overpopulated slum now that so many more people have moved into their already overpopulated neighborhood (Lovett 2014). Nothing has been settled and communities remain broken. As much as the CHA wants to claim that they have made public housing better for people, according to the people actually affected by public housing, these residents are still displaced and are still waiting for their promises to be kept. Despite CHA’s step in the right direction with forming the Working Group, in order for it to really be a “working group,” residents should get the housing that they expressed needing and the housing that they were told they would receive.

As explained by Todd Palmer, public housing issues are now, real, personal, and hard for many people in Chicago to productively talk about (personal interview, August 1, 2013). Just as the National Public Housing Museum (NPHM) is working with the committee to collaborate with former public housing residents, the CHA needs to do the same. Maybe the NPHM could work with the CHA and public housing residents, former and current, to discuss what changes need to happen in today’s housing crisis. The NPHM could create a traveling mobile exhibit describing the challenges and compromises they came to. If the NPHM chose to be more controversial, maybe they could create an exhibit showing the demands of Chicago residents in need of housing assistance from CHA.

Along with illustrating the planned objectives of Plan 10, this exhibit could touch on what happens after failed high rise buildings get demolished. It could give voice to the residents that lost their homes and where they found new homes, whether in new public housing residences in the same neighborhood or relocated to a new neighborhood.
This exhibit could speak to the issues explained above, which have already been topics of discussion in *High Rise Stories* (Petty 2013) and “Pruitt-Igoe Myth” (Freidrichs 2012).

It might also be interesting to show examples of renovations that have the potential for success. An example of this can be seen in Denver, Colorado. Currently, the city is working on revitalizing a 15-acre site in the South Lincoln community, which is currently home to more than 200 distressed public housing units from the 1950s (Daigneau 2013). Originally set to be completed in 2018, the redevelopment is now on track to hit a 2016 deadline. Since this project has not been completed, it is important to note that it can only be an example of a potentially good case study since no research or evidence supports how the renovation and planning worked for residents. Once completed the renovation will include up to 900 new public housing and market-rate units (Daigneau 2013; Denver Public Housing 2015). These homes will be rejuvenated, walkable, transit-oriented, healthy, sustainable, and consisting of mixed-income residents.

Kimball Crangle, senior developer at the Denver Housing Authority, explains: “We let the community talk to us and tell us and guide us about what type of development makes sense for them” (Daigneau 2013:2). In this statement, Crangle is referring to the comprehensive predevelopment outreach, which drew from community feedback as well as a health impact assessment. Overall, residents stressed wanting to leverage its attributes while mitigating the spillover effects from South Lincoln’s obsolete housing and deep poverty.

The highlights of this redevelopment include units for seniors and the disabled as well as job training programs including youth activities and art classes (Daigneau 2013).
A community “health navigator” will be on site to work one-on-one with residents to help them improve their health. Next, about 65 percent of residents do not own a car, so public transit is essential (Daigneau 2013:3). Key to the development, is the proximity to the light-rail. Scholarships are being offered for bike-share memberships and substantial bike infrastructure is being built including paths and racks to encourage cycling.

The buildings have also been designed to be 50 percent more efficient than current building codes mandate and be a minimum of LEED Gold (Daigneau 2013:3). When finished, the community hopes to get 85 percent of its power from renewable energy, including solar panels and geothermal heating and cooling. Lastly, during the planning phase, a health impact assessment revealed that 55 percent of South Lincoln’s residents were overweight (Daigneau 2013:3). To improve this percentage, sidewalks have been widened to encourage walking and other activity and the placement of staircases will be front and center to entice their use over elevators. Community gardens will be added and personnel will be available to help residents learn how to garden. Youth will also have the opportunity for learning about nutrition and culinary job training.

Lastly, I suggest an exhibit that speaks to the strict policies, degradation of the buildings, and possibly even crime in public housing. This exhibition could fuse the work done by researchers and authors like Sudhir Venkatesh (2008) and James Vigil (2007) as well as present first-hand oral histories from previous or current residents like seen in “Pruitt-Igoe” (2012), “The Field” (2014), and High Rise Stories (2013). Documenting this history can help visitors to the museum have a greater understanding of why some residents are angry with Chicago public housing.
Initially, an assessment of the policies on residents could help shed light onto how these restrictions negatively influenced the residents and public housing as a whole. As previously explained, mothers that were on aid from the government were not allowed to have an unmarried man present in the house (Chicago Housing Authority 2013). Although the CHA was trying to help residents this policy created larger problems like limiting the household income and not allowing money to be invested back into the homes. From here, the exhibit could evaluate what went wrong, including the common problems encountered by residents like backed-up incinerators, perpetually broken elevators, and infestations of roaches and vermin (Petty 2013). The exhibit could explain how the buildings failed its residents.

Following the degradation of these buildings, an explanation for the high crime rates is necessary. Chicago high rise projects, in their final years, were no longer a community (Petty 2013:12). By the end, violence had frayed the sense of community for many residents. The violence left behind both physical and emotional wreckage so deep and so profound for some that it altered their lives, as seen in “Pruitt-Igoe” (Freidrichs 2012; Petty 2013). The exhibit could offer a place for discussion, sharing, closure, understanding, and reflection. Along with my recommendation for a discussion on previous crime in public housing, an exhibit speaking to the current violence in Chicago, especially in South and West Side neighborhoods, in my opinion, is crucial. As I will explain later in this chapter, shootings and crime are still a serious problem in certain areas of Chicago. An exhibit speaking to this issue is relevant and a pressing social problem for many people.
As questioned in the HBO series “VICE: Gangs & Oil”, “If the rest of America got safer in the 90s, how did the gang problem here [in Chicago] get even worse?” (Maher 2013). This episode goes on to question why only certain areas of Chicago are becoming tiny war zones. This documentary explains that throughout the 2000s Chicago demolished its inner-city projects in hopes of breaking up the gangs that more or less ruled them. By doing this, gang members were relocated throughout Chicago and the surrounding suburbs. The documentary argues that this is why the violence has not decreased, especially in certain neighborhoods (Maher 2013). Former gang members explain that a lot of gang affiliated public housing residents had never lived outside of those buildings (Maher 2013). Once the city tore down their homes and relocated these individuals, some residents did not know how else to protect their new territory, except with violence. A youth from Chicago explains that this created new gang territories, two completely different subcultures in the same community. He says that now, everyone shoots it out instead of talking it out (Maher 2013). Once a certain territory is crossed, shootings start and the two areas go into gang warfare. An exhibit illustrating the violence that is claimed to have increased due to the demolitions of public housing could help bring awareness to this issue. It could help Plan 10 reevaluate what former and current residents need.

