

MUSE 600: History and Theory

12/11/2015

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**“National Human Rights Museums: An Engine for Social or Economic Growth?  
A Comparative Analyses of Conscience Museums of Canada, USA and Russia.”**

## **Abstract**

Human rights have become highly discussed topic and one of the dominant themes in the museum field. The main reason that the idea of social inclusion is popular is that society constructs a sense of reliability and creativity, and hence becomes an important power element in politics. Therefore, social issues can be discussed, constructed and politicized in museums. More specifically, this research will compare and analyze three case studies – Canadian Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg, Canada, Civil and Human Rights Center, Atlanta, USA and GULAG, Perm - 36, Kuchino, Russia). While these three museums are treated as important cultural and tourist destinations and participate in difficult history memorialization and raising awareness, they also raise ethical concerns on the matter of social inclusion. Therefore, based on these three case studies the paper will argue that these national human rights museums might be putting the focus on economic change rather than on providing an opportunity for social growth. Thus, I will present my outside perspective on the challenges and controversies of applying the idea of social inclusion. I will analyze each museum's commitment to social inclusion by investigating architecture, mission and vision, governance and funding, programming/exhibitions and mass media reviews. This methodology is based primarily on published and peer reviewed research papers, journals, articles, books and websites. I believe that this study may facilitate an understanding of museum engagement with social issues and a responsible inclusion of human rights idea on local, national and international levels. Also, I hope to identify new approaches to communicating social issues, specifically within human rights museum that are funded by the government and to see how museums can give more opportunities for communities to develop critical citizenship skills.

## 1. Introduction

Today, in the era of global transformations and development one can see a radical change in the vision and work of cultural institution. Museums are now starting to question their social mission by acting as agents of social progress and becoming a place where diverse communities can represent and talk about their rights. According to a museum scholar Richard Sandell, “Human rights museums, particularly are designed for engaging visitors in the conversation around social inclusion issues (indigenous and minority ethnic community, women rights, disabled and sexual minorities).”<sup>1</sup> The concept of human rights museums initially began with and focused on representing ideas and activities rather than collections and objects. The idea of human rights was initially formed by the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. This document states that “Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.”<sup>2</sup> As International Committee on Management’s *2009 Declaration of Museum Responsibility to Promote Human Rights* proclaimed that the “responsibility of museums is to be active in promoting diversity and human rights.”<sup>3</sup> Based on these principles, human rights museums are created to reveal contemporary ideas and issues, to exhibit aspiration, to give visible evidence of difficult history, to criticize it, as well as to raise awareness and to educate. The increased interest and emphasis on social inclusion makes museum an ideal space for

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Sandell, and Eithne Nightingale. *Museums, Equality and Social Justice*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2012., 197

<sup>2</sup> "United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights." 1952, 3.

<sup>3</sup> David Fleming. The Diverse Museum. Stephen Weil Memorial Lecture, presented at the 2009 annual INTERCOM meeting, November 10-13, Torreon, Mexico., in: Jennifer Carter, and Jennifer Orange. "Contentious Terrain: Defining a Human Rights Museology." *Museum Management and Curatorship* 27:2 (2012): 124. [www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmmc20](http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmmc20).

activism that empowers communities to engage in human rights issues, as well as to serve as an engine for attracting tourism and revenue. As Richard Sandell recognizes “Human Rights is increasingly recognized, and has become one of the most globalized political values of our time.”<sup>4</sup> This new position that museums are taking raises a number of controversial issues and questions that serve as a basis for this research paper analysis. Some of these issues include: why museums should now display and educate about social issues of the past and present, and why it is such a highly discussed topic and concern for the government, how human rights museums promote, criticize and discuss human rights issues freely while at the same time have state support, is it another form of invisible power that sits inevitably within the walls of museum and produces ideologies that do not agree with the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Therefore, this research paper will look at the concept of human rights idea application in three large state-funded museums located in the United States, Canada and Russia. While researching the topic, I noticed that it is a relatively new debate: “there is little known about the social and political effects and consequences of museums increasing engagement with human rights, and it is an under-researched area.”<sup>5</sup> Therefore, this research paper will analyze the application and construction of social inclusion from the perspective of the study of discourses of universality of human rights and moral authorship. The paper will look at these discourses in order to see how human rights issues are defined and represented in the national human rights museums and what controversies they raise. Firstly, the paper will provide a socio-historic context of the human rights museums and challenges they face in the 21st century. Secondly, it will analyze cases of three major institutions that promote contemporary social issues on local and international levels: Canadian Museum for Human Rights, National Center for Civil and Human Rights, USA, and

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Sandell, and Eithne Nightingale. *Museums, Equality and Social Justice*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2012., 197

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 195

Gulag Perm-36 museum of Russia. This research will illustrate how these museums are mission-driven and what controversies they raise on local, national and international levels by comparing their architecture, missions and visions, governance and funding, and exhibitions, as well as analyze the audience/mass media reactions. This research paper hopes to raise awareness in understanding human rights museums as a space for improving the moral health and character of a community, but not making it as a tool for constructing political ideologies.

## **2. Socio-historic context and current role of human rights museums in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**

Throughout ages museums' visions and missions have been evolving. Some of the first museums represented an idealized, world of curiosities and meant to entertain elites and bourgeoisie that were collecting precious objects. The main goal was to establish the museum for handling colonial heritage. These museums were available for a limited number of people. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the age of industrialization and revolutions museums started to change their vision towards serving a wider audience. However, their community outreach potential was still largely unrealized. Today, we can see another process of museum reformation, whereby museums are thought of as socially inclusive institutions. This new role proves to be challenging as it requires representation of public interests, and political issues which often entail conflicts and tensions with state institutions and other funding organizations. Also, as Richard Sandell mentions it leads to another moral and ethical challenge in discussing political and social consequences, and the responsibilities of museums to be engaged with human rights issues on local, national and international levels. In the last two decades museums all over the world have experienced significant cuts of state funding which pushes them to look for creative and ethically

appropriate solutions to raise money. This leads museums to their major challenge: to find a balance between financial independence and sustainability and freedom of critique and choice of programs.

