

# Diversity and Philanthropy at African American Museums Black Renaissance

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## 2 African American/All-American

The commission shall develop a fundraising plan for supporting the creation and maintenance of the Museum through contributions by the American people, and a separate plan on fundraising by the African American community.

(H.R. 3442 2001)

In 2003, after President George W. Bush signed into law the legislation that established the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), J. Richard Taft, president of the Taft Organization, and Alice Green Burnette, principal of Advancement Solutions, presented a report to Congress. The advancement consultants had been charged with developing a plan to raise more than \$200 million in private funds to help build the museum. Although they rejected the legislation's call to create wholly separate fundraising plans for different racial groups,<sup>1</sup> they recommended that the campaign take heed of their findings concerning racial differences in response to the NMAAHC. In their report, which was based on over a year of study including focus groups and interviews with targeted donors, the consultants were cautiously optimistic about generating interracial support for the museum. Although prospective white donors were less excited about the NMAAHC than their black counterparts, Taft and Green Burnette advised that the former could be successfully cultivated by emphasizing the museum's interracial dimensions:

Our findings indicate that the case for support—as currently constituted—evokes a powerful response from African Americans and can be expected to motivate significant contributions at all levels in that community. Although enthusiasm from the non-African American community appears to be more restrained, this study suggests that it may be possible to build significant support among white Americans if the NMAAHC Museum campaign is depicted as “all American,” featuring both African American and white American leadership and involvement.

(Taft and Green Burnette 2003, 6)

This chapter further examines how black and white patrons respond to African American museums. More specifically, I elaborate how members of both groups define the racial and ethnic value of these cultural institutions. I find that patrons often see black museums as having dual identities—one black and the other American. Indeed, it is not uncommon for patrons of all races to use phrases along the lines of “African American history is American history” or “African American culture is American culture” to describe why African American museums should be broadly supported. However, while blacks and whites alike generally embrace a vision of black museums as both “African American” and “all-American,” black supporters often have a heightened awareness of their relevance for the black community, and white supporters often have a particular sensitivity to their significance for whites.<sup>2</sup> This chapter centers on the African American/all-American duality, but the last section also introduces a further distinction: the African American museum as African American versus African diasporic. I document how first- and second-generation supporters of African descent often place particular emphasis on the latter.<sup>3</sup> To understand these racial and ethnic variances, I draw upon the broader literature on the black and white middle and upper classes.

Since the 1960s, the class structure in the United States has transformed to include more middle- and upper-class blacks (Edsall 2017; Harvey Wingfield 2011; Landry and Marsh 2011; Watkins 2005, 260–267; Wilson 1980; Wingfield 2013; Zweigenhaft and Domhoff 2011). Although there is ongoing debate about the salience of race versus class in shaping opportunities (Willie 1979; Wilson 1980), research consistently shows that the life chances, understandings of self, and beliefs about the opportunity structure of middle- and upper-class blacks and whites often diverge (Collins 1997; Dawson 1994; Hochschild 1995; Pattillo-McCoy 1999). For example, while legal barriers restricting opportunities for blacks have eroded, racial bias continues (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997; Bonilla-Silva 2010; Feagin and Sikes 1994). Similarly, black identity often remains a salient category of belonging for middle- and upper-class blacks (Lacy 2004, 2007; Tatum 1987; Willie 2003).

Sociologists have long argued that racially distinct structural and symbolic realities contribute to different patterns of cultural engagement among middle- and upper-class blacks and whites. For example, in the 1950s E. Franklin Frazier (1997[1957]) asserted that the “black bourgeoisie” managed racially rooted status anxieties through imitating the lifestyle of elite whites. Although his work has been highly critiqued, one fundamental assumption underlying his research, that racial boundaries influence cultural engagement, is widely accepted. Like Frazier, contemporary researchers also explicate how middle-class blacks negotiate racial inequality through engagement with mainstream high-status cultural symbols (Lacy 2007, 72–113; Molnár and Lamont 2002, 88–111). However, there is also increasing analysis of their engagement with black culture (Banks 2010, 2017, 2018, forthcoming; Fleming and Roses 2007). In comparison to their white counterparts, middle-class blacks have higher levels of engagement with some forms of black culture (DiMaggio

and Ostrower 1990; Halle 1993, 158–159).<sup>4</sup> A desire to nurture their racial identity motivates some middle-class blacks to seek out black culture such as art by black visual artists (Banks 2010, 2019; Crockett 2017; Grams 2010). Although Francie Ostrower's *Trustees of Culture* (2002) theoretically centers class in interpreting cultural patronage, a section in one chapter also explores how race and ethnicity may influence the experience of minorities on museum and opera house boards. For example, a black trustee whom she interviews believes that he “sets the tone” for his organization’s outreach to minority communities (Ostrower 2002, 50). This chapter builds on this literature by describing how race and ethnicity organize supporters’ conceptions about the value of African American museums.

Although all supporters typically embrace African American museums as having worth for blacks and nonblacks, black supporters are particularly cognizant of the former, and white patrons are especially aware of the latter. I develop this argument by examining three dimensions of racial value: philanthropic space, neighborhoods, and narratives. Consistent with research demonstrating that black spaces and places (Lacy 2004), or organizations and neighborhoods, play an important role in black middle-class social and civic life, I find that black supporters are often especially aware of the function that African American museums play in the broader fabric of the black community. In line with research demonstrating that middle-class blacks seek out black culture to nurture black identities (Banks 2010, Banks 2018, forthcoming), I show how black patrons are often especially conscious of the worth of black-centered narratives in African American museums and their transformative power for black museum-goers. In comparison, I find that white supporters often place particular emphasis on the value of black museums as interracial spaces and places. It is also not uncommon for them to be especially sensitive to the value of black museums for articulating interracial narratives that can change the hearts and minds of whites. I posit that this interracial emphasis is enabled by both structure and culture. For example, structurally, white patrons are often entering black contexts, such as black neighborhoods and events, where blacks are in the majority. Through their very presence in these spaces—or by going over to the “other side”—some whites see themselves as interracial bridges who link racial communities. I also propose that factors such as whites’ racial and ethnic identities contribute to their heightened focus on black museums as spaces to highlight interracial narratives. In essence, varying past and present experiential realities and differential access to broader values, beliefs, and meanings related to race and ethnicity may contribute to black and white patrons having different degrees of clarity about the different racial sides of black museums.<sup>5</sup>

## Spaces

Although it has long been understood that the space of cultural philanthropy is inhabited by the upper-middle and upper class, what is less

recognized is that this space is also further divided along racial and ethnic lines. Across each city that I visited, the leading majority cultural institutions are supported mainly by whites, while black museums are disproportionately supported by blacks. This pattern, whereby white and black elites are segregated into different social worlds, is long-standing. Sociologists studying the black middle class across various time periods document a pattern of segregated organizational life that distinguishes members of the black middle class from their white counterparts (Frazier 1997[1957]; Graham 1999; Lacy 2004, 908–930; Landry 1987). There are parallel organizational spheres with specifically black and white middle-class organizations such as sororities and fraternities.<sup>6</sup> One black trustee who describes his city as “fairly segregated” distinguishes the separate communities by race referring to them as “black Centersville” and “white Centersville.” Although the range of separation varies from city to city and there is typically a degree of overlap, racial segregation is an ongoing reality in middle- and upper-class organizational life.