Father Michael Pfledge, Englewood Priest and social activist, explains in the documentary that we have to deal with guns (Maher 2013). “Most African Americans do not want to use a gun to survive”, Pfledge explains. Chicago has ignored violence, in his opinion, because it has been primarily a black and brown problem. Pfledge stresses that there has been a conscious decision to let some communities fall apart as long as it is
contained, but drugs and violence are seeping into other neighborhoods. Pfledge begs Chicago to wake up and deal with this growing issue. Furthermore, Jacqueline Collins, Illinois State Senator 16th District, agrees that there have been decades of a lack of resources in communities that are experiencing a higher rate of violence. She says, “There are consequences to failed economic and political policies and most communities of color in Chicago are facing these” (Maher 2013). These neighborhoods have high unemployment rates, failing schools, foreclosures, and closing mental institutions and hospitals. Overall, an exhibit on this topic would be controversial. It additionally would run the risk of losing donors that are associated with Chicago politics as well as the Chicago Housing Authority. Collins an Illinois Senator and Pfledge a Priest, however, hold important roles in Chicago and are speaking up to bring awareness to this issue. With this, maybe others would do the same. Regardless to the risks associated with this exhibit topic, I recommend that the NPHM create exhibits that deal with current social issues of public housing residents and the violence in Chicago because it is too serious of an issue to ignore.

To close this section, the last foreseeable problem with the NPHM, in my opinion, is its location. This thesis has touched on community museums and has explained the importance of their location to the communities they are trying to serve and collaborate or consult with. In terms of a National Public Housing Museum, I do agree that Chicago is a good place to nationally discuss public housing because of Chicago’s long standing history with public housing. As the NPHM website explains, “Few cities have a more dramatic connection to public housing than Chicago, home to some of the first urban public housing efforts in the nation. In no other city has the transformation of existing
public housing been so rapid and thorough” (National Public Housing Museum 2015a). I am, however, concerned with the NPHM being in the Little Italy neighborhood of Chicago.

Little Italy, located in Chicago’s Near West Side neighborhood (see Appendix B), has been home to the greatest concentration of Italian immigrants in Chicago’s history as far back as the 1850s (Chicago Traveler 2015). Today, this community is densely populated, diverse, and is still home to many Italian families. Due to the close proximity to the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), many of the inhabitants of the area are students. As the neighborhood became more affluent, young professionals have started buying condominium space in the area, most likely recent graduates of UIC (Chicago Traveler 2015). This neighborhood, although diverse, is largely a college town. This makes me question why the NPHM chose this site, especially because the majority of this neighborhood does not rely on public housing. Additionally, for those who live in neighborhoods reliant on public housing on the South and West Sides, they will need to travel to Little Italy in order to be actively involved with the museum. This could limit these residents ability to participate in programming and other various activities due to issues like transportation, cost, and time.

A big factor in choosing this location, as I inferred from the NPHM website, was that the museum was to be in the last remaining Jane Addams Homes building of the ALBA apartments (National Public Housing Museum 2015a). To make this museum work, I recommend that the NPHM use this building, and stories from the other ALBA homes, to tell the history of the degradation of public housing. The historic ALBA Homes (Jane Addams Homes, Robert Brooks Homes, Loomis Courts, and Grace Abbott
Homes) were located in Little Italy and extended into neighborhoods just west of there. Originally, these homes were intended for European immigrant families and once black families started moving in, many of the Europeans left. Eventually, as the buildings began to fail due to a lack of funding, gangs began to rule these homes. Since 2007, all of these buildings have been demolished due to gang and drug problems, except the Jane Addams Homes building (Petty 2013). If the NPHM touches on this, I think it could more holistically discuss the issues associated with race and public housing in Chicago.

The location of the NPHM makes me wonder if this choice has offended African American former or current public housing residents due to the NPHM being located in Little Italy and not in a community where public housing is in greater need. I wonder why the NPHM founders did not want to build the museum in a neighborhood like Cabrini-Green, Englewood, or other neighborhoods that have been negatively impacted by the failures of public housing. In my opinion, this could have made the museum more powerful for communities that are currently in need of resources and social institutions.

If the NPHM would have looked to the Anacostia Community Museum as a model, maybe they would have changed its location. The NPHM website lists the District Six Museum, the Tenement Museum, and the Hull-House Museum as current examples of museums that the NPHM plans to model itself after (National Public Housing Museum 2015a). Before, the NPHM only mentioned modeling itself after the Tenement Museum and the Hull-House Museum, which led me to think that the museum would be mainly about European immigrant stories. Since the mention of the District Six Museum as a model for the NPHM is new to the website, I am hopeful that the museum will present a more diverse story than I previously thought.
Recent Changes at the National Public Housing Museum

As noted earlier, since I interviewed Leo in 2013, he has resigned from his position at the NPHM and is pursuing a different career path. Additionally, since meeting with Palmer in 2013, his title has changed to Associate Director/Curator. In December 2014, the NPHM chose Charles Leeks as their new Executive Director. In late March of 2015, he was introduced to the community and officially took over Palmer’s position (National Public Housing Museum 2015c). Leeks has a long history in community building and engagement. The NPHM website explains:

As a strong advocate of asset-based community development he saw the value of utilizing the powerful stories of communities and the physical environment as ways to foster social justice within communities and to affect policy that helps determine outcomes in those communities. [2015c]

The website goes on to explain that this was particularly true in Chicago’s North Lawndale community where Leeks has been director of the program for Neighborhood Housing Services of Chicago (NHS). Leeks focused on “image, physical conditions, and community engagement in the affordable housing arena as a way to change perceptions about such communities” (National Public Housing Museum 2015c).

During his tenure at NHS in North Lawndale, he participated in projects and partnerships with the University of Illinois at Chicago. Leeks developed the Historic Chicago Greystone Initiative, and developed Lawndale exhibits featured at the Chicago Architecture Foundation. The NPHM explains:

His understanding of historic preservation, his ability to create strong community, and his understanding of how to build institutions will serve NPHM well as we move forward to securing our building and creating the permanent museum. A resident of public housing in his early childhood, he developed abiding respect for
the broad societal benefits offered by an opportunity to provide quality housing to those families that were outside the private market looking in. [2015c]

While working for NHS he considered the outcomes for Chicago Housing Authority developments, including Ogden Courts, Harrison Courts, and the Lawndale Complex (National Public Housing Museum 2015c).

Since Leeks started at the NPHM, the museum has also taken on a new mission. The NPHM website states:

The National Public Housing Museum is a place of stories that mine the vastly complex history of public and publicly subsidized housing in America. The Museum creates a living cultural experience on social justice and human rights that creatively re-imagine the future of our community, our society, and our spaces. NPHM is not just about the preservation of stories, it is about helping to preserve society’s highest ideals. [National Public Housing Museum 2015c]

The museum additionally has a new series of programming called “The Public Good”.