There are two major roles of museums that are widely discussed in the literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. The first role is a museum as a “landmark” whereby they construct an ideology for a community or a nation within socio-political and economic contexts.<sup>6</sup> Museums take part in ‘history writing’, which means “the construction of their own nation's history, which can be used as legitimization by the leadership of a nation-state.”<sup>7</sup> Most of the time these kinds of museums are used as a tool for representing political interests. According to Duncan’s well-known article *Museum as a Temple or the Forum* “...museums have always featured displays of power: great man, great wealth great deeds. Places for cultural struggle and controversy and claims of superiority.”<sup>8</sup> In the meantime, other museums are used as engines for economic growth and change: “museums are changing dramatically according to new demands such as competitiveness, visitors, management and fundraising. These new demands make museums “mass-entertainment machines.”<sup>9</sup> Most museums face what Cameron Duncan identifies as an “identity crises.”<sup>10</sup> As a result, museums change, mix and disorient their mission and vision and start becoming either like department stores, or as part of a large theme of nationalization.

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<sup>6</sup> Ngaire Blankenberg & Gail Dexter Lord, Chapter 1, "Why Cities, Museums and Soft Power," in *Cities, Museums and Soft Power*, AAM, 2015

<sup>7</sup> Anja Luepken, "Politics of Representation—Normativity in Museum Practice." *Journal of Religion in Europe* 4 (2011): 163

<sup>8</sup> Steven C Dubin, *Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum*. New York: New York University Press, 1999: 3

<sup>9</sup> Van Aalst, I. From Museum to Mass Entertainment: the Evolution of the Role of Museums in Cities. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 9, 195 - 209 (2002) in: Elsa Vivant, "Who Brands Whom?: The Role of Local Authorities in the Branching of Art Museums." *Town Planning Review* 82, no. 1 (2011): 99-115. doi:10.3828.

<sup>10</sup> Duncan F Cameron, "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum." *The Journal of World History: Museums, Society, Knowledge*, 1972, 48

Conversely, the second role museums play is called a 'place maker'.<sup>11</sup> They are museums that talk about contemporary social issues that relate to their location and context. Museums broaden their role towards agents of progressive social change and places where social issues are discussed. Talking about this role Richard Sandell looks for 'activist practices' where he finds "cultural representations are constitutive as well as reflective of ways of seeing, thinking and talking about social issues".<sup>12</sup> This new position of the museum puts it into trouble and controversy, especially when they talk about difficult and uncomfortable topics for the state. In this scenario national human rights museums have to struggle or balance between two challenges. The first is a problem of freedom to represent public interests while depending on state funding. The second is the need to balance state interests and public trust as people trust and accept museums' visions and missions without questioning them because of museums' moral authority and affiliation with power institutes. In order to test this hypothesis, challenges and controversies of museum as a 'landmark' or 'place-maker' I studied three national human rights museums: Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg, Canada; National Center for Civil and Human Rights, Atlanta, GA, USA; and Gulag Perm-36 Russia.

### **2.1.1 Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg, Canada**

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) was opened in the Fall of 2014. Its founder is Israel Asper: a Winnipeg businessman and philanthropist who received support from individuals, unions, nonprofit organizations, and central Canadian and local Manitoban governments. His primary goal in opening the CMHR was "to have a museum that will serve as

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<sup>11</sup> Ngaire Blankenberg & Gail Dexter Lord, Chapter 1, "Why Cities, Museums and Soft Power," in *Cities, Museums and Soft Power*, AAM, 2015

<sup>12</sup> Jennifer Carter, and Jennifer Orange. "Contentious Terrain: Defining a Human Rights Museology." *Museum Management and Curatorship* 27:2 (2012): 111-27. [www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmmc20](http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmmc20).

an approval for the absence of national holocaust memorial, connection with the wider world problem of the holocaust revealing the examples of the Holocaust for Canada.”<sup>13</sup> Today, the CMHR statutory mandate states that “the museum will enhance the public understanding of human rights, promote respect for others, and encourage reflection and dialogue”<sup>14</sup> The CMHR broadens the human rights idea and makes it their core institutional mission. Professor of the University of Manitoba Umut Orzu commented on the mission of the CMHR: “While CMHR goal is to facilitate conversations about human rights, opportunities for visitors to develop critical citizenship skills, the museum is a state-run institution that serves moral and nationalistic purposes too.”<sup>15</sup>

Another controversy is the museum building that is the “first object or element that the visitor sees; the first vital element of story narration”,<sup>16</sup> and also its most permanent exhibit. Therefore, the story that CMHR building reflects is the idea of connection to the Earth suggesting that all human beings are children of the Earth. 1200 glazed panels appear as “a dove, a symbol of peace embracing the museum.”<sup>17</sup> The construction project for the CMHR raised a lot of controversies: the cost of construction (more than \$300 million), exhibition content, interference of the board of trustees and the government. These concerns are discussed by the

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<sup>13</sup> Adams, James. "Inside the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, the Labyrinth of Conscience." *The Globe and Mail*. September 19, 2014. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/art-and-architecture/inside-the-canadian-museum-for-human-rights-the-labyrinth-of-conscience/article20701809/>.