The separation in social and civic life maps onto the cultural world. For example, while black middle-class organizations, such as Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity (or the Boulé) and The Links, Inc., were million-dollar donors to the NMAAHC, no white social organizations were among large donors to the new museum (Banks forthcoming).<sup>7,8</sup> Philanthropy at black museums is experienced by some black supporters as an extension of this broader black organizational life. In the past, formal racial barriers forced middle-class blacks to craft separate social, civic, and educational spaces, and today some middle-class blacks self-consciously seek out these spaces. Informal racial barriers continue, and black spaces can provide respite from them (Allen 1992; Lacy 2004; Pattillo 2007). Moreover, though blacks are a minority in the United States, upper-middle- and upper-class blacks are an even smaller minority. Black organizational spaces are an escape from being “the only one in the room,” as one black trustee explains. When a Millennial supporter moved to her predominately white city, she became a patron to connect with other blacks there.

So, I moved to [Azure City] about four years ago, and one of the things I noticed when I first moved ... was [that there was] not a ... strong sense of black community here. Having gone to [an Historically Black College and University (HBCU)] I was not cool with that ... I couldn't grow and thrive and do what I wanted to do professionally and socially without a strong sense of community. So, that's basically what brought me to the museum.

Jennifer, a black supporter in another city, also casts light on the social dimensions of patronage when she describes how she first became involved with her local African American museum. “The types of events that they were sponsoring sparked my interest,” she says.

They had the Friday Jazz event. I would go and see African American art and meet other people who were interested in it. A good friend of mine [who is black]—she was my former boss and we became good friends—is very involved in the museum. Supporting some of the activities that she was participating in was sort of my introduction to the group. You have a friend, you try to support the friend, and before you know it, you say, “Hmmm, I might like this.”

Social ties are at the heart of Jennifer’s patronage. She recently commissioned a work by an African American artist for the museum. It was to honor the friend and colleague who introduced her to the organization. “My dear friend did something very nice for me, and one way for me to thank her was to try and find something that she likes and support that,” Jennifer says. When I ask Jennifer whether she knows other patrons at the museum socially she shares that it is “probably 50-50.”

I knew a couple of people from church and from other organizations that I’ve worked with or now work with. I knew a couple of neighbors as well. A lot of African Americans in the city belong to the same organizations. There are not a lot of organizations and so they belong to the same organizations. Every black person I know does something for, is a member of, is on the board, sponsors events at, or is a friend of the museum. It gets a lot of support. It has great community support.

Jennifer notes how she connects with blacks who are part of her broader network through involvement with the museum. This is in stark contrast to other philanthropic events in the city, where she is often the only black, or one of a few. “It’s nice being around African Americans whom you have things in common with,” Jennifer says, explaining why the museum’s fundraisers are so appealing to her.

The first time that I went to the winter gala was last year, and there wasn’t one thing there that I didn’t like. Folks who are supporters donate art, and people bid on it. These are people I know in the community and who I like. For some reason, there was not one thing there that I wouldn’t want. The whole point is to make a lot of money and run up the bids. Then for the [summer] gala, I just like parties. They have nice food, nice music. The night is great. I go to a lot of black tie events that are white-centric, and this is the one thing where you go and it’s mostly black people, and it’s beautiful, beautiful black people. It’s like all of the pretty people are there. So, my husband and I, we like that. We’ve only been twice. I invited my sister, and she and her husband will come and join us. All the events are so classy. They’re well done and well put together. The people that associate themselves with the museum are just very refined, decent, nice people that you want to be around.

Echoing Jennifer's sentiment, a trustee at a black museum located on the other side of the country comments that the yearly gala offers "another place for African Americans to gather." "You see a lot of your friends and you're able to talk art over wine and feel pride," she reflects. When I attend a gala for one museum it is clear that it is a hub for bringing together the black middle and upper class in the city. The gala is held on a warm summer evening. A few hundred supporters are at the event. The women sport freshly coiffed hair, tasteful makeup, and elegant evening gowns, while the men wear formal suits and tuxedos. In a rotunda with modern and contemporary art, *hors d'oeuvres* are served and jazz plays in the background. An older crowd gathers here. In a courtyard, a DJ spins popular hip-hop hits as the younger crowd dances. The atmosphere is festive, and people interact with familiarity and ease. Throughout the evening, patrons greet friends and acquaintances with hugs and kisses. Well-known black middle-class social organizations and black civic organizations also have a formal presence as institutional supporters of the event. While there are some whites, and an even smaller number of Latinxs and Asian Americans present, for the most part it is a black crowd.

Museum staff also comment on how fundraisers are important for developing social ties—particularly social ties among blacks. When I ask one staff member if networking is common at her museum's major fundraiser she says,

Are you kidding? It [the Goldsville African American Museum gala] is *the* networking situation of the year. I think people do it just for the social connections. ... Not only do you see fabulous clothes, it's a good party. Is it like network central? Absolutely.

In contrast to attendees at other museum fundraisers in the city, the crowd at her museum's gala is primarily black. But, some prominent whites also attend. "Attending gives you prestige in the white community too," she explains. She recalls a gala a few years ago where she ran into one of her white neighbors. "I went there, and I met a woman who lived in my building. She said, 'I heard this was the place to come.'" While this staff member believes that the fundraiser helps to establish one's reputation within the city's upper-middle and upper class at large, she sees it as especially important for doing so among the community's black elite. "There's still a lot of segregation among communities in this country. So, I think you especially get prestige within the African American community," she says. A staff member at a different museum also comments on the role of black museum patronage in nurturing bonds and gaining recognition among the black middle and upper class in particular. "I think it plays this role within all communities," she acknowledges. "But, within the black community, definitely. It adds to things you can talk about... It has a lot to do with that. Being seen in the right places also helps."



At museum events, many of the middle- and upper-class blacks know one other and value their patronage for reinforcing these existing bonds. In contrast, Steven, who has served on the boards of the leading majority and black museums in his city, describes how the majority museum draws a different crowd. He is one of a few blacks in the community who have served on the board of the respected Blue City Art Museum. Historically, the board has been mainly composed of individuals from long-standing elite white families in the city. I ask him to compare patronage at the two museums. "There are some events at the Blue City Art Museum that I probably don't even know about," he says. "Why wouldn't you know about them?" I ask.

STEVEN: They're at private homes. Also, I'm not in some of their clubs.

There are people who are very comfortable with me being on the board of the museum, but I've never been to their house.

PATRICIA: Why do you think that is the case?

STEVEN: Hello? I think racism is alive and well in America and in every class.

PATRICIA: When you say every class, what do you mean?

STEVEN: From high to low, it is alive and well.

PATRICIA: Even among the people on the board?

STEVEN: There are certain things that are okay to do, but a lot of things I don't know anything about. Like when you get into, well, third-generation history. There are still a lot of old connections here. I just can't tune into it. There are also vacationing patterns and private clubs. There is the Fox Club. It is very Princeton-heavy. So to get in, to be non-Princeton, nonwhite, that's heavy. I was an exception period, and I know it. Period. But I am a former trustee of the museum, so if you're ever going to make an exception, well then ... [voice trails off].