On their programming calendar the NPHM explains:

The National Public Housing Museum is the first cultural institution in the United States dedicated to interpreting the American experience in public housing. The Museum draws on the power of place and memory to illuminate the resilience of poor and working class families of every race and ethnicity to realize the promise of America. [National Public Housing 2015b]

Starting in April of 2015 and going into 2016, the NPHM will have a series of programming that “will create alliances across museums, universities, policymakers, and practitioners, and most importantly, will engage the public in a timely and urgent public discourse” (National Public Housing Museum 2015b). Through panels, roundtables, keynotes, photography, films, and plays the Public Good series focuses on potential solutions to disinvestment in public housing, education, healthcare, and transportation. Topics will include rebuilding public housing, New York City public housing, housing
insecurity, and America’s responsibility to the poor (National Public Housing Museum 2015b).

It is possible that in hiring Leeks the NPHM might be able to ensure that the permanent museum will encompass a wide variety of perspectives. Given his highly relevant background, community members might feel more comfortable with him as Executive Director, and trust him to make the appropriate choices regarding the museum’s mission.

**Jane Addams Hull-House Museum and Report to the Public: An Untold Story of the Conservative Vice Lords**

The Jane Addams Hull-House Museum in Chicago has a commitment to linking research, education, and social engagement (Jane Addams Hull-House Museum 2014). The museum’s mission is to create exhibitions that bring awareness to social injustice and give voice to people not usually heard. A fine example of an exhibit that exemplified its mission is *Report to the Public: An Untold Story of the Conservative Vice Lords*, which opened in Chicago’s Logan Square neighborhood on June 22, 2012 and was there until December 2012. Its host was Art in These Times, an occasional venue for temporary exhibits that is primarily a local Chicago magazine office space.
The exhibit, which was sponsored and put together by the Hull-House, was intended to promote dialogue about gangs and the opportunity for creating social change by presenting the history of the Conservative Vice Lords (CVL). The exhibition asked, “Can gang members become forces for positive social change?” (Ranallo 2012). By using CVL history, the exhibit hoped to encourage people currently in gangs to make a positive change in their communities. The exhibition questioned what defines a gang (Figure 1) and shows diverse examples of them in order to expand people’s understanding and attempted to dispel stereotypes to show more of what a gang actually is (Kass 2012). Some examples of gangs are Mayor Daley’s Hamburg Athletic Club, the Chicago Outfit, and a Christian prayer gang.

Along with showing images of other Chicago gangs throughout history, this section allowed visitors to become part of the exhibition (Figure 2), as they could write their own meaning of gangs on a sheet of paper and post it alongside the wall, creating a dynamic and interactive display (Anaya 2012).
The CVL story was told by collaborating with former members to help create the narrative of the exhibition. The CVL story is unique, as explained in the background chapter of this thesis, and deserves to be told. As stated by Lisa Junkin, Interim Director at the Hull-House Museum, “The exhibition isn’t meant to glorify or demonize gangs, rather, it challenges widely held views of gang members as unredeemable thugs through an untold story of the Conservative Vice Lords fighting for the life of their community.” (Anaya 2012:1). By understanding their story, people can begin to see that gang members can and have contributed to positive social change. The exhibit was intended to transform one’s definition of a gang, redefining the word and bringing insight to a group that fought to change North Lawndale.

When I interviewed Lisa Junkin in the summer of 2013, she gave me two transcriptions of interviews with former CVL. At the time of the creation of Report to the Public, Junkin was the manager/co-curator and education coordinator at the Hull-House Museum. For the exhibit, she selected the collections, made labels, and held community meetings with the CVL, which was where I first meet Junkin and the CVL (as explained in the “Introduction” chapter of this thesis). When I asked her about her philosophy in museum practice, she explained that museums are unique places to learn and reflect (personal interview, August 2, 2013). According to Junkin, museums make us who we are by helping us make reconnections with both the past and present. They allow visitors to have a “transformative experience by asking hard questions and answering them.” (personal interview, August 2, 2013).
*Report to the Public* is remarkable for many reasons, due to the population being represented as well as the methods with which the museum chose to represent them. In Junkin’s words the *Report to the Public* exhibition is particularly special because it “was created with shared authority between the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum and the CVL” (personal interview, August 2, 2013). First person voices were used for the narrative of the exhibit and audio recordings were also available in the exhibit from Benneth Lee, former CVL, Dr. John Hagedorn, professor of criminology, and Anne Zelle, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago employee that helped develop Art & Soul in North Lawndale (Figure 3).

Junkin explained that although the experience of working with the CVL was overall positive and beneficial to the museum and North Lawndale, many obstacles developed that the staff did not foresee. Initially, there were several issues with getting the former gang members to come to the museum for meetings. To start, Junkin did not personally know how to get in contact with these individuals and was relying on a connection she had with a former gang member that was in charge of contacting other CVL. This was hard because Junkin did not have control over scheduling these appointments and explaining what exactly the museum was hoping to do. Additionally, many CVL did not feel comfortable meeting with Junkin, did not have a way to get to the
museum, and were busy working at the time of the meetings (personal interview, August 2, 2013). Some individuals, as Junkin explained, demanded money in exchange for their stories. The Hull-House was able to offer food and small stipends to certain individuals that participated.

Junkin struggled with the fact that there was not a lot of recorded history about the CVL, and thus creating content for the exhibit was difficult. Aside from a few news articles, there was no documentation because the CVL were originally a criminal enterprise (personal interview, August 2, 2013). In this respect, Junkin heavily relied on first person narratives. Once former gang members started coming regularly to community meetings, issues arose when creating a consensus on certain aspects of the exhibit. Since the story was mainly based on oral histories and memory, many CVL had conflicting perspectives (personal interview, August 2, 2013). Many of the individuals Junkin met with were also older, and in and out of homelessness, often battling addictions, and were sometimes involved in criminal activity that possibly made them twist their story to avoid incriminating themselves. Female former gang members were also hard to find because very few women were willing to identify themselves as a former Vice Lady. Consequently, their history was not as strongly developed in the exhibit as other sections.

In addition, Junkin wanted the former gang members to help install the exhibit and write the labels and interpretive material as seen at the Chicago History Museum when they created an exhibit about unions. In this exhibit, union members wrote the labels and Junkin thought this would be a good idea for the CVL. However, since many of these individuals could not read or write, they were not able to contribute in this way.
The Hull-House wished they could have taught the CVL better museum skills, but realized through interacting with them that they needed help with other issues, like battling addiction, improving their reading and writing skills, and finding work.