<sup>14</sup> Karen Busby, Adam Muller, and Andrew Woolford. "Chapter 1 Grounding the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Conversation." In *The Idea of a Human Rights Museum*. Vol. 1. Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, September 1, 2015. [https://books.google.com/books?id=jSfECgAAQBAJ&pg=PT11&lpg=PT11&dq=the+idea+of+human+rights+museum&source=bl&ots=snaGgotUEC&sig=FEAJK\\_kvCdPV8zJ-FSb\\_BujSv30&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwis8duPttXJAhVN7GMKHfKSB084ChDoAQgvMAM#v=onepage&q=the%20idea%20of%20human%20rights%20museum&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=jSfECgAAQBAJ&pg=PT11&lpg=PT11&dq=the+idea+of+human+rights+museum&source=bl&ots=snaGgotUEC&sig=FEAJK_kvCdPV8zJ-FSb_BujSv30&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwis8duPttXJAhVN7GMKHfKSB084ChDoAQgvMAM#v=onepage&q=the%20idea%20of%20human%20rights%20museum&f=false)

<sup>15</sup> Umut Özsü. "The Real Problem with the Canadian Human Rights Museum | Toronto Star." *Thestar.com*. September 17, 2014. [http://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2014/09/17/the\\_real\\_problem\\_with\\_the\\_canadian\\_human\\_rights\\_museum.html](http://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2014/09/17/the_real_problem_with_the_canadian_human_rights_museum.html)

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Umut Orzu, [www.thestar.com](http://www.thestar.com)

<sup>17</sup> Karen Busby, Adam Muller, and Andrew Woolford. "Chapter 1 Grounding the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Conversation." In *The Idea of a Human Rights Museum*. Vol. 1. September 1, 2015.



professor of the University of Manitoba Umut Orzu: “Its detractors have raised concerns about curatorial content and argued that it is a significant waste of resources, particularly as there is little evidence that the museum will contribute meaningfully to the local and provincial economy.”<sup>18</sup> A very prominent of the building is the Tower of Hope that symbolizes a bright and high future, yet appearing as a prison tower or a symbol of controlling people and showing its supremacy.<sup>19</sup> *The Walrus*, a Canadian magazine in one of its articles calls the CMHR’s building as “Faulty Tower, a Tourist Trap, Failed Memorial and White Elephant [and] our newest arena of noisy ethno-political sniping.”<sup>20</sup> “The location of the CMHR is purposefully chosen and it is built at the edge of the Winnipeg downtown, between two rivers which was the meeting site of indigenous people. It seemed a perfect place for the state to build it there but it raised public concerns because the place was an archaeologically significant site. During the construction of the building there were found 600,000 artifacts.”<sup>21</sup> Due to the construction plan research and excavation was not fully performed. One of the archeologists commented: “the worst case of legal destruction of the rich heritage that I have had the misfortune to witness”<sup>22</sup> Winnipeg is not very well-known and visited place. No more than a few kilometers from the Canadian Museum for Human Rights lay Winnipeg’s North End. “Well-known for its transgenerational poverty and chronic underinvestment, the area with the highest child poverty rate in Canada, and the area that

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<sup>18</sup> Umut Özsü. "The Real Problem with the Canadian Human Rights Museum | Toronto Star." Thestar.com. September 17, 2014.

[http://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2014/09/17/the\\_real\\_problem\\_with\\_the\\_canadian\\_human\\_rights\\_museum.html](http://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2014/09/17/the_real_problem_with_the_canadian_human_rights_museum.html)

<sup>19</sup> "Faulty Tower: The Canadian Museum for Human Rights as Tourist Trap, Failed Memorial, and White Elephant." Thewalrus.ca Faulty Tower Comments. November 1, 2014. <http://thewalrus.ca/faulty-tower/>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., Faulty Tower: The Canadian Museum for Human Rights as Tourist Trap

<sup>21</sup> Karen Busby, Adam Muller, and Andrew Woolford. "Chapter 1 Grounding the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Conversation." In *The Idea of a Human Rights Museum*. Vol. 1. Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, September 1, 2015

<sup>22</sup> Karen Busby, *The Idea of Human Rights Museum*

has long been regarded as one of the most destitute in any major Canadian city.<sup>23</sup> Another issue brought up by the author of the article Nancy Macdonald, titled “Welcome to Winnipeg: Where Canada’s racism problem is at its Worst”<sup>24</sup> notes that Manitoba is considered as home to Canada’s largest urban indigenous population and second in North America after Anchorage (by proportion).<sup>25</sup> *The Guardian* website states: “Much of the city’s aboriginal community, however, remains underemployed, undereducated and relegated to relatively impoverished neighborhoods in Winnipeg’s inner city and North End. Two of the three poorest postal codes in Canada are in Winnipeg. Both are predominantly indigenous neighborhoods.”<sup>26</sup> Despite all these discomfoting data, the Manitoban government is pursuing an image of success nationally and internationally by building the CMHR that symbolizes a bridge across the nation.

The idea of bridging is also played out in 11 CMHR exhibition halls that are linked with a serpentine walkway guiding the audience throughout the museum. The CMHR website describes it as “ramps of glowing alabaster criss-cross galleries designed to challenge motivate and uplift and the human rights journey will walk the visitor from darkness to light.”<sup>27</sup> The design and content was developed by the Content Advisory Committee (CAC) which play an important role in conducting research on what should be discussed. Also, CAC conducted

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<sup>23</sup> Umut Özsu. "The Real Problem with the Canadian Human Rights Museum | Toronto Star." Thestar.com. September 17, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Macdonald, Nancy. "Welcome to Winnipeg, Where Canada's Racism Problem Is at Its Worst." Macleans.ca. January 22, 2015. <http://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/welcome-to-winnipeg-where-canadas-racism-problem-is-at-its-worst/>.

<sup>25</sup> "The 'great Indigenous Divide': Winnipeg Stares into an Ethnic Chasm." *The Guardian*. October 21, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/oct/21/winnipeg-election-indigenous-divide-aboriginal>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., "The 'great Indigenous Divide': Winnipeg Stares into an Ethnic Chasm." *The Guardian*. 2014.