In Digby Baltzell's (1964) research on the Philadelphia elite, he describes the intimate social ties among the old white Protestant families in the city. Their shared sense of honor and familiarity was bred through living in the same neighborhoods, joining the same social organizations, and attending the same prep schools and elite colleges. Writing in the 1950s, Baltzell notes how nonwhite and non-Protestant elites are excluded from this circle. Decades later, Steven sees similar bonds among his city's old-money elite. His membership on the board of the city's oldest art museum and in other organizations gives him some foothold in this world. Yet, if long-standing family ties are necessary for complete acceptance, it will never be a group where he is fully at home. In contrast, he is at the nucleus of the black elite that comes together at the African American museum.

For black patrons, African American museum events like galas are often a welcome aspect of their patronage. The opportunity to connect with middle- and upper-class blacks who are already in their social circles, as well as make new connections, is cherished. This is cast in relief when I look through society page photos of fundraising events at the major

African American and majority museums in different cities. Inevitably, the black events have a concentration of blacks, while events for the majority museums picture few, or in some cases, none at all. Patrons like Steven who support majority and black museums in their cities directly experience this difference. It is within this context of having few opportunities to interact with blacks in the cultural world, as well as in other aspects of their lives, that they place value on connecting with other blacks at African American museums.

In his oft-cited essay “The Talented Tenth,” W.E.B. DuBois 1996 [1903] asserts, “The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men.” While he later amended his thesis (Waite 2001), his beliefs concerning racial uplift and class had long taken hold among the black middle and upper class. This value, that middle- and upper-class blacks have a duty to help advance the race, is evident within the context of museum philanthropy. This belief, that the sphere of black cultural organizations is where middle- and upper-class blacks have a particular obligation for leadership, is fueled not only by broader racial uplift ideology but also by the perception that leadership at majority cultural institutions is in a sense “owned” by middle- and upper-class whites.

When I interview Lucy, the attachment that black patrons have to her city’s African American museum is brought into relief when she talks about the tight connection that the white upper-middle and upper class have with the city’s largest art museum. Like Steven, Lucy is a black patron who has served on the boards of the majority and black museums in her community. I ask her to describe differences between the two boards. She feels that white board members feel a sense of ownership of the majority museum. In her mind, they believe, “We’re at the table, because we’re supposed to be at the table. It’s our turn to be at the table.” Given the large contingent of board members who are 50 years and older I ask her if this attitude is primarily related to age. “Not entirely. It’s a function of birthright,” Lucy replies. “As African Americans, we have witnessed this all our lives.”

Take a white person who is a vice president at his company. He feels that “of course, I’m supposed to be here. I’m used to being here. I don’t know that you are supposed to be here. But, I’m supposed to be here. The art on the walls and the sculptures all represent who I am—European American. This museum represents who I am. Does it represent you? Should it represent you?” So, it’s not age. It really isn’t age in my opinion.

Lucy views white elites as feeling a racial and class connection to the majority art museum. From her perspective, they see it as “their museum.”<sup>9</sup> In contrast, for some black patrons, African American museums are valued as the institutions in the cultural world to which they are distinctly connected. These are organizations that black Americans have the opportunity to lead and that focus on culture from their racial group. A staff member describes this perspective, noting that

for black patrons supporting her museum is important because there's "a sense of pride and support for something that belongs to them."

However, for black board members who take a leadership role in cultivating major gifts, it can sometimes be challenging to reconcile broader community expectations that blacks will play a central role in the philanthropic leadership of black museums with the harsh reality that wealth is still concentrated among whites (Conley 1999; Oliver and Shapiro 1997; Shapiro 2005). One former board chair who helped to secure a seven-figure donation from a white foundation in his city is sensitive to criticism from some segments of the black community that there isn't enough black "control" of the museum. He notes that though there have been commitments made by some black middle-class organizations in the city, as well as black families, the unequal racial distribution of wealth makes it challenging to realize the ideal of having black cultural uplift funded primarily by donations from blacks. "The biggest thing right now is trying to get a consistent funding base. I think that's our biggest challenge and I think most African American museums across the nation [have it too]," he explains.

I think we do have African Americans who give, but nothing in the sense of major multi-million dollar gifts and the like. At least I haven't seen too many... If you look at most of the signature African American museums [and cultural organizations], they're not driven by an Afro-American governing body that is the primary sponsor. At Alvin Ailey [a black dance company] it's the Weills [a wealthy white family].<sup>10</sup> ... When you really look at the top tier donors who are there, they're not African-Americans per se, although you're starting to see some. We went to Alvin Ailey in December, and we saw some of the actors and stars who are our patrons. But big endowment funds, that big endowment fund that's totally managed and run by African Americans, I don't know too many. Now, that just might be my lack of knowledge, but that's what I think is missing. So, what we wind up doing ... is we have fundraisers. And, we solicit a lot. But, we are not necessarily getting what I call the big gifts, and consistent big gifts over time. Even the one that's going up in DC [the NMAAHC] has got its problems. If there isn't a big driver, it's going to ... need white America to help fund it. So, the big challenge is how do you get a community to consistently own it and make it a priority of their giving... If you can't get an endowment, or you don't have a large enough pool, you're spending too much of your time trying to raise what I call "small dollars," and that's our big challenge—can we get out from under having to do that so we can then direct dollars to programming.

I interviewed this trustee before fundraising for the NMAAHC was complete and all of the major gifts were reported. While the racial pattern of funding for this museum complicates his statements, it does not entirely contradict them. Analyzing million-dollar gifts to all of the Smithsonian

museums for the years 2005 to 2016, I found that black donors were far more likely than white donors to give to the NMAAHC. Looking at funding for the NMAAHC among the wealthiest Americans offers further insight on racial patterns of support for the museum. In 2016 just two African Americans—Oprah Winfrey and Robert Smith—were among the 400 wealthiest people in the United States. Both were founding donors of the NMAAHC. White billionaires, such as Bill Gates, were also founding donors to the NMAAHC, but their rate of giving to the museum—about 3 percent—was smaller than the 100 percent rate of support among the infinitesimally population of blacks in the group. Similarly, of the 20 wealthiest Black Americans in 2009—the most recent year this particular grouping was compiled by *Forbes* magazine—six, or 30 percent, ended up being founding donors of the NMAAHC. These patterns of funding suggest that wealthy blacks may be more likely than their white counterparts to donate to black museums. Yet, there is also evidence that whites are an important funding base for black museums.<sup>11</sup> Even in the case of the NMAAHC, where the majority of large donations by individuals, families, and family foundations appear to have come from blacks, gifts from whites, such as gifts in the \$10 million and above category from the financier David Rubenstein and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, amounted to a significant share of overall funds raised (see Figure 2.1).



Figure 2.1 Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Concourse Atrium and Oprah Winfrey Theater, National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, DC.

While recognizing the practical and moral value of white philanthropic involvement, and also helping to secure major donations from his majority white workplace, Don, a black trustee, talks about personally advocating that his racially mixed board not institute a required level of giving for trustees. “A number of the board members—minority board members—felt that it was incumbent upon ourselves to ensure that if the museum is going to be funded, that it is funded from not just the corporate community, but also from the African American community,” he explains.