When working with communities, the literature shows that although museums may have established goals, these goals can quickly change once the staff meet with their community. Based on her study of museums and communities, Crooke suggests that staff should get to know the community before the planning process (2007). As seen when Junkin met with CVL, she needed to adapt her agenda to the needs and abilities of her community. The museum should understand what individuals in the community need and how they can create a mutually beneficial partnership. Overall, the relations between museums and communities rest upon the moral agency of the institution and its participation in creating an improved society (Marstine 2011:10).

Richard Sandell, professor of museum studies, explains that along with new museum ethics comes the recognition of social well-being, equity, and fairness as an integral part of museum work (2011:135-136). Many authors have shown how increasing engagement with politically and morally charged contemporary issues has opened the museum up to more diverse audiences and to more democratic and collaborative modes of practice. The concept of the museum as a site of moral activist challenges and reconfigures widely supported positions on rights issues. This conception of the museum is also fraught with challenges and can generate opposition (Sandell 2011:142-143). But, Sandell argues, these challenges should not deter towards the development of more socially engaged, responsible, and ethnically informed museum practice.
I asked Junkin if she thought the method of collaboration created a positive experience for all individuals involved in the development process, despite challenges. Junkin responded saying that “it created a mutually beneficial experience” because she worked closely with Benneth Lee, former CVL, on weeding out certain conflicting stories and this helped them breach gaps in knowledge and come to a reasonable consensus (personal interview, August 2, 2013). When asking Junkin if she thought the CVL felt empowered by the exhibit, she stressed that “they were very proud.” (personal interview, August 2, 2013). The CVL liked that people were finally taking notice of their accomplishments and felt empowered by this opportunity to be involved with the exhibit. They were vocal about their frustrations with the exhibit content, but overall it was a positive experience for them.

Moreover, I asked Junkin if she thought the exhibition had encouraged people to think differently about gangs. Junkin explained that the exhibit, right from the start, showed multiple perspectives on gangs (personal interview, August 2, 2013). It showed that the word “gang” means different things to different people and that not all people see gangs as bad. From this exhibit, people were able to see different definitions of gangs and hear firsthand from what being in a gang was like for the CVL. It allowed visitors to think differently and have a more personal relationship with the stories.

Despite all of the challenges collaboration created for the Hull-House, Junkin thought the exhibit was a success and around 300 people showed up for the opening night, many from North Lawndale. Junkin stressed “that for the life of the exhibit to continue after its premier, the gang members needed to take control of the exhibit and have it be a part of their community.” (personal interview, August 2, 2013). She related
that she can no longer push for the CVL to find a permanent home for the exhibit in their community, and furthermore, she felt that she could not be the voice of the CVL because she was not a member of their community. Junkin gave them as much knowledge as she could but it was ultimately up to them to keep the exhibit alive. They needed to want to share their work. Fortunately, former CVL located a temporary home for the exhibit and it opened on November 1st, 2013 at a North Lawndale community church, Spirit of Truth Church (Jane Addams Hull-House Museum 2014). This exhibit was being used to teach youth in North Lawndale that violence is not the answer and to inspire them to change their lives just as the former community members did in the past. Former CVL were running the new space, including Benneth Lee, and were serving as community educators and history keepers. The exhibit has closed since then and is awaiting a new location. Originally Lee wanted the exhibit to travel to different locations in order to reach more visitors and this is something the Hull-House is still trying to do.

After meeting with Junkin, she sent me a transcription of an interview with Benneth Lee, also known as Benny. He was affiliated with the Conservative Vice Lord branch of the Vice Lords (unpublished audio transcriptions, October 25, 2012). In Junkin’s interview with Lee, she asks him how he would describe his affiliation with the museum project and Report to the Public. He replied that Bobby Gore wanted the cofounders of the CVL to tell their story. Gore, while going through old pictures and newspaper clippings, told Lee that he would hate for all his work to be in vain and that he would hate for the material he saved to go to waste. With this, Lee suggested to Gore that they compile their material and stories into a book explaining their experiences through their own perspectives. Then Lee thought, maybe a museum would be a good
idea. Lee explains to Junkin that both Lee and Gore laughed at the idea, which I think is because they knew that museums are not typically about gangs.

When Lee left Gore’s house, he really started to think about it. Lee called Gore back and told him that they should really try to create a museum about the CVL. From the start, they wanted to use their materials to educate young people in order to show them what positive, anti-violent work the CVL did in the 60s. At the time, Lee was working with Dr. John Hagedorn at University of Illinois, Chicago and passed his idea on to him. From there, Hagedorn introduced Lee to Lisa Junkin. Junkin thought Lee and Gore had a good idea and met with Lee to discuss how to get the project started.

In the same interview, Junkin asks Lee if he thought the museum project was glorifying gangs (unpublished audio transcriptions, October 25, 2012). Lee said no and stressed that the project’s purpose is to educate the youth. The project is there to help youth learn about what happened in the 1960s. The exhibit is highlighting the efforts of the CVL, what they tried to do and actually did. Lee hopes that through their story, young people can say “well, we have a role in the community too.” The project is targeting high school and college-age people (unpublished audio transcriptions, October 25, 2012). From the beginning, Lee wanted the exhibit to be a traveling exhibit that would not only touch on CVL, but tell the whole history of the Black Power Movement: what it looked like, what the whole Civil Rights Movement looked like in Chicago. Lee saw the project as a tool to raise consciousness, not just highlight and glorify the Vice Lords, which is why, Lee explains, he and Gore chose to focus on the Conservative branch and not the entire Vice Lords history (unpublished audio transcriptions, October 25, 2012). The project does not touch on the violent gangbanger history in order to show
that there was a model that was adopted that was positive. Lee states that youth in Chicago, New York, Detroit, and other major cities were organizing and getting money from the government to help improve their community. This is the history that most people do not know. This history was not typically featured on the nightly news.

Lee explains that his heart is in this project because it is a foundation he can stand on (unpublished audio transcription, October 25, 2012). Once the project can grab youth and college aged people’s attention, then he can educate them. His goal is to raise their awareness and get them to look at themselves differently, to look at their role in the community differently, and to look at a possible future. Lee states that young people in communities where there is a sense of hopelessness can benefit from this education. Lee says,

Every year you have young people coming out of high school, really wanting to go to college, but their families do not have the necessary resources or knowledge to support them getting there. And so the young people get frustrated and they end up in junior college, and their families don’t have what it takes to get ‘em engaged in college or support them, and eventually they drop out of college and are back in the community out of desperation, trying to make it in the best way they can. [unpublished audio transcription, October 25, 2012]

Lee wants this project to raise awareness in young people and older people alike. His message is that we, as communities, need to get behind our young people. Lee understands what it is like to be trapped in the gang life at a young age as well as the drug and penitentiary life. He wants to put all he has into the project in order to get this message to the youth.