<sup>27</sup> "Canadian Museum for Human Rights." About the Museum. <https://humanrights.ca/about>.

interviews with different people, and “identified the richness of human rights issues across Canada”.<sup>28</sup>

### **2.1.2 National Center for Civil and Human Rights, Atlanta, GA, USA**

The new museum building that was opened in June 2014 is located not far from the birthplace of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr and among several attraction sites, such as World of Coca-Cola museum, Georgia Aquarium and near Centennial Olympic Park in downtown Atlanta. It was conceived by the civil rights legends Evelyn Lowery and former United Nations Ambassador Andrew Young who worked on museum project for more than 10 years and was launched by the former Mayor Shirley Franklin.<sup>29</sup> The Atlanta journal states that “The city was already home to memorials and historic sites honoring Atlanta native Martin Luther King, Jr (APEX African American Panoramic Experience Museum), but they intended this space to go beyond the King’s legacy, or even civil rights history.<sup>30</sup> The CCHR project totaled \$82 million for 35,000 square-feet that was funded evenly between the private and state funds. The concept of the museum was developed in an international design competition won by Philip Freelon who proposed an idea of uniting all the people around a common goal that can be achieved through collaboration. The building structure is curved and wrapped in glass-panels. The exhibition hall of the first floor titled “Rolls Down Like Water: The American Civil Rights Movement” was created by a renowned playwright and theater director George C. Wolfe together with Rockwell Group design

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<sup>28</sup> Karen Busby, Adam Muller, and Andrew Woolford. "Chapter 1 Grounding the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Conversation." In *The Idea of a Human Rights Museum*. Vol. 1. Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, September 1, 2015

<sup>29</sup> "About Us." Civil and Human Rights Center. <https://www.civilandhumanrights.org/about-us>.

<sup>30</sup> "Civil Rights Museum Opens in Downtown Atlanta." [www.ajc.com/Arts and Culture](http://www.ajc.com/Arts and Culture). June 1, 2014.  
<http://www.ajc.com/news/entertainment/attractions/atlanta-civil-rights-museum-planned-downtown-atlan/ncpRG/>.

exhibit company.<sup>31</sup> One of the remarkable exhibits is interactive mockup lunch counter that reconstructs an experience of discrimination in 1950s. The second exhibition hall title is Spark of Conviction: The Global Human Rights Movement based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The third exhibition hall is called “Voice to the Voiceless” displaying Martin Luther King’s papers and documents emulating an atmosphere of a prayer room. All exhibition halls visualize and organize stories of real individuals inspiring personal connection and engagement among the visitors. However, all three exhibition halls are not equally impactful and informative. The museum’s mission and vision as stated in the website “is to empower people to take the protection of every human's rights personally. Through sharing stories of courage and struggle around the world. The Center encourages visitors to gain a deeper understanding of the role they play in helping to protect the rights of all people.”<sup>32</sup> The center also claims a role in strengthening human rights movement around the world. The museum’s programs are designed to respond to a wider audience but they are under-promoted as there is very little information about them on the museum’s website. Instead, the museum provides tourists with a list of places to see and even a list of hotels to stay. Most web pages characterize the CCHR as a source for boosting tourism, and serve as a forum for discussing contemporary issues. “As the new Center for Civil and Human Rights prepares for its unveiling on June 23, it is already being woven into the business fabric of Atlanta.”<sup>33</sup> The *Economist* provides further critique of the museum: “The vitality of the new centre should make it an asset to Atlanta. To thrive institutions can no longer merely proffer facts to their visitors—Wikipedia can do that both more quickly and cheaply—but

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<sup>31</sup> Catherine Fox. "Review: Exhibits at Center for Civil and Human Rights Tell Vivid Stories to Engage and Move." ArtsATL Atlanta's Source for Arts News and Reviews. July 10, 2014. <http://www.artsatl.com/2014/07/center-civil-human-rights-atlanta-exhibits/#sthash.HIUVM7J.dpuf>.

<sup>32</sup> "Center for Civil and Human Rights." About Us. <https://www.civilandhumanrights.org/about-us>.

<sup>33</sup> Saporta, Maria. "Business Embraces Newest Attraction -- Center for Civil and Human Rights - Atlanta Business Chronicle." Widgets RSS Atlanta Business Chronicle. June 23, 2014. <http://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta/print-edition/2014/06/13/business-embraces-city-s-newest-attraction.html>.

must also offer relevant experiences, as the centre's exhibits do. But the site needs to attract visitors for their own sake, rather than just drawing company delegates who desire to be seen holding meetings in its many events spaces (Coca Cola and CNN are sniffing around). Its displays must remain meaningful, and its technology up-to-date, so that it does not merely varnish the efforts of the activists it celebrates.”<sup>34</sup>

### **2.1.3 GULAG Museum at Perm - 36, Kuchino, Russia**

The Gulag is an abbreviation for Glavnoe Upravlenie Ispravitelno-Trudovikh Lagerei (in English Chief Administration of Corrective Labor Camps). There was a chain of thousands of corrective labor camps around the USSR. Most of the camps were destroyed or deteriorated after closing down in post-Stalinist period. These camps served as temporary low-quality structures for prisoners to stay for seasonal work (road construction or lumbering in eastern and northern parts of Russia). It was only after the USSR collapse in 1991 when it was possible to preserve the site in the northern Ural Mountains Perm-36 (800 miles east of Moscow). Some of the acclaimed Russian writers, such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Varlam Shalamov and Yevgeniy Ginzburg were victims of these camps. These authors were forbidden in the USSR and were uncensored only short after the end of the Soviet Union. There are not many sources that discuss the Gulag in Russian history textbooks. GULAG Perm-36 survived thanks to the Russian human rights organization Memorial that worked hard to reopen its doors as a museum, a place for education and research on political repression in 1994. There are two separate sections in the site: the Maximum Security Camp and Strict Regiment Camp and other camp structures such as a watch

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<sup>34</sup> "All Rights Now." The Economist. August 19, 2014. <http://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2014/08/centre-civil-and-human-rights>.