We had a lengthy debate ... two board meetings ago because one of the board members wanted to establish a monetary threshold for board members to give in order to serve. ... But ... I personally thought that it would preclude some people who looked like me from serving on the board. So at the end of the day, the board member who was advocating it withdrew the motion. ... But, financially giving to the museum is extremely important from my perspective, as an African-American, because you can't have what I view as an African American treasure ... and African Americans are not meaningfully participating in the viability of that structure on a go-forth basis. That's not intended to be racist or otherwise. It's just a fact from my perspective. Meaning, that if your heritage is to be preserved, then you need to be a part of ensuring that it is being preserved in the right way.

Given that on average blacks have less wealth and lower incomes than whites (U.S. Census Bureau 2012, 40–41; Oliver and Shapiro 1997), this trustee worried that a minimum requirement for giving might preclude blacks from serving on the board. This concern for black participation in black museum philanthropy is consistent with black middle-class orientations towards not only uplift but also broader black traditions of self-help and giving (Carson 1993).

The question of black leadership also came to the fore as a national black museum in Washington, DC, was being debated. Over the decades-long process that a national African American museum was under consideration, questions were raised about the appropriate level of involvement for the Smithsonian Institution. Although some of the reticence was grounded in general uneasiness about government oversight, it was also related to specific concerns around race and government control. In particular, there was apprehension that the predominately white leadership at the Smithsonian would marginalize a black museum under its jurisdiction (Brown 1991; Ruffins 1998, 78–101). In the early 1990s, the African American Institutional Study Advisory Committee was formed to determine the feasibility of a national black museum. During the second meeting museum professionals and other stakeholders, such as Tom Mack, an African American entrepreneur, were invited to speak before the committee. Mack played a central role in reigniting efforts to establish a

national black museum in the 1980s. During Mack's testimony, he raised questions such as, who "should have the power and control over the new institution?" He asserted that the "proposed museum should be governed by the descendants of slaves, rather than the descendants of slave owners" (Brown 1991, 92).

Plans to establish a national black museum in this period ultimately failed, but by the next decade another committee was formed. Although Mack was not on the commission that wrote the draft legislation for a final bill to form the NMAAHC, the issue of black trusteeship was addressed in the legislative outline. The draft legislation stated that a slight majority of trustees, or 13 out of 25, "must be of African descent" (National Museum of African American History and Culture Plan for Action Presidential Commission 2003, 116). The final legislation (H.R. 3491 2003) makes no reference to the race of trustees. However, efforts to legislate the racial composition of the board for what would become the NMAAHC illustrate the concern that blacks will be shut out of the leadership at black cultural institutions.

While some black supporters are particularly attuned to the significance of black participation in the world of black museum philanthropy, it is not uncommon for white supporters to be especially aware of the meanings of white engagement within this realm.

Dan, a white trustee, has an interest in black culture. However, "it's not a passion for me like it is for some people on our board," he says. "That was not really the compelling factor in my decision to do it [join the board]." He describes his interest in joining this board, as well as the board of another black cultural organization in his city, as motivated by a desire to bridge a racial divide:

I'd been thinking about possibly joining the board of the Johnson [another black cultural organization in the community] because I was attracted to the fact that it was a very diverse board. I hadn't been offered that opportunity yet, but I wanted to get more involved in the city, and I had been involved in other not-for-profits in the city. I was curious about [the museum] and wanted to see it succeed so that was really a big part of it. ... If you know much about the city, I don't know how atypical it is, but the city is pretty segregated. I thought, "Well, maybe there's something that I could try to do about is as an individual." I mean my circle of friends was pretty lily-white, and I belong to an exclusive country club, and I went to an exclusive school. ... But at any rate, that was really more what was motivating me than the values. I enjoy [culture], but it really wasn't the urge that was dragging my interest.

I ask if anything in particular happened to spark his growing interest in fostering racial integration in his community. "No," he replies, "It was kind of a growing awareness. I was kind of involved in community activities,

but not so overtly in a diverse environment.” For Dan, whose personal network is predominately white, joining boards of African American cultural institutions presents an opportunity to racially broaden his circle of acquaintances. When entering these philanthropic spaces with high concentrations of blacks, he sees himself as a bridge between racial communities. Grant, a white trustee at a black museum in another city, also describes his experience as a board member as a means of crossing racial boundaries. “So, why did you decide to get involved?,” I ask. “Well, I guess that it was a feeling that this was a worthy undertaking that the white community hadn’t fully supported and that I thought we should,” he replies. “I had some experiences in my childhood, in my younger days, with the black community, that made me want to do it.” When I ask him about the moment during his “younger days” that gave him the motivation to support an African American museum decades later, he describes a life-changing encounter when he was a 19-year-old college student. “When I was in college I thought that I was going to become a minister,” he recalls:

I spent a summer after my sophomore year in Goldsville [a historic black neighborhood] at something called the [East Goldsville Protestant Parish], which was a group of four storefront churches. ... I spent August living right in the community and it was tough. It was tough living in those days. ... But, I found people that were just very, very genuine and very hardworking and good people. I don’t know that it changed my view. It may just have really sort of reinforced my view that the white world didn’t really understand the black world and appreciate its strengths.

I ask Grant about his social connections to other patrons at the museum. Outside of the museum he does not have a relationship with most of them. “I think that being involved with the museum has brought me into contact with a lot of people I wouldn’t have otherwise known,” he comments. “Why wouldn’t you know them otherwise?” I ask. “Our worlds wouldn’t have crossed,” he replies. Grant elaborates on the separate spheres of the black and white elite in his city when we talk about one of the museum’s signature events. “Far and away the winter gala is the biggest fundraiser,” he says.

GRANT: But, that’s really attributable to Mary Weaver [a black trustee who works in finance], who has been our board chair for the last, she would say, too many years. She keeps saying she’s not going to do it anymore. But, she’s a dynamo and because of her work she has connections to people who are involved in very substantial investments. She is a major partner of something called Sound Investments. I have the impression that it’s a lot of African American money. You know, it saddens me because it seems to be something that separates the two worlds in a very large way. She’s very successful, but most of my friends or acquaintances who are in the investment world, they have no idea.

PATRICIA: About the company?

GRANT: Well yes, about her organization and how much they're doing. It's been written up in black magazines, many of which I had no idea about. I didn't even know they existed. But, it's a shame that somehow we don't get together. I am hopeful that President [Obama] will somehow be able to bring us more together.

Later, when discussing his contributions to the board and recruiting new members, Grant talks further about the separation between blacks and whites in his city.

GRANT: I don't have as many connections with the African American community, which is really the source of most of the board members. I think that's the way people want it. So, I don't really have many suggestions for new board members. I feel as though I'm deficient in that regard, but understandably. But, I think that I helped to get it [the governance committee which he chairs] together and make sure that we do follow the by-laws and that we grow it. We have an increasingly strong board. The organization has grown immeasurably in strength, in vitality, in financial security, and in the caliber of the board. I'm very impressed with the people.

PATRICIA: What do you look for when bringing people into the organization?

GRANT: Well, I tend to look for commitment and a willingness to work. ... I really don't ... know enough about most of the people. I feel very sad that there are two parallel societies here. I think for the most part the white community doesn't understand that the black community is every bit as intelligent, educated, you know all those virtuous things. And, they just go on side by side without many overlaps. It really bothers me and saddens me.