To close the interview, Junkin asks Lee, “So pretend I’m the person you’re getting the message out to. What do you tell me?” Lee says “the message is: gangs are here in Chicago. Violence is here, unnecessary killings, young people are getting killed.”

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Young people are afraid to excel in life because of the pressures around them. He hopes that this project will be a place, a safe place where young people can come and raise their awareness. Lee explains, “...it will be a place I can bring those young people that are out there doing shootings, out there doing the gangbanging and drug selling, to bring them so they can re-think what they’re doing.” He will bring them to the museum to raise their awareness and hopefully make them look at themselves differently, see themselves positively functioning in their communities. Lee wants to show them that there is a better way to maneuver through life in spite of everything going on around them. Bobby Gore and the rest of the Vice Lords did not always have the backing of their community, the support of the community. They were looked upon as a street gang. So they took all that came their way and still moved on to better their community. Eventually the community believed in what they were doing.

Lee states that not everyone believed in the CVL because there was a message out there that is still around today. He explains this message, “...once a gang member, always a gang member.” Lee was incarcerated for over 27 years and is still being punished for what he was convicted of over twenty-eight years ago. He has been sober for 28 years. He went from being a high school dropout to now having a master’s degree in teaching. He went from a street player to now being a husband. He used to think children were a handicap, but now he has a son, three daughters, and a grandson. Still, Lee explains, there are people in society that say, “Benny Lee still needs to be watched.” There are still those barriers that an unforgiving, powerful group in society set. Those barriers, Lee thinks, which were set on
him and many other people like him that never believe a person can change (unpublished audio transcription, October 25, 2012). Lee believes these barriers were set up to benefit the people that created them in the first place. Although these barriers are there, by never giving up and continuing to better your community and yourself, life will improve.

*Report to the Public* was successful in asking many tough questions. It asked its visitors what a gang is and made viewers see that not all gang members are bad. In a *Lakefront Historian* review about the exhibit, blogger Devin Hunter explains that the exhibit commemorates CVL history and reminds us that hope can grow out of foundations of a crisis (2012). Today, shootings and gang related violence is high, especially in Chicago. This persistent media coverage on gang violence trains us to understand loose associations of urban youth as the inevitable cause of violence and disruption. It avoids conversations about the social and economic foundations of inner-city violence. As Hunter explains, “Continual gang violence also makes it difficult to remember a time when some street gangs shifted from illicit activities and violence to community service and legitimate political activity.” (2012:2). The continued negative media coverage avoids reminding society of the gang members that made a difference. Through *Report to the Public* visitors can learn about the urban crisis of the 1960s that called for innovative partnerships between legitimate institutions and gangs. Hunter states, “This timely exhibit questions the absolute ties between street gangs and destructive violence, suggesting that groups of frustrated young people are not destined to wreak the community havoc so prevalent on the evening news.” (2012:2). By focusing on the efforts made by the CVL to stop violence and better their community, this exhibit
was, in my opinion, successful in showing visitors that gangs have embodied empowerment, community, and conscious building.

Unlike the NPHM, I think the Report to the Public exhibit was smart to not mention the negative, dark, and violent history of the Vice Lords. The media has and continues to tell the story of violence in gang-ridden neighborhoods; this story has already been told. As explained by Lisa Yun Lee exhibits use history as a lens through which to understand and approach contentious topics and to engage the public on critical social issues that are too often evaded and avoided in “polite society” (2011:183). By telling the story of the CVL, visitors were sometimes able to gain a new perspective on gangs, their members, and communities. Along with teaching the general public about these changes, youth and gang-affiliated people may have been inspired to change their own lives.

According to Elaine H. Gurian, a focus on community-centered museums allows communities an outlet for local histories to stay alive (2006:7). All humans have history and should have access to it. She explains, personal experiences are a strong medium and a valuable teaching tool. Report to the Public is a fine example of a valuable teaching tool, told through local history. This benefits the museum, by gaining this untold history, and also the CVL, by giving them the space to share their story and inspire others. As James Clifford also explains, museums should become a space that benefits both the museum and the culture being represented (1997). It should be a space for cross-cultural dialogues, source community expertise, and consultation.

This exhibit was a step in the right direction to inform institutions and politicians that Chicago is nearing a point of radical innovation in dealing with gang violence
(Hunter 2012). This exhibit showed the community of North Lawndale and surrounding
neighborhoods that gang members do not always remain violent gang members. Positive
changes can occur within communities and gangs, and from hearing from former gang
members, youth can start to think about pursuing new paths. Gang members can realize
what role they play in their community. Ivan Karp and Steven P. Lavine think that if the
museum community continues to explore multicultural and intercultural terrain
consciously and deliberately, it can play a role in reflecting and mediating claims of
various groups and perhaps help construct a new idea of themselves (1991:8). Being in a
gang, after learning about the CVL, does not have to be a negative membership.

Museums can start to understand that for every different community they reach
out to, there will be a new, different set of challenges. In order to learn from these
challenges, museums should communicate and share their experiences in order to be
prepared to take on new ones. David Thelen, historian and professor emeritus at Indiana
University, explains:

What is needed to deepen community and museum collaboration is a format that
can encourage both community and museum people to reflect about the strengths
and weaknesses, the surprising discoveries that accompany their attempts to move
beyond networking and ‘buy-ins’ to build sustained collaborations, to co-create,
to empower each other, even to envision how such collaborations provide
glimpses of a greater civic purpose within a museum. [2005:336]

Instead of shying away from complex dialogues, museums should continue to share their
challenges, learn from them, and continue to make exhibits that tell often untold stories.

I think it is important for museums to be as transparent as they can. Thelen
suggests that museum directors or other officials report candidly the challenges and
problems they had encountered and perhaps failed to solve (2005:337). The museum
professionals I interviewed were honest with me when talking about the challenges they encountered. In my opinion, this honesty is what can be helpful to other museum professionals. Revealing these challenges is what helps museums grow and learn as civic institutions. It is not always easy for museums to identify the best process to follow when involving communities (Thelen 2005). The interests of local museums and community groups may be so diffuse that first-hand, individual accounts of actual partnerships might be more valuable to institutions.