tower, barracks and a mess. The museum governance is structured unusually: the site itself is a state property and exhibitions, archives, excursions and other programs are managed and owned by the non-governmental organization Memorial. The Memorial initiated a human rights center that aimed to research and to expose human rights abuses, to educate future generation, and to create connections between the public and the government. Since 2005 the museum has been organizing annual international scientific conferences on the topics of totalitarian history that offered a discussion platform for human rights activists and historians. There were other public outreach programs funded by the Ford Foundation.<sup>35</sup> Until recently, the museum was regarded as a ‘museum of tragedy’, a ‘territory of freedom’, but recently due to state funding cuts, raising pressure and interest in the site, Perm-36 had to close its doors in April 2014.<sup>36</sup> In addition Perm-36 was blamed and labeled as “foreign agent” by the Russian Ministry of Justice, stating that the center “is undermining the constitutional order of the Russian Federation [and works towards] “a change of political regime in the country”<sup>37</sup> through its activities. This position of the Russian authorities echoes back to the Stalinist regime when this kind of “anti-government” organizations would be deemed as foreign agents, spies or even betrayers of the country. After the closure of the site the Memorial had to discontinue its cooperation with the museum. The scientifically developed archives and materials were confiscated. Now, fully state-run GULAG Perm-36 reopened its door, but with a different perspective: large-scale exhibitions about the history of political repression, a large section on the Romanov dynasty and a large library. As the new director of the museum said, “This museum is to tell what happened in the past, not to frighten

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<sup>35</sup> Cichowlas, Ola. "The Kremlin Is Trying To Erase Memories Of The Gulag." New Republic. June 23, 2014. <https://newrepublic.com/article/118306/kremlin-trying-erase-memories-gulag>

<sup>36</sup> Mickhail Danilovich, and Robert Coalson. "New Management At The Gulag Museum." RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty. June 25, 2015. <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-perm-gulag-museum-takeover-contribution-to-victory/27152188.html>.

<sup>37</sup> Cichowlas, Ola. "The Kremlin Is Trying To Erase Memories Of The Gulag." New Republic. June 23, 2014. <https://newrepublic.com/article/118306/kremlin-trying-erase-memories-gulag>

people and not to tell about death.”<sup>38</sup>. As a part of the institutional transformation this site was included in the UNESCO World Heritage Site list. As a result one can observe how significantly this museum changed its vision and representation of human rights issues. Before, this museum displayed stories about repressions, the tragedy of millions of people who went through political repressions of Gulag. Today, the museum barely mentions what used to be the core of its content. A recent program on Radio Liberty asked the leaders of the Memorial about a new role, mission and vision of Perm-36. One of the interviewees shared that “the new presentation is devoted not to the repressive forced-labor practices of the Stalin era, but to timber production at the camp and its contribution to the Soviet victory in World War II.”<sup>39</sup> Radio Liberty, also, reported that this new vision and leadership made them remove words “Stalin”, “dissident” or “gulag” from promotional and published materials.<sup>40</sup> Hence, the new mission of the museum is to talk about history neutrally. The head of the Sakharov Center, a Moscow-based human rights organization, Sergei Lukashevsky emphasizes that “There is a general tendency to show Soviet history as a series of victories with some tragic episodes. He calls the new vision of the museum as a “treacherous paragraph of such a history.”<sup>41</sup> The downplaying of the horror of the prison system and interpreting it as an ‘industrial progress and victory of WWII’ has been criticized by another independent mass media observer who noted that some “Russian museums, such as Moscow’s State Gulag Museum and Tomsk’s interactive NKVD museum, exclusively memorialize the Stalinist terror and the Great Purges. But Perm 36 is the only former labor camp

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<sup>38</sup> Howard Amos. “New Museum Stakes Claim to Russia’s Gulag Legacy”. The Moscow Times. November 5, 2015. [http://www.themoscowtimes.com/arts\\_n\\_ideas/article/new-museum-stakes-claim-to-rus](http://www.themoscowtimes.com/arts_n_ideas/article/new-museum-stakes-claim-to-rus)

<sup>39</sup> Mikhail Danilovich, and Robert Coalson. "New Management At The Gulag Museum." Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. June 25, 2015. <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-perm-gulag-museum-takeover-contribution-to-victory/27152188.html>.

<sup>40</sup> Radio Svoboda. Human Rights in Russia. “Why does Russia no longer have any need for the GULAG museum Perm-36?” Interview. June 27, 2014. <http://www.rightsinrussia.info/archive/russian-media/radio-svoboda/perm-36>

<sup>41</sup> Anna Dolgova, "Russia's Gulag Museum Shuts Doors Amid Mounting State Pressure | News." The Moscow Times. March 15, 2015. <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/article/516920.html>.

that immortalizes the lives of political dissidents throughout the entire Soviet era.”<sup>42</sup> Now GULAG Museum of Perm-36 has an image of an interesting and unusual site to visit - it offers a ‘two hour Communist Walking Tour’<sup>43</sup> and it tells about the history that should be just learned and not questioned.

### 3.1 Comparative case study analysis

National Museums for Human Rights originally were developed as spaces that stand *for* human rights, and therefore are expected to serve the benefit of public. The Mission of three case studies (CMHR, CCHR, and GULAG Perm-36) is to talk about human rights, to demonstrate their morality and authority in advocating for human rights on global and local levels. The dependency on state funding is another important factor in two of the cases (USA and Canada) proved that state control and funding are interlinked and, in case of Russian museum Perm-36, that museums as state-run organizations can easily become focal points for transmitting a state ideology. Therefore, the study identified three modes of human rights representation within the state-funded museums. The first mode is representing human rights issues as a mean to generate visitorship and economic impact for cities. Sociologists of the urban political economy Harvey Molotch and John Logan argue, “many new (civil rights movements) museums mash the entrepreneurial motives of the urban growth machine.”<sup>44</sup> The study of the three museums have indicated that specifically CMHR and CCHR were built in the central parts of the cities, involved

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<sup>42</sup> Cichowlas, Ola. "The Kremlin Is Trying To Erase Memories Of The Gulag." New Republic. June 23, 2014. <https://newrepublic.com/article/118306/kremlin-trying-erase-memories-gulag>.