PATRICIA: Do you think that's changing?

GRANT: Well, it hasn't really in the sense that we've only had, as long as I've been there, I think two non-African American board members. Given what the organization is about, and where it came from, it seems to me that that's probably the way it will be for a while. Maybe we should be trying harder to get others involved, but I do think that the leadership of this effort is invariably going to be the people who are closest to this.

Grant enters a black social world through giving to the museum. Not only are the people new to him for the most part, but the broader contexts that encapsulate their lives, such as black businesses and black media, are also not a part of his everyday reality. In contrast, black patrons are often well-acquainted with the people and contexts. For them, patronage at African American museums is a space where they can interact with others who have more intimate familiarity with their lives.



The feelings of distance that some white patrons like Grant experience at African American museums reflect the very real boundaries between the white and black elite in the United States. However, there are also white patrons who are deeply embedded in the black community. For them, interracial ties forged at African American museums are appreciated as a typical rather than exceptional instance of personally bridging racial boundaries. For example, one white trustee attributes his being asked to join a local black museum board to his “special relationship with the black community.” “My high school was 50 percent [black] and ... most of my employees ... are African American,” he says. “Now in my adult life, even beyond my business, in all other aspects, my civic engagements, my charitable engagements, I intermingle with every level of the African American community. So, I am very comfortable with African Americans and empathetic.”

Patronage events at African American museums are unique spaces in the broader cultural and philanthropic worlds. In “majority” spaces black patrons are typically in the minority, and they often have fewer social ties to other supporters than do their white counterparts.<sup>12</sup> In the African American museum space, they are more often in the majority and highly socially integrated. On the other hand, when white patrons become involved in black museum philanthropy, they enter a context in which they are more often in the minority and other patrons are new to them. Still, there are some white supporters who often place, or find, themselves in contexts in which they are one of few whites, so crossing racial boundaries in the space of black museum philanthropy is a familiar experience.

For some white supporters, philanthropic involvement in black museums is understood as worthwhile not only because it allows them to actualize personal values concerning interracial ties, but also because it helps museums to meet external expectations for diversity. Some large funders have instituted implicit expectations or explicit requirements that grants will go to only nonprofits with diverse supporters (Bertagnoli 2012). Although these initiatives emerged mostly out of concern for limited racial and ethnic diversity at majority nonprofits, this new emphasis on diversity also affects black nonprofits. Board diversity is now a standard used to judge all nonprofits, with the belief that if they are not racially and ethnically diverse, they are not only in conflict with democratic ideals but also will function at a suboptimal level (Parkinson 2016). Some white supporters recognize that their presence at black museums addresses the pressure for racial diversity. One trustee notes this when he describes how he is often asked to participate in highly visible events, such as visits from dignitaries, at his museum. Reflecting on these events he says in jest, “So pardon the crass description, but I was like the white busboy because they always needed, they wanted diversity.” He enjoys the events, but also recognizes that his whiteness signifies to the broader community that the museum is racially inclusive. Similarly, after mentioning that he’s “the only white guy on the board,” a patron at another museum describes how white supporters signal to the

philanthropic community that black museums are in line with new diversity norms. He notes that in “management audits conducted by museum associations,” typically the critique is, “You’re all white. You’d better do something about that.” But, in the case of his museum, it is, “You’re all black and you better do something about that.”

Okay, fine. They say in order to be successful you need to have a diverse board. If it’s all black, it’s not going to work. You really need to, regardless of the thematics of the institution, to reflect your community. But I’m very comfortable with it, if everybody else is. Whites, blacks, so that’s cool. ... It’s really a question of do you bring the management and the leadership expertise to the issue to make the place successful. And I’ve never run into any issue, at least over anybody saying, “What’s that white guy doing down here?”

Some white supporters understand that their involvement in black museums helps the organizations to comply with values emanating from the broader nonprofit environment that idealize, and as one patron notes, almost “fetishize” diversity. Although this is not a major motivator of their involvement, it is nonetheless a role that they recognize themselves playing by virtue of their race. White supporters are often entering spaces where they may be “temporary minorities,” or at least much less in the majority than they are in the philanthropic space of majority cultural institutions.<sup>15</sup> For many, this contributes to a heightened sense that what matters about giving to black museums is that it can be a site where racial divides are bridged. Next, I describe differences in how black and white patrons define the racial value of black museums in relationship to place.

## Places

From the earliest years of the black museum movement, many African American museums, such as the DuSable Museum of African American History in the South Side of Chicago and the Studio Museum of Harlem, were established in black communities. In this way they are not only spatially close to where African Americans live but also part of a broader network of black institutions such as black churches, black schools, and black-owned businesses. Some black patrons view support of their local black museums as strengthening these spatial and symbolic black communities.

Kwame is an entrepreneur who lives and works in a historically black neighborhood. He moved to the neighborhood with his parents and siblings several decades ago. Though the neighborhood is now gentrifying, he sees the area as a model self-sustaining and self-sufficient black community. To him, it is a place where black nonprofits, like the museum where he is a trustee, along with black-owned businesses like his own, can thrive and contribute to the well-being of the still primarily African American population.

Everything that he needs, as he says several times during our interview, is “within a one-mile radius.” Kwame first became acquainted with the museum and its founder when he was growing up. It is part of a cultural center where his sisters, and later his daughters, took dance lessons. It’s “only a block and a half away from where I live, so it’s also in a one-mile radius. It’s part of the community,” he explains.

Several years ago, Kwame was approached by the museum’s founder to do some sales-related work with the museum. In keeping with his philosophy to donate part of his business profits to community organizations, he made a gift to the museum after his work was complete. Subsequently, he was invited to join the museum’s board. As Kwame talks about his initial work for and then subsequent donation to the museum, he describes his philosophy of black economic empowerment. “Well, typically when I make a sale, particularly if it’s a large sale, I like to make a donation to the charity of the sellers’ choice just ... to be appreciative of what they allow me to sell, to try to increase business for black businesses,” he explains.

I take and then I give, because if I take and then I give, all of the money stays in the same circle and that’s very important. So it may be small, but it’s very important. My first sale was to an attorney. Then I made a sale to an electrician. I got the electrician to hire the lawyer to represent him ... and then I got the lawyer to hire the electrician to do some work in his house. So even though it might be small, the idea is not. And, when you continue and you get larger, it has more of an impact. Particularly the impact is felt if you stay in that small circle. If you do things 10 or 20 miles away from you it’s not felt the same as when you do things within the small circle, because you can actually measure and see the quality of life changes. And, it can affect your personal quality of life and that was my goal.