To facilitate greater communication among museums around challenges, the Urban Network was formed with the aim of sharing effective practices, strategies, and resources and advancing a national dialogue on civic engagement (Spitz and Thom 2003). The main goal of the Urban Network is to improve the equality of access to museum learning for all people. Through the book The Urban Network: Museums Embracing Communities ten major museums in five metropolitan areas across the U.S. (Chicago, Brooklyn, Minneapolis, Houston, and Oakland) have documented and shared the innovative programs and strategies they have developed to attract, serve, and engage diverse audiences (Spitz and Thom 2003). This Network serves as a model for other museums to learn from and improve their community engagement in the 21st century. According to Jennifer Spitz and Margaret Thom, authors of The Urban Network, museums have been increasingly interested in attracting and building deeper relationships with more diverse audiences. A plethora of innovative programs have evolved and the relationships museums have forged with communities often have created new ways for audiences to participate in museum learning and use collections (Spitz and Thom 2003).
Their goal is to increase learning by sharing and collaborating within and between museums, similar to the partnership museums and community members do locally, so that museums can improve existing programs and initiatives and share successful practices with others. Ellen Wahl, Director of Youth, Family, and Community Programs at the American Museum of Natural History, explains that museum professionals still see barriers (2003). Barriers like transportation and cost of admission and tangible barriers like feeling unwelcome, intimidated, or irrelevant still prevent museums from reaching certain communities. Museums wrestle with how to break down barriers, how to get their programs out to communities who cannot or do not come in to the museum. By constantly staying in communication with one another, museums can possibly learn from one another and help create better civic engagement. There is no doubt that museums have begun to improve their ability to collaborate and form lasting relationships with communities, but there is still more work to be done.

The nature of collaborating and engaging communities creates challenges in and of itself. As museums reach out to different communities, they should be prepared to work hard and serve these communities to the best of their ability. With this, these methods are still a challenge facing museums today. If museums want to make themselves welcoming, they will have to understand that it takes time to build trust. Museums can continue to reach out to more and more diverse groups and create a place for them to share as well as learn. Overall, the history of museums can help museum professionals learn important lessons about the application of the principles of community museology and some of the tensions and challenges this involves (James 2005:339). Museums should address the issues associated with collaboration and
community engagement by sharing their stories with each other. By holding conferences and publishing case studies, through groups like the Urban Network, museums can become more aware of methods that work and which methods still need improvement.

**North Lawndale & the Vice Lords Today**

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the murder rate in Chicago spiraled out of control. During that time, the FBI arrested dozens of the city’s most prominent gang leaders, similarly to what happened to Bobby Gore in the later 1960s. Eventually, the city’s murder rate was cut in half, and the gangs splintered from a lack of leadership. In 2000, as explained above, the Chicago Housing Authority implemented the most aggressive plan for urban renewal in United States history, The Plan for Transformation (Lovett 2014). Soon after this plan was implemented, tens of thousands of residents were displaced to the city’s poorest South and West Sides. In 2008, there were 509 homicides in Chicago (Bates 2009). Many Chicago residents and journalists took note that this number was much higher than the 314 soldiers killed in Iraq in the same year.

In the past several years, Chicago has been referred to as ‘Chiraq’, a term that combines Chicago and Iraq in order to draw awareness to how dangerous warfare among gangs has become in Chicago. In 2013, Chicago had 2,185 shooting victims (Chicago Tribune 2014). In 2014, there were 2,589 shooting victims, compared to this year (from January 1, 2015 to April 12, 2015) having 474 shooting victims thus far (Chicago Tribune 2015). In 2013, there were 422 homicides (the deliberate and unlawful killing of one person by another) in Chicago (DNAinfo Chicago 2015). In 2014, 432 of the shootings victims resulted in death and this year there have already been 93 homicides (Chicago Tribune 2015). Despite the increase in shooting victims and homicides over the
past two years, Chicago is on track to have one of its lowest crime rates in decades. Violent crimes (robbery, battery, assault, homicide, and sexual assault), property crimes (theft, burglary, and motor vehicle theft), and quality of life crimes (criminal damage, narcotics, and prostitution) have all been steadily decreasing since 2001 (Chicago Tribune 2015). Chicago’s Mayor Rahm Emanuel pointed to the positive news as well, saying the drop in crime is not a one-year blip, but something historic (Main 2013). He stresses that the drop in crime rates is not just comparing one year to another, but the Mayor’s office is looking at the crime rates now and comparing them against the last 40 years, which is what is significant.

The South and West sides of Chicago, however, seem stuck in time with persistently high violence rates - an inequality that demands attention. In an article written in 2013, Professor Andrew Papachristos at Yale University explains that he found a greater proportion of murders in the city involve street gang members since the mid-1990s (Main 2013). Murders among rival gangs are on the decrease, but killings among factions within the same gang are on the rise. Below I will look at crimes tracked by the Chicago Tribune to see where North Lawndale falls among crime rates compared with other Chicago neighborhoods, like Roseland and Englewood that have been mentioned above as being overpopulated by displaced public housing families. The Chicago Tribune has been tracking crimes starting January 1st, 2014 until April 12th, 2015 and update the website monthly. Below I provide numbers from two periods of time as specified. This was done to keep my thesis as up to date as well as to show how often these numbers fluctuate in these neighborhoods.
From August 14th until September 12, 2014 (30 days) North Lawndale, which is a West Side neighborhood, had 196 quality of life crimes and 161 property crimes (Chicago Tribune 2014). North Lawndale had 94 violent crimes, which ranked North Lawndale 4th out of the 77 Chicago community areas for highest violent crime (this rank is determined by violent crimes per 1,000 people). In 2014, there were a total of 11 homicides (Chicago Tribune 2015). As previously mentioned, many displaced public housing residents have been moving into already overpopulated neighborhoods like Roseland and Englewood, which are both on the South Side of Chicago. Papachristos also mentioned that the South and West Sides of Chicago are experiencing a persistently high violence crime rate. During the same time frame as above, Roseland had 144 quality of life crimes and 157 property crimes (Chicago Tribune 2014). This area had 64 violent crimes and ranks as the 16th highest area for violent crime. In 2014, Roseland has 12 homicides. Englewood had 114 quality of life crimes and 153 property crimes and 92 violent crimes. This ranks Englewood as the 1st most violent area in Chicago and in 2014 has 22 homicides. By looking at these crime rates, one can see that North Lawndale and Englewood still rank very high in terms of the most violent crime areas.

Since looking at the crime in these areas in 2014, the numbers have dropped. From March 4th until April 12th 2015, North Lawndale ranks as the 13th highest area for violent crime and Roseland is now the 18th (Chicago Tribune 2015). Englewood has also dropped to being the 3rd highest area for violent crime leaving areas like West Garfield Park at 1st and Fuller Park as the 2nd (both West and South Side neighborhoods).
Although these neighborhoods have had a slight decrease in violent crime, they are still among some of the most violent areas. And regardless to the decrease, West and South
Side neighborhoods are still ranked with persistently high violence rates. Because of this violence, in my opinion, these Chicago neighborhoods are in need of socially responsible museums more than ever.

