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Book Review of *Contesting Knowledge: Museums and Indigenous Perspectives* edited by Susan Sleeper-Smith.

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Seventeen scholars contributed to this group work. First exposed to compilation books in the eighties, I found the format exhilarating then. There were so many angles, so much information. Now, however, such books are, to me, rather like walking a cobblestone path. Maybe I just have inappropriate shoes, but the journey is seldom entirely smooth going. And having to adapt to different writing styles every 20 to 30 pages is an added hindrance. Still, the genre is here to stay, and Contesting Knowledge has much to recommend it.

Analyzed in four out of twelve pieces, the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) is viewed from interesting perspectives, and those writings are among the most interesting chapters, along with pieces about particular Native community museums.

Native writer Amy Lonetree’s “Museums as Sites of Decolonization” compares NMAI exhibits to those of the Ziibiwing Center for Anishinaabe Culture, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan. Lonetree notes that NMAI “fails to tell the hard truths of colonization.” She finds NMAI to be an institution of a nation-state, unable to vary from a national agenda. Searching for a successful decolonizing exhibit, Lonetree finds that the Ziibiwing Center provides the best example. It makes oral traditions the overarching framework in which to discuss Anishinaabe lives and history. Viewers learn about land theft, disease, poverty, violence, and forced conversions of faith. The exhibits discuss removals, smallpox, and alcoholism.

Lonetree notes that the Center’s exhibition walls narrow as the hard truths are faced. Background voices read disturbing texts of treaties and documents, should a viewer not be inclined to read exhibit labels. Knowing the colonizing section is emotionally taxing, the Center next offers a roomier space, inhabited with a heartbeat sound and soft music, where positive aspects of the community are described and visitors can calm down.

Contesting Knowledge, with five times more non-Native than Native authors, I realized, can itself be seen as an aspect of lingering colonization where Native people are the subject described and analyzed primarily by others. Ann McMullen’s contribution, however, doesn’t analyze a strictly Native topic, but instead takes a unique look at George Heye, the premier collector of Native materials now belonging to NMAI. She works at exposing the maligning descriptions of him and his work as examples of bias.

Gwyneira Isaac’s contribution illuminates how the Zuni A:shiwi A:wan Museum and Heritage Center approaches archival material and replicated artifacts, and how institutional places can adapt to honor Native sensitivities. Brian Daniels notes how Northern California tribes learned the importance of cultural documentation from various court decision setbacks. Daniels notes that the American Indian Religious Freedom Act only guarantees the right to beliefs, not the practice of them. Aiding their continuing struggles, the Hupa, Yurok, and Shasta have emphasized archives and museum development. These and other interesting chapters illuminate Native efforts to survive. Karen Coody Cooper, Cherokee Heritage Center, Tahlequah, Oklahoma.