There is a proposal to move the museum to a new area in the community. Since it is still within the boundaries of a one-mile radius, Kwame is not concerned about the move:

I am a local yokel as you might say. I am a local guy. I believe in living my life within this radius, taking and giving in the same radius. The reward that I receive is that I can actually see the effect because it’s in such a small area. ... If you walk around the street you might see someone who is addicted to drugs come up and talk to me and you might see a minister, or a politician. There is a lot of love and a lot of respect when I walk down the street with my neighbors. ... I am happy to have the wealth that I have. Whatever wealth that I have, I attribute it to the same inner-circle one-mile radius. But, the money was not my goal. The goal was improving life, not being humiliated. That’s very important to me. It’s very important to me as a kid who grew up in

the Jim Crow South—separate water fountains, back of the bus, being yelled at by people. I am a child and a white man is yelling at me about walking to the wrong bathroom. Those experiences of hate make me say, “Okay, you keep this. You want this. You got it. This little square right here belongs to me. Whoever steps on this property has to submit to my way of life and my way of thinking.” And, I am going to do the very best that I can to make this square the very best that it can be.

In Kwame’s eyes, supporting institutions in black neighborhoods helps to ensure that black people, including his own family, are able to enjoy a good quality of life in communities where they are subject to less racial discrimination and stigmatization. He emphasizes that his priorities for giving are to “myself and my family first, and the community in which we live because it’s our home.” “If I am not going to go out, then I must make change within if I want a better life tomorrow,” he explains:

How do I make life better and avoid the indignities and humiliations that we suffer as a people when we are in the larger community? I would rather stay here with dignity and just cure the ills that are here as opposed to trying to change the larger community. That’s going to be an everlasting task for us as a people and we are still trying. Our president [Obama] is humiliated. This guy is getting insulted and humiliated by all kinds of people, and here he is a fellow that graduated from a prestigious university and he’s articulate, he’s smart, he is honest... And so myself, I try to avoid these things that the highest person in the country suffers. To avoid this, I said, “Well, I will resort to just staying right here in this little village and make the best of whatever it is for me to have.” And for me, it works.

In Kwame’s eyes, the African American museum where he is a trustee is part of a broader black neighborhood ecosystem. By supporting the museum, he is also supporting a spatial and symbolic community where he lives and works. He regards the space outside of his gentrifying, but still predominately black, neighborhood as one where blacks are at risk of discrimination and stigmatization. By supporting black organizations, such as the African American museum, he sees himself as nurturing an oasis where blacks not only have shelter from racial humiliations and slights but also can enjoy the company and talents of one another.

Other black patrons with long-standing ties to the black communities where the museums that they support are located also describe the museums’ value as community institutions. Some patrons do not actually live or work in the communities but they have other ties, such as growing up there, having family who live there, or attending church there. A black trustee who does not live in the black community where the local black museum she supports is located but has gone to church there for over two

decades, describes the role that the museum plays in the broader neighborhood ecosystem—particularly for black youth. “So many kids still don’t get beyond a certain geography, and certainly, having a black museum dedicated to art opens up their world of thinking about ‘Well, there’s more out there,’” she reflects.

While black museums are often founded in black neighborhoods, some communities later undergo a shift in racial makeup. Over time, the museums can end up being on the edge, or in the heart, of gentrifying communities. These shifts in racial composition are often part of broader city transformations where the communities are targeted for redevelopment. As is the case in cities around the world where art and culture are used to spur local economies (Dávila 2004, 2012; Grazian 2005; Lloyd 2010; Wherry 2008; Zukin 2014), black museums are sometimes also part of redevelopment plans. Some black supporters with long-standing ties to these communities welcome improvements to the neighborhoods and an infusion of resources to black museums as part of neighborhood revitalization. However, they also express nostalgia about black neighborhoods of yesteryear. Cynthia is a trustee who spent her early childhood in the segregated neighborhood where the black museum she supports is located. She reminisces about that period, recalling, “Folks were just out strolling and eating and having a good time, going in and out of the [black-owned] restaurants.” When she describes how her trusteeship at the museum fits into her philanthropic ethos, she elaborates on what she views as an unintended positive side of past segregation. “It’s [her philanthropy] all about the empowerment of our people,” she explains:

I think that unfortunately we are having vivid demonstrations right now that what used to be just the way it was—that parents taught their children coping skills in order to make it in essentially a white world—a lot of that kind of fell off for various reasons. I think integration sent a false message that we didn’t have to still know how to successfully navigate American culture. So, we saw a lot of our people become so frustrated and so disengaged and then the whole drug phenomenon. So, helping people with coping skills, and also helping them to develop sellable skills is something that I’ve always been a part of. ... So, as I look at my history of boardsmanship, it’s always been about that. I think that our museums are ways to showcase who we are—the excellence, the passion, the beauty, the expression, all of that that is resident in our society. ... So that’s one of the reasons that I really enjoy supporting the whole museum piece.

Currently there are efforts to revitalize the community where the museum is located. “I think it’s very important,” she says about the effort. But, she also questions whether the revitalization has to come at the expense of undermining the black fabric of the neighborhood:

CYNTHIA: As you know, you can go all over the world, and if you say something about this area, there's a really good chance that the people you're talking to in these foreign locations have, at the very least, heard about it. So when you have something that valuable that is yours, and is physically located in your space, it needs to be viewed and treated that way. That's something that I think we need to do more work on.

PATRICIA: Do you expect the character of the community to change if there is more government and business investment in the area surrounding the museum?

CYNTHIA: I don't think that positive recognition and improvement has to necessarily be because gentrification has occurred. I think that too often it's viewed that way, which is why some of the older folk who remember the heyday get upset. Because it's like in some folks' minds, the only way that it can be improved, upgraded, raised to a higher lever—in the eyes of the general population—is that it has to be whitened. While that's a belief held by many, that doesn't have to be the reality. The reality should be that there is a richness and something worthy of understanding and embracing without you changing the culture, and without you changing the overarching physical makeup of the people who are there. So yes, I want us to be and to remain inclusive, but I don't think that we should have to subjugate the African American culture that founded it in the first place.

PATRICIA: What would it look like if you subjugate the culture?

CYNTHIA: Well, this is where you would have mainly white ownership of the businesses, where the music would be aimed particularly at the preferences of a specific audience. It probably would be where you would have more of your chain outlets up the street, as opposed to individually owned and flavored retail outlets, where a lot of the leadership of different things would not be as integrated as would be desirable.

Some other black supporters are cautious about change in the neighborhoods where the museums they support are located not because of personal memories of days long past, but because of the memories and experiences of blacks in their network. "I didn't grow up here. I don't work here. I live on the other side of town," one supporter notes. "But, I have close friends who make their living here and call it home. They've been here their whole lives. Change needs to happen and [the museum] should be part of it, but black people shouldn't be left behind."

Ben, a black patron who lives and works near the black museum he supports, also expresses caution about ongoing changes in the neighborhood. "This is my hood. I love it—born and raised," he says. The community is undergoing significant demographic shifts, and the museum itself is framed by some stakeholders as a vehicle that can help to enliven the local community and its cultural infrastructure. However, Ben wonders if the changes will compromise the cohesiveness and even physical and emotional

safety of the area. "This is my community. I wouldn't trade it. I love being in the 'hood," he says:

No matter how much money I make, I feel safest here. I will try to develop my own 'hood as opposed to going around people who are working against my interests without even knowing. When you leave, when you go to spaces that are not safe, some of the people there are against you without even realizing and that's very, very dangerous.

He elaborates on safety in the area around the museum. "I would rather go down to the museum by the projects. I feel safer in the 'hood than I do in the Heights [a wealthy white area]. I went to school there [the Heights] and felt completely unsafe, but the 'hood is fine."