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<sup>44</sup> Logan, J., and Molotch, H. *Urban fortunes: The political economy of place*. Berkeley: University of California Press, (1988) in: Autry, Robyn. "The Political Economy of Memory: The Challenges of Representing National Conflict at ‘identity-driven’ Museums." *Theory and Society* 42 (2012):73



major investments from private and state funds in order to create an attraction instead of supporting existing museums that already talk about human rights. In the contrary, the third case-study invested considerable funds in reshaping the content/history and maintaining the historical appearance of the site. A logical question that comes to mind is whether such investments are more important than child poverty in Winnipeg and high crime rates in Atlanta. One can argue that these museums use the image of socially inclusive institutions while predominantly serving as tourist destinations generating economic growth. As proposed by Robyn Autry who studied African American museums in the US from the perspective of political economy, African American heritage is “an engine for economic development, as potential source of culture led-urban regeneration. Hence, politics, government officials most of the museums with new mission (social, civil right) serve as another source for tourist development.”<sup>45</sup> Yet one can argue that in response to limited financial support from the state museums have to come up with creative ideas in bringing in wider audiences through advanced technology, programs, and social inclusion and justice. Richard Sandell observed that “in most countries where museums cater primarily for a tourist market - where the desire for tourist income can take precedence over a commitment to social justice.”<sup>46</sup>

The second mode of using the human rights theme is history interpretation and nation-building. Here Anja Luepken concludes that “Museums are a mean of identity construction for states and social groups, even if society change, this function remains.”<sup>47</sup> National museums were established to create cultural identities through visible traditions and material cultural heritage

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<sup>45</sup> Autry, Robyn. "The Political Economy of Memory: The Challenges of Representing National Conflict at 'identity-driven' Museums." *Theory and Society* 42 (2012):73

<sup>46</sup> Richard Sandell, and Eithne Nightingale. *Museums, Equality and Social Justice*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2012., 197, quoted in Wilson 1997: 73

<sup>47</sup> Anja Luepken, "Politics of Representation—Normativity in Museum Practice." *Journal of Religion in Europe* 4 (2011): 181

that contributes to the representation and construction of identity, and to strengthen citizen identification through displays of power in objects and buildings as a symbolic competition with other nations.<sup>48</sup> Autry Robyn analyzed 'identity - driven' African American US museums that struggle with the notion of true African American history representation, where she states that "Some black museums reveal and depict ugliest chapters of American history, when other most "mainstream" museums are translating the black history to make or construct a celebrated past to anchor black identity, framed within a narrative of progress that resonates with more conventional representation of American social values and mores, thus do not show real story of blacks as "victims of history" forever oppressed and whites as the racist perpetrators of violence."<sup>49</sup> The case of the CCHR identifies itself mainly as a "mainstream" museum, where exhibitions talk about African American racist past, but not fully gets into details and leaves more questions than answers. Above all, the civil rights movement of Native Americans that started in 1960 is not represented in the CCHR even though the center takes a responsibility of advocating for worldwide human and civil rights issues. In one of the interviews with the curator of National American Science Museum brings up an important perspective to the understanding of museums that are state-funded and controlled: "It is difficult for any National Museum in any country to do things that politicians or the public dislike."<sup>50</sup> The study of the CMHR exhibitions and mass media reaction revealed the fact that there is also an issue of incorporating the diversity of human rights and there is a lack of coverage of rights of Quebec and indigenous people of

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<sup>48</sup> Anja Luepken, "Politics of Representation—Normativity in Museum Practice." *Journal of Religion in Europe* 4 (2011): 165

<sup>49</sup> Autry, Robyn. "The Political Economy of Memory: The Challenges of Representing National Conflict at 'identity-driven' Museums." *Theory and Society* 42 (2012): 77

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 100

Canada. The challenge to “represent historical and ongoing human rights violations against indigenous people - decolonizing its own practices” is ongoing.<sup>51</sup>

GULAG Perm-36 as a museum that struggled with independence gives clear evidences on how Russian government makes its history interpretation and propaganda as a tool for nation-building. The Soviet authorities used narratives of national unity and social homogeneity in a way that the British museum presents the British people as a noble people. Today’s Russia seems to have inherited a totalitarian political culture and represses any form of otherness, difficult and shameful episodes of history. Such museums as State Gulag Museum and Perm-36 seem neutral places for memorizing the past, but this short research shows that it is carefully and purposefully constructed; objects and buildings reflect certain interpretations of people’s memory.

### 3.2 Conclusion

The analysis of the three national human rights museums helped to form a framework on what constitutes strong socially inclusive practice within the 21st century. Richard Sandell concludes on the matter of social inclusion “The notion of museum being active in seeking to fulfill a social justice agenda remains a radical one.”<sup>52</sup> Where, also Autry Robin mentions “Staff decisions over the depiction of painful histories are shaped not only by struggles over the truth, but also by more prosaic issue of funding, attendance and institutional capacity-building.”<sup>53</sup> Recognition of museum’s moral and ethical responsibilities was important because the cases revealed how these

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<sup>51</sup> Karen Busby, Adam Muller, and Andrew Woolford. "Chapter 1 Grounding the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Conversation." In *The Idea of a Human Rights Museum*. Vol. 1. Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, September 1, 2015

<sup>52</sup> Richard Sandell, and Eithne Nightingale. *Museums, Equality and Social Justice*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2012., 197