Today, there are still two sets of the Vice Lords in North Lawndale, the Cicero Vice Lords and the Conservative Vice Lords (unpublished audio transcriptions, 2011). The CVL is no longer a non-profit and is an actual street gang. As expressed through the crime rates above, North Lawndale is currently experiencing gang associated violence. Now more than ever does North Lawndale, and other Chicago neighborhoods like Roseland and Englewood, need people like Benneth Lee and Bobby Gore to stand up to violence and spread the word that this is not the only answer. This as well as the need for the Chicago Housing Authority to provide better housing options for tenants, leaves these neighborhoods in a state of violence. Papachristos suggests that a greater proportion of murders involve killings among factions within the same gang (Main 2013). Since many families, that may include gang members, are moving out of public housing and into neighborhoods, where they most likely have family, friends, or gang affiliations, it is possible that these families are from the same gang, but from a different faction. This could be a possible explanation to the high violent crime rates in several Chicago communities on the South and West Sides.

I think the CVL were correct in the grassroots organizing they implemented, cleaning up the neighborhood, creating a tenants’ housing rights organization, and places for kids like Art & Soul. By bettering their community, the CVL gave the community hope. By having *Report to the Public* on display in North Lawndale, I hope that young people became more aware of the CVL history and regained a sense of hope. And
although this exhibit was a small step towards combating a very large issue, it is a start. Young people can be inspired and maybe this will be the place for that to happen. Hopefully the *Report to the Public* exhibit will be able to travel to Roseland, Englewood, and other areas of Chicago that are experiencing high crime rates. I think it is important to remain hopeful that although it is just an exhibit and that poor Chicago policies are mainly to blame, it still has the power to influence people and inspire them to change. Exhibits like *Report to the Public* and better plans for transformation by the Chicago Housing Authority can help stop violence in Chicago.

**Collecting Contemporary Urban Material Culture**

When conducting interviews at both the National Public Housing Museum and the Jane Addams Hull-House, both Palmer and Junkin touched on the difficulties they experienced with obtaining material objects for their exhibits. Recently, this has become a topic of interest among museum anthropologists. In their article “Introduction: Building a Collection of Contemporary Urban Material Culture” in *Museum Anthropology* Robert Rotenberg and Alaka Wali express similar concerns (2014). They explain that museums need to take “new directions [in collecting material culture] that take into account the complexity of capturing urban lifeways” (Rotenberg and Wali 2014:2). Past collecting practices have focused on geographic areas and have left museums, like the Field Museum in Chicago, without an understanding of current patterns of social organization, social structure, and human environment relationships. Rotenberg and Wali remind museum professionals that through collected objects, the interrelationships between people and their environments and how these interrelationships shape human diversity are better understood (2014).
When asking Palmer if the NPHM had objects, he said that they were in the process of collecting them, but is mostly relying on oral histories (personal interview, August 1, 2013). As a museum, he feels that, although collecting material culture will be difficult, it is necessary. In terms of collecting, Palmer and his staff are gathering objects that are important to the residents, objects that can tell a story. This is difficult because to the residents, objects are seen as everyday objects not necessarily worth collecting (personal interview, August 1, 2013). Most materials from public housing were not saved because they were seen as not having value or use at the time. Since storage space at the NPHM is also limited, Palmer said he wants to only collect objects that can be useful to the community if preserved. The lack of objects leaves Palmer having to rely on replicating objects in order to tell a story.

The issues faced at the NPHM and the Hull-House are typical for most community museums. Junkin similarly had a hard time collecting objects. As previously mentioned, the CVL were originally a criminal enterprise and this is one reason for why there is not a lot of documentation or material culture associated with the CVL (personal interview, August 2, 2013). Junkin was responsible for collecting objects for Report to the Public and mainly relied on the few newspaper articles, personal photographs from former gang members, government documents from when the CVL was a nonprofit, and clothing. Like with the NPHM, Junkin also had difficulties obtaining objects because many former CVL did not save clothing or any other objects affiliated with the CVL because they did not see a reason for holding onto them. They also, overtime, simply lost track of where these objects were located.
While attending community meetings in 2011 at the Hull-House with former CVL, much of the time was spent going through photographs and asking Benneth Lee and other former CVL who was in the photographs, where they were taken, and what was going on when the photo was taken. This was a long and difficult process for the former CVL because, as they are getting older in age, they did not remember a lot about the photographs. This left Junkin with material culture, but no stories or memories behind them.

The problems associated with collecting material culture, in the case of the NPHM and CVL objects, leaves museums mainly relying on oral histories. With this, Report to the Public presented these stories through audio recordings in the exhibit, which is something I see the NPHM doing as well. I think this can be a much more powerful alternative to relying on a text heavy exhibit. Actually being able to hear from former public housing residents and gang members is more personal and often times moving. The NPHM and the Hull-House should incorporate programming into their museum to help communities understand the importance of saving objects in order to collect material culture that better encompasses the diversity among history and the varying community areas in Chicago, just as the Chicago Historical Society did several years ago.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have tried to show that for every community a museum reaches out to, there will be a different and unique set of challenges. Museums need to adapt to the needs of various groups. They need to communicate with other museums to improve their collaborative and engagement methods. By sharing these challenges, other museums can better prepare themselves for working with communities, while also stressing that there should be no preconceptions of a group. Museum staff need to get to know the community they are working with and facilitate a mutually beneficial experience. This thesis is unique because the population with which the museums consulted with, not because of the practices the museums used to do so. It is another example of community museums and their reliance on community for collections as well as oral histories. Up until now, most museums have not worked extensively with public housing residents or gang members. My case studies show how museums are reaching out to even more atypical populations for input on exhibits, finally opening up the museum to previously ignored voices.

Largely, it can be seen that the history of Chicago is still influencing what the city is experiencing today. This includes poor policies, a lack of adequate human services and resources, gang violence, and segregation. Museums are starting to work with
communities to help them share the stories that are not always heard, which can instill awareness on issues associated with certain communities, like public housing and gangs. With this, I hope that museums will be able to help influence public policies in Chicago and help create a better city for people to live in. This thesis offers several recommendations to the National Public Housing Museum as well as presents the work done for the *Report to the Public* in a way that can try to help museum professionals create exhibits that empower and relate to contemporary issues, even if controversial. My work hopes to show museum professionals that controversial exhibits work and they can get people to think about and understand a given topic differently.

