Spring 2010


Majel Boxer
*Fort Lewis College*

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch

Part of the [American Studies Commons](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch)

http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch/1085

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

In recent years a number of related academic fields have explored the connections between museums and Indigenous peoples. The growth in published monographs and edited volumes has in part been spurred on by the 2004 opening of the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC. This monograph raises significant questions and reveals numerous debates surrounding such issues as ownership and access to museum collections and archives; the repatriation of human remains, funerary items, and cultural patrimony; Native American traditional and modern art and art museums; the need for consultation and collaboration with Indigenous peoples and communities; and the importance of sacred sites.

The study’s title is derived from the titles of two protested museum exhibits: The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada’s First Peoples, organized by the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta, and discussed in chapter 1; and First Encounters, designed by the Florida Museum of Natural History as a traveling exhibit celebrating the Columbus Quincentenary, and outlined in chapter 7. The author explains “[t]he term ‘spirited encounters’ captures the energetic battles waged by indigenous protestors [sic] who have been determined to force museums to recognize and redress long-held institutional biases regarding Native life and history.”

The strength of the monograph lies in the theoretical approach the author threads throughout the four parts titled “Protesting Exhibitions,” “The Long Road to Repatriation,” “Whose Heroes and Holidays,” and “Claiming Our Own Places.” Cooper develops the concept of protest and adds to it the term “protestor,” explaining, “I spell protestor with an ‘o,’ staking a claim to whatever added authority and power the ‘o,’ as seen in curator, senator, or administrator, might provide.” For Cooper, protest has been a political action, thus affecting and shaping the policies of museums.

While its subtitle reads American Indians Protest Museum Policies and Practices, this study encompasses
much more than museum-related protests. For example, in chapter 8 Cooper offers a history lesson on the myth of the first Thanksgiving and a discussion of the complex nature of living history museums. In chapter 9 she describes the long evolution from Custer Battlefield National Monument to the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument as filled with various AIM protests in the 1970s and 1980s until 1991 when Congress passed legislation granting a name change and a separate monument to honor American Indian men, women, and children who fought and died in the battle. Chapter 10 offers an examination of sacred cultural sites like Blue Lake, Devils Tower, and Bear Butte.

 Appropriately, the study concludes by detailing three Native museum-like facilities, a term used by Cooper to describe the hybrid nature of these community museums. The Makah Cultural and Research Center, the Ak-Chin Him Dakota Ecomuseum, and the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center are discussed briefly and for Cooper are a testament to the collective actions by protestors Native and non-Native who have created a space for such hybrids to exist. Majel Boxer, Department of Southwest Studies, Fort Lewis College, Durango, Colorado.