<sup>53</sup> Autry, Robyn. "The Political Economy of Memory: The Challenges of Representing National Conflict at 'identity-driven' Museums." *Theory and Society* 42 (2012): 62

museums are affecting the present and future understandings, and how these museums educate and change citizens and the state. At this point I would like to raise questions for further investigation: How we can bring human rights issues into action for the community first; how to correct imbalances when we tell the stories of minorities or difficult stories, and how museums can reshape the state's vision. Although these questions seem trivial, they are in fact crucial in terms of today's concerns over museum's social mission, and absence of faith and unity within the community. At this initial, infant state of human rights museums I would consider the following four suggestions. The first is that difficult past should be properly remembered and represented so these past examples would be learned and serve as a bridge to group consciousness and change of stereotypes. Secondly, for museum in order to be involved in a meaningful way in human rights movement, a museum should be able to critique governments with no fear of threat on financial or political levels. The third important thing for human rights museums is to be always critical about its mission and its activities. The research about museum self-evaluation by Jennifer Orange and Jennifer Carter concludes that "The self-evaluation is critical if we are to actualize human rights in a progressive and meaningful way, constant reevaluation of how engagement within the field occurs, what interpretation of rights is supported and how those rights are going to be advanced is important."<sup>54</sup> The notion of self-evaluation leads to the fourth suggestion: education as a crucial aspect of human rights museum that develops critical citizen skills and responsibility, and mobilizes community to take action. Education is a way to becoming more socially active and actually bring positive change through thinking, noticing, understanding, uniting, and engaging others. This museum skill should play a vital role in the activities of 'truth' representation and uncovering social abuses. Museums

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<sup>54</sup> Orange, Jennifer A., and J. Carter Jennifer. "'It's Time to Pause and Reflect': Museums and Human Rights." *Curator: The Museum Journal* 55, no. 3 (2012): 264

already demonstrate soft power - their ability to unite, engage and educate others about human rights and becoming socially active and responsible citizens. Therefore, museums have better chances in solving current and future social issues by educating its audiences with greater responsibility.

It is important to criticize the way museums are interpreting human rights issues that affects legal and public understanding of human rights. Therefore it is very important not just to show a history of the past and present, but mainly to engage in educating about rights. Gerald Pilley, vice-chancellor and rector of Liverpool Hope University said that “university and museums should be the critics and the conscience of society with the goal of humanizing society as their fundamental task.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Orange, Jennifer A., and J. Carter Jennifer. ““It’s Time to Pause and Reflect”: Museums and Human Rights.” *Curator: The Museum Journal* 55, no. 3 (2012): 261

### **Annotated Bibliography**

1. Autry, Robyn. "The Political Economy of Memory: The Challenges of Representing National Conflict at 'Identity-Driven' Museums." *Theory and Society* 42 (2012): 57-80.

Robyn Autry is an assistant professor of sociology at the Wesleyan University. In her article, she tries to analyze the “identity-driven” black US museums that struggle with the notion of true black history representation or/and isolation from funding and attendance. The core of her work is analysis of 15 exhibitions of US black museums, interviews with curators and directors, museum documents, and newspaper articles. Her research gives important evidences that African American Heritage became “an engine for economic development.” This article is relevant for my research because it reveals social - historical and political contexts that surround my research on conducting comparative analysis of museums that talk about social issues.

2. Busby, Karen., Muller, Adam, and Woolford Andrew. "Chapter 1 Grounding the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Conversation." In *The Idea of a Human Rights Museum*. Vol. 1. Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, September 1, 2015.

The authors analyzed construction and application of the idea of human rights in Canadian museums for human rights. This research is very recent and studies Canadian Museum of Human Rights, Winnipeg, Canada. The chapter provides insights on the problematics of relation between human rights and museum engagement and social inclusion in diverse socioeconomic and political contexts.

3. Cameron, Duncan F. "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum." *The Journal of World History: Museums, Society, Knowledge*, 1972, 48-60.

Duncan Cameron is a great museum leader of XXth century, and especially he became well-known after the article “*The Museum, a Temple or the Forum*”. Here in this article, Duncan is concerned with an issue of museums’ inability to recognize their community role in the XXth century. Throughout the article, the author supports his claim by providing evidences - examples of ‘museumnes, mainly those museums that do not serve nonprofit and community driven mission. Hence, he is trying to identify a real definition of the term museum that “meets everyone’s satisfaction”. He is searching for the definition through the history of museum formation and through the idea of museum reformation. The author proposes a very radical idea for that time (1971) suggesting that museums’ role should change from a temple to the forum – an open space for discussion, debate, and experimentation. His definition of museum as the forum, the place that tells stories of our lives is very relevant and important today. It served as a starting point at that time. Nowadays it shows that museum field has not yet achieved enough to what it needs to become socially responsible. This essay serves as an important theoretical source for analyzing and comparing the role of museums in the past and present.

4. Carter, Jennifer, and Orange Jennifer. "Contentious Terrain: Defining a Human Rights Museology." *Museum Management and Curatorship* 27:2 (2012): 111-27.  
[www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmmc20](http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmmc20).

This research talks about the meaning and the issue of universality of human rights represented in museums. It gives a theoretical basis of understanding of the ways human rights are constructed by governments. The focus of this research is the responsibility of institutions that position themselves as human rights museums claiming moral authorship of such concepts.

5. Drengwitz, Beatrice., Elbers Benjamin., Deborah Jahn Lisa, and Wrogemann Irmela. "Nation and National Museums, a Contested Relationship: An Analysis of U.S. National Museums in the Twenty-first Century." *Curator: The Museum Journal* 57, no. 1 (2014): 97-106.

Four German students in Cultural Studies at Leuphana University of Lüneburg conducted a research where they intended to present their outside perspectives on the role of US national museums in shaping national identity. They analyzed the Smithsonian Institution and National September 11 Memorial Museum in New York through interviewing curators and directors. This research provides abundant evidences of the US museums struggling with “the virtual impossibility of portraying the inconsistent and pluralistic construction of ‘nation’ in today’s society” and limitations with ‘field of power’ that lead to misrepresentation of the “nation”. Hence, it serves as a good platform for opening up a debate about adequate and inclusive community representation in the US and other countries.

6. Dubin, Steven C. *Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum*. New York: New York University Press, 1999.