I hope this thesis contributes to the field of anthropology and museum studies as an example of how researchers can use the methods of ethnographic research, including conducting structured interviews and field site visits, and a holistic approach to better understand museums and the communities they serve. More specifically, this thesis hopes to contribute to museum studies lessons learned from museum institutions that are collaborating and consulting with communities. My interviews allowed me to gain a better understanding of the unforeseen challenges experienced by museum staff that occurred when they collaborated with and engaged groups from urban Chicago neighborhoods. Such challenges are: disagreements on content among committees, the public feeling they did not have enough power with the exhibit content, a lack of objects, informants to the museum feeling as if they needed to benefit from their participation either financially or with some sort of reciprocity, and the museum staff having a lack of prior knowledge on their informants.
If museum professionals do not have a way to learn about these challenges, they will continue to encounter the same ones. This can mean that these museums will make the same mistakes, discouraging community involvement. By sharing these stories, museums can be better equipped to take what other institutions have learned and apply it to their unique situation, which this thesis hopes to do. Learning from these challenges, museums will be able to forge stronger relationships with communities, which includes gaining their trust.

Fath Davis Ruffins asserts that there is still a strong mandate to preserve twentieth-century African American culture (Ruffins 1992). Ruffins suggests that scholars continue to research, collect, and preserve African American life so that future generations of scholars can use these resources to better understand their own era (1992:592). Knowing of how uneven the collection of African American history has been, Ruffins urges accountability for what African Americans do today. With this, my project hopes to preserve African American history of public housing and gangs, especially in Chicago. I hope it will inform future generations about the hardships many residents of public housing experienced in order to inspire them to take a stand against inadequate human services.

In addition, my thesis provides an account of public housing and gang history that is only starting to be researched. I hope this thesis is able to provide examples of public housing that works, as seen in Santiago, Chile, Denver’s South Lincoln, and at Sugar Hill in New York City. Additionally, by documenting the violence and destruction of Chicago gangs, I hope future generations can be inspired by the Conservative Vice Lords to change their lives. Recently in Baltimore, for example, Bloods and Crips put aside
their gang rivalry to focus on fighting police brutality (David 2015). Both gangs marched side by side in a rally against police assaulting black people. They put aside their differences and found a unified voice. The violence in the South and West Side neighborhoods of Chicago is not improving and something needs to change as these gang members did in Baltimore. If these Chicago neighborhoods do not receive the public resources they need, I can foresee these communities taking matters into their own hands as previously seen in Chicago’s history. With this, I would not be surprised that if in my lifetime a revolution similar to the Civil Rights Movement happens. Segregation and neighborhood neglect in Chicago needs to end.

**Further Research**

If I were able to continue my research, or suggest areas that could be further examined, I would first visit the National Public Housing Museum on its opening. Since the museum was not open at the time of my research, I was not able to see how the staffs’ ideas and plans for the museum were implemented. I would also like to conduct interviews with the NPHM committee to see how they felt in terms of being a part of the committee. It would be interesting to see whether or not they felt their voices were heard and if their needs were met. During the spring of 2014, I contacted Todd Palmer in hopes to set up an interview time with the committee members, but did not receive a response.

Upon seeing the NPHM’s final construction, I would be able to make further conclusions about whether or not I think the museum did a fair job in creating a museum about national public housing. By going to the museum, I could see what the museum did or did not do in terms of topics, designs, timeframes, demographics, geographic locations, and perspectives. With most museum openings, I would also be able to look at
reviews and critiques from other professionals to gauge the overall response to the museum. Second, I would be curious to see where the *Report to the Public* exhibit is installed next. To continue my research, I would observe how the exhibit is impacting the community where it is located, especially youth and gang members. Going to this location and doing participant observation or tracking and timing could be beneficial. It would also be worthwhile to conduct further interviews with people at the exhibit or involved with running it.
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Appendix A

Timeline of the Exhibits: National Public Housing Museum

2010-2011 *History Coming Home*

2012-2013 *The Sound, The Soul, and The Syncopation*

2015 National Public Housing Museum plans to open

Figure 4 shows a timeline for the National Public Housing Museum (Mathios 2014)

Timeline of the Exhibits: *Report to the Public*

2012 Exhibition opening reception

2013 Exhibit moved to Spirit of Truth Church

2014 Exhibit closed and the new location is to be determined

Figure 5 shows a timeline for the *Report to the Public* exhibit (Mathios 2014)
Figure 6: This image shows a map of all the Chicago neighborhoods (Chicago Dossier 2014).
Appendix C

Questionnaire:
Matt Leo and Todd Palmer at the National Public Housing Museum

1. What role do you play at the National Public Housing Museum?

2. Do you hold a certain philosophy in museum practice?

3. What special emphasis and practices does the NPHM have that other museums do not have? Why were these chosen?

4. I understand that the NPHM is going to incorporate stories from people that have actually lived in and experienced public housing in Chicago. Do you think that the method of collaboration created a positive experience for all individuals involved in the development process?

If yes, how has collaboration created a positive experience? What were some of the difficulties you felt in this process? What would you do differently?

5. How has involving former public housing residents in the development process improved the narrative and overall message of the museum? What was their specific contributions and roles in developing the museum?

6. Do you think that the residents felt empowered by being involved with the exhibition? Why do you think that way? Do you have any examples?

7. How has the museum encouraged people to think differently about public housing? Did people end up thinking differently? Again, could you give examples to illustrate this?

8. How was the museum successful in combating common stereotypes of public housing?

9. Overall, are there any other positive impacts that you could see occurring as a result of this museum? Are there any other programs that will go along with the museum?

- Thank you -

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Questionnaire:
Lisa Junkin at the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum

1. What is your role at the Hull-House? What is your philosophy in museum practice?

2. What was your role with developing the Report to the Public exhibition?

3. What special emphasis and practices does the Report to the Public exhibition have that other exhibitions do not have? Why were these chosen?

4. Do you think that the method of collaboration created a positive experience for all individuals involved in the development process? If yes, how has collaboration created a positive experience? What were some of the difficulties you felt in this process? What would you do differently?

5. How has involving former Conservative Vice Lords in the development process improved the narrative and overall message of the exhibition? What was their specific contributions and roles in developing the exhibition?

6. Do you think that the CVL felt empowered by being involved with the exhibition? Why do you think that way? Do you have any examples?

7. How has the exhibition encouraged people to think differently about gangs? Did people end up thinking differently? Again, could you give examples to illustrate this?

8. How was the exhibition successful in combating common stereotypes of gangs?

9. Overall, are there any other positive impacts that occurred as a result of this exhibition? Were there any other programs that went on along with the exhibition?

10. Do you see the exhibition re-opening in the future?

- Thank you -