PATRICIA: So what do you mean by unsafe?

BEN: Well, when you are walking down the street and someone looks in your face, and you can tell that they don't necessarily see you as a human being. Just things like that and all of the other microaggressions that accompany it. That's what I mean by unsafe.

PATRICIA: So in this predominately African American space you don't get that?

BEN: No. If somebody has a problem with you, it's probably because they have a problem with you particularly and not just because you exist. I'll live with that.

PATRICIA: Do you think that gentrification will alter the demographic profile of the museum's supporters?

BEN: I doubt it. I mean, the community has changed. Many of my neighbors are gentrifiers. However, you're not going to see them heavy in support [of the museum] because they don't care about it. When a hipster coffee shop opens, they flock to that because that's what they want to support. They're looking to support another hipster coffee shop, but they're not looking to support the museum. They are not looking to support [the museum] because they don't care. Because it's not theirs, they see no value. It doesn't mean community to them. It means nothing. So, I don't worry about the demographic of the museum changing too much... They [the gentrifiers] are not here to interact with the community. They are here to create their own community. They are not interested in acknowledging the lady that everybody for twenty years says good morning to. They are not interested in that. They are not interested in supporting and seeing how they can build these small businesses over here. They are interested in creating their own small businesses in their place. They don't see value and that's why the demographic of the museum won't change. Whether or not the museum exists in five years or ten years, that's the question. While it's here, the demographic is going to be the same. The same people are going to be supporting it.

Ben sees the new residents populating his neighborhood as having little commitment to either its well-established black institutions, such as the museum, or its long-standing black residents. In his view, they also make the neighborhood less safe. “As the numbers grow and there becomes fewer black people and more gentrifiers, it is less of a safe space,” he comments:

You know, when my neighbors are having a party I just try to go to sleep. I deal with the noise. I am not calling the police on my neighbors when you know they can experience violence. I’ve sat in community board meetings and just hear people, new residents of the community—gentrifiers—casually talk about calling the police on business owners or residents. There’s a code here. You don’t do that. You might as well hate somebody to do that. You could possibly be sentencing them to death by doing that, and so, no, it’s not as safe anymore. It’s not as safe.

Although Ben has lived in this community all of his life, his comments are resonant with middle-class blacks who move to black urban communities partly to seek respite from racial marginalization (Pattillo 2007). In his research on “the continuing significance of race,” the sociologist Joe Feagin catalogues a range of discriminatory actions faced by middle-class blacks in public spaces. They include behaviors such as verbal epithets, poor service, and police harassment (Feagin 1991, 104). It is microaggressions and more explicit forms of intimidation like these that Ben feels less exposed to in the predominately black neighborhood where he lives and where the museum he supports is located. While some of these communities also suffer from challenges like declining infrastructure and crime, to a degree they serve as an oasis from some forms of racial marginalization. Black supporters like Ben with strong ties to these areas are often intimately familiar with these protective qualities of black communities. For this reason, some are wary of the gentrification taking place in the neighborhoods surrounding black museums.

For white supporters, who often have a very different relationship with these neighborhoods—one not atypically anchored by weak ties and entailing passage across an unofficial racial line that circumscribes the black side of town—it is not uncommon to be especially focused on the role that black museums can play in building interracial community spaces. Dan, who became a black museum supporter to help foster interracial ties via the board, also sees his museum as a vehicle that can do this more broadly by “helping with diversity in the community.” Before he joined the board, he personally spent little time in the predominately black neighborhood where the museum stands. But he thinks that the museum can be a draw for whites to visit the community. He tries to bring white friends and colleagues to the museum as a reminder “that there really is a very strong cultural heritage here.”



It happens to be an African-American heritage, but it's an important heritage for the city, and I think a lot of people don't really appreciate it. ... I bring people down to the area on occasion. We have an annual fundraising luncheon ... preceded by tours of the museum, and it's been fairly effective. I bring people to that luncheon and so it's on an anecdotal basis, but maybe it's somewhat helpful.

While his friends and colleagues have generally welcomed their sojourns to the community, he recalls one disheartening response.

It's almost uniformly positive, but there are friends of mine who clearly live extremely suburban lives and are not accustomed to being in an urban diverse setting, and it's kind of disappointing to me. There is really one guy who I could just tell he hadn't been around African American people much. I mean he's been in business for years, but at any rate, I got him down there. Of course he doesn't know [the culture] so there was that aspect as well. So some people, it's just going to take a while. But most of the people, just about everybody else I've taken down to the museum, have really been surprised and enjoyed it.

Dan sees fears about neighborhood crime as one reason that some whites are reluctant to visit the area. "Where it is [the location] has a lot to do with it," he says. "There is still kind of, I am sure you run across it talking with others, this kind of concern about coming down to the inner city." Gregory, another white trustee, also describes how segregation in his city—and white perceptions about crime in the black part—deter white visitation. "It's part of the race problem that exists in the city," he says.

I think there are people who don't want to go east of Walton in the city and who are afraid to go to the [area around the museum]. That's part of it... In a lot of communities, particularly white communities, they don't really think about even venturing down there, except to go to Jake's [a popular restaurant]. ... I don't think it [danger from crime] is really a reality at all. But, there's a perception whites in the city have.

In his opinion, improved transportation that better integrates the black neighborhood with the city center, as well as more parking spaces near tourist attractions like the museum, will help to bring more traffic to the area.

I think you've got to make it easy for people to get there and feel like it's more of a controlled safe environment. ... I think that [better public transportation] would turn that place around. If you just had a simple easy way to get over there. ... Parking is sort of unclear in the neighborhood. I mean you're looking for parking spots in the street, and people

don't want to stray far from [the main thoroughfare] and so I think that's an impediment.

John, who is also white, similarly comments about crime as an impediment to whites visiting the black museum where he is a board member. He does not live or work in the black section of the community where the museum is located. But, over the years, he has visited the area for its cultural attractions. Even before he joined the board, he made these sojourns. "I loved the diversity that was evident when you came here," he reminisces. "I always found that intriguing and I don't know why. But, I liked being immersed in a different culture. I felt super cool. What can I say?" Compared to the past, he sees the community as less "edgy" but safer now.

It's less edgy now, because it's more mainstream now. I don't feel the least bit threatened when I come here. It's very different now. Typically, when we [his group of friends] came to a club we would be the only white folks in the club. I didn't necessarily feel really safe here at the time. It's changed now because it's more gentrified, and there's a lot more substance here than there was then.

Despite feeling that the area is now safer, John describes how some white acquaintances are wary of the community because of concerns about crime. "Now, I'll tell you a story that I found very interesting," he recounts.

I was interviewing ... a white guy who's probably in his forties—and this is really kind of disappointing to me. He told me, "I was walking down the street with my son and I was on 11th street. As I passed Matey's—[a restaurant near the museum]—I realized, oh, oh, I'm getting over near Charles Street [the street the museum is located on], we need to turn around." He said, "I didn't want to make a big deal about it with my son, but I knew we had ventured too far." I thought, "No, you hadn't. You hadn't ventured far enough." But that's still something that we fight. ... I've had people tell me, "You know, you just need to move the museum over to a different area and it would flourish. You need to move it five blocks west of here." Well, that isn't going to happen. This is a [historic site], not five blocks west of here.