Steven Dubin brings to the reader's attention several controversial exhibitions that were conducted within museums space from 1968 to 1999. Through these case studies of exhibitions the author reveals the process of transformation within the museum from temple to site of activism and debate. Also, this book serves as the important resource for my research, because it is based on the interviews with curators, scholars, museum administrators and community activists that are talking about the connection between the arts, power and ideology. These valuable historical insights will help to analyze the ways how US museums are reshaping themselves to play an important role in the lives of the U.S people.

7. Gurt, Gabriel Alcalde, and Manuel Rueda Torres Josep. "People Who Don't Go to Museums."

*International Journal of Heritage Studies* 13, no. 6 (2007): 521-23.

This short article raises important questions on the new role of museums and their responsibility to choose paths towards social democratization. The authors observed these subject through Girona Museum of Art in Spain where they analyzed the relation between the socio-demographic characteristics of visitors and their attendance. With this study the authors revealed certain social relationships that are mainly ideologically led by the museum and hence segregate the audience into 'relevant' and 'non-relevant' types. Therefore, the authors came up with the conclusion that the idea to make museum more diverse is still not applicable in some European museums and it serves as a good evidence for my argument on the socially inclusive role of museum.

8. Knell, Simon J., Aronsson Peter., Bugge Amundsen Arne., Jane Barnes Amy., Burch Stuart., Carter Jennifer., Gosselin Viviane., A. Hughes Sarah, and Kirwan Alan. "Chapter 1, 2, 3." In *National Museums: New Studies from around the World*, 1-67. New York, NY: Routledge, 2011.

This book is a great resource that explores the national museums around the world. The authors brought up into one book very recent museum cases on “how national museums have been used to create a sense of national Self, deal with the consequences of political change, remake difficult pasts, and confront those issues of nationalism, ethnicity and multiculturalism” that became a focus in national identity politics. The book, also, combines studies from different fields surrounding museums, such as politics, history, sociology and anthropology. This source will bring in a critical insight into the ideology of today’s national museums of civil rights in the world. Also, it will help to analyze how professionally museums instate the myth of nation, civil rights or actually represent the nation’s identity, interest and rights. Hence, it will serve as a supportive base through which I will explore how museums in the world perform their moral authority.

9. Luepken, Anja. "Politics of Representation—Normativity in Museum Practice." *Journal of Religion in Europe* 4 (2011): 157-83.

In this article the author discusses the notion of “normativity” that she applied to the idea of ‘museality’. She questions a museum’s relationship to its audience, what is normal for museums and their audience, and who makes these decisions. Her study is based on analyses of the history of museum formation and its connection with normativity. Anja Luepken differentiates museums

into three categories: the establishment museum, the counterculture museum, and the self-conscience liberal museum. I came to a conclusion from her comparative analysis that museums are seen as temples where museums' practices are not questioned. The author shows ways how a 'temple' idea and misconception give a great opportunity to government to strengthen their power through the possibilities of education and accessibility within museum space.

10. Blankenberg Ngaire & Dexter Lord Gail, Chapter 1, "Why Cities, Museums and Soft Power," in *Cities, Museums and Soft Power*, AAM, 2015

The authors talk about the museum's power of conversion. The important message that the authors tell the reader is that museum's ability to generate and produce as both soft and hard power should be considered wisely and responsibly by museum professionals and by the audience. He describes very recent museum examples and investigates their soft and hard power of conversion and influence on the audience. It is important to recognize that the authors see the positive change of museums towards becoming more socially and community oriented, and, therefore, their strong potential in building 'social capital' and 'contextual intelligence'.

11. Özsu, Umut. "The Real Problem with the Canadian Human Rights Museum | Toronto Star."

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[http://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2014/09/17/the\\_real\\_problem\\_with\\_the\\_canadian\\_human\\_rights\\_museum.html](http://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2014/09/17/the_real_problem_with_the_canadian_human_rights_museum.html)

12. O'Neill, Mark. "Museums, Professionalism and Democracy." *Cultural Trends* 17, no. 4 (2008): 289-307.

Mark O'Neil tries to understand and analyze the changing role of museums and cultural professionals through reviewing three recent reports (*Capturing Cultural Value, supporting Excellence in the Arts and Valuing Museums*). These reports advocate the following issues: the role of museums in society and its dependence on the government, how a museum can overcome instrumentalist value and become useful to the public, and what are the new roles assigned by the government on museums. The author asks - why have museums changed their relations with society and why is there a confusion about their current role. I consider this article as an important one, because it raises the questions about the meaning of museums in society and the idea of developing more democratic and equal museums.

10. Orange, Jennifer A., and J. Carter Jennifer. "'It's Time to Pause and Reflect': Museums and Human Rights." *Curator: The Museum Journal* 55, no. 3 (2012): 259-66.

Two authors explore the connection between Museums and Human Rights movements by looking at museums' past relationship with rights and identity and what are the challenges that come with the idea of making museum a place for social movements. How do museums address social issues? Are museums effective in educating and developing critical citizenship skills? These are important questions that the authors answer through case study analysis of several human rights museums in Canada and the US. The authors conclude that museum professionals

should be more critical and self-evaluative in human rights movements in order to contribute in a meaningful way to the society.

11. Sandell, Richard, and Nightingale Eithne. *Museums, Equality and Social Justice*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2012. 13-45,72-84,125-142, 193-227.

Richard Sandell is a professor of museum studies at Leicester University, and Eithne Nightingale is a head of diversity and equality department at London's Victoria and Albert Museum. Here the authors recognize the power of museum to influence human rights movements, as well as their lack of methodology in social inclusion. Hence, the authors explore ways for museums to be equal and socially just to their communities. Each chapter of the book explores theories of social justice and equality and gives details on how to construct or deconstruct the work of an institution to start building just society. Their main idea that all museums should practice social inclusion is quite relevant to my project. It serves as a useful framework to help recognize those institutions that truly represent and care for their community.

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