"Do you think that it [the museum] would thrive if that [moving the museum] was the case?" I ask. "I think it would do better ... but I'm not in favor of moving it," he responds.

But, I'm also not going to discount the fact that it's a hurdle that has caused some difficulty. ... Over the course of the years I've probably brought twenty people in. My hope would be that someday, when they're looking for something to do, and they've got guests in town or

something, that they'll think about coming over here and that begins to break down the concerns that people have. The other thing that happens, that sets us back, is there have been shootings here. ... I've had people tell me. "So, how are things down there? Have you bought cocaine down there lately?" Well, you know I don't like hearing that, but that's what people do.

Right now, the community is transforming with more business and government investment. While these changes might shift the racial demographics and cultural spirit of the neighborhood, John sees them as improving the life chances of residents and bringing broader support to the museum.

As far as changing the area I guess I'm all in favor of making it a vital area. ... I don't care if it's strictly a black culture place, because I believe over time the cultures have to begin to meld. Hopefully, we'd always have the uniqueness of the culture. But, at the same time, I'd like to think that the cultures begin to blend a little bit better and with that you probably are going to change the area. But, I don't see that as a problem in the long term.

Other supporters echo his belief that though segregation helped to create unique black cultural traditions, gentrification will ultimately be a positive development for the community's people and organizations. One white trustee, who says he was a "casual appreciator" of the neighborhood prior to joining the board, favors investment that he hopes will bring in more tourists and others. "It was a fully thriving community, and then for a variety of reasons it went into ... a sort of fallow, nonthriving state," he says.

We can't bring it back, nor should we even think about bringing it back as an engine of black life. ... No way, we bring it back as a connected part of the city that people use and enjoy for what it is, whether it's nightlife, or business areas, or the historic research that can be done in the museum. So we bring it back that way. That's really the path that we are on now, which is really exciting.

Jacob, a white trustee who describes himself as "just peripherally" linked to other organizations in the historically black community where he is a museum trustee, is also enthusiastic about neighborhood revitalization there. Although he is an avid supporter of revitalization efforts, he recalls a news report in which black residents voiced concerns about gentrification. "People think it's the wealthy people just coming down here and wanting to take over. ... It's from my vantage point totally irrelevant and not true," he says. But, he admits that "there's a lot of history, things that took place 30, 40, 50 years ago. Things that I barely know about." In his eyes, business investment will increase visitation to the museum and improve the

community as a whole. But, he fears that businesses will come only if more government funds are directed to the area.

If you come down here, you see structures that don't look good. They don't look stable. A commercial developer looks at that and says "Am I going to be able to succeed if I come down and start a restaurant or start a dry cleaner, or whatever?"

Ultimately, he believes that the museum's future depends on fully integrating it into the city's "business and tourist infrastructure."

These white supporters are especially attuned to the role of black museums as vehicles for building interracial communities. While many do not have deep structural ties to black neighborhoods, they typically see their interactions in these areas as positive and encourage other whites' involvement. Being exposed to unfiltered fears from white friends and acquaintances that black neighborhoods are dangerous, they are also particularly sensitive to the reality that white visitation to these museums may be held in check until concerns about crime in the surrounding neighborhoods are allayed. In their eyes, gentrification is a tool that will help to increase museum visitation and improve the quality of life of residents. Among black supporters there is also strong interest in infrastructural changes that will upgrade black museums and their surrounding communities. Black supporters are also typically keen on creating a museum environment where all people, regardless of race and ethnicity, feel welcome. However, they also more often have a heightened awareness, derived from personal experiences and the experiences of black family, friends and acquaintances, of racial marginalization that can accompany gentrification. Moreover, personal experiences within, and collective black memories of, self-sufficient black communities of yesteryear also contribute to deeper nostalgia for thriving black communities. In the next section, I compare how black and white patrons define the value of black museums in relationship to racial and ethnic narratives.

## Narratives

Tucked into a corner on the third floor of the NMAAHC is a white sign with maroon writing that reads, "Mae's Millinery" (see Figure 2.2). The surrounding glass cases are filled with intricately designed hats and accessories created by Mae Reeves. In 1941, after moving to Philadelphia from Georgia during the Great Migration, Reeves opened what would become a thriving hat shop. Her grandson Joel Limerick was partly motivated to join the Ambassadors at the NMAAHC—a young professionals patron group for individuals who give between \$5,000 and \$24,999—because of the familial connection (Building Blocks 2014). Commenting on his patronage he notes that, "This is a chance for us to be part of something that generations after us will thank us for" (Building Blocks 2014).



Figure 2.2 Mae's Millinery Exhibition, the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Black supporters often describe the value of black museums in relationship to preserving personal histories characteristic of the black experience. While they may be intimately familiar with family histories and have held onto cherished family heirlooms, they view black museums as spaces that can protect and publicly memorialize these legacies. Donating or loaning family artifacts to, and providing financial support for, African American museums allows them to help preserve these legacies. The Boyd family not only gave a million-dollar gift to the NMAAHC, but they also donated artifacts from their family business started by Richard Henry (R.H.) Boyd in the 19th century. The family history is documented in an exhibition in the museum's Community Galleries. At the top of the exhibit case there is a quote from the family patriarch, the publishing magnate R.H. Boyd, that reads, "Will you help the young Negro be a self-respecting man by putting the Periodicals of his father's organization in his hands?" The display holds objects such as a black-and-white family portrait from the 1890s, a metal printing plate used from 1959 to 1979, and a printed Baptist Sunday school lesson from 1926. T.B. Boyd III, R.H.'s great-grandson, describes the personal and broader cultural significance of his family's heirlooms and philanthropy at the NMAAHC (Smithsonian Campaign n.d.): "We need a repository for African American

history in this country. A lot of our great stories have not been told ... I grew up with these beautiful artifacts. Now, they'll be shared by millions."

These family stories, often involving success against the odds, are embraced as personally inspiring narratives that can also motivate a broader public. When I interviewed black supporters in their homes, they often showed me heirlooms that serve as aide-mémoires for recollecting family histories. Some patrons also display these objects in their offices. After I interviewed one black trustee in a conference room at his family business, we went upstairs to his office. A copy of a cherished 19th-century family document hangs on the wall there. He went over the history of the document in detail. In the process of describing this artifact, he told a broader story about his family's upward mobility, mentioning "several generations of college-educated folks on both sides and ties to Booker T. Washington." "Looking at people like my ancestors ... that history insulates you," he says.

Once you understand that kind of stuff, it allows you to deal with all of these other modern challenges. ... Whenever we have some challenges [in the business], I just look at this up on my wall. ... You look at that, and you say, "Wow, these guys did incredible things, and we can do it as well." Not in any way standing others up, but it has to make you feel good about yourself.

For black supporters who deeply value tangible and intangible family cultural patrimony, African American museums are often lauded as institutions that can aid in protecting and preserving it. There is often recognition that these narratives and objects are among a sea of others relating to African Americans that have been largely hidden from public view. However, there is also often the belief that if these artifacts and narratives are introduced to the public they can empower others, just as they have been a source of inspiration and strength in their families. While these narratives and objects that center African Americans are valued for how they can empower all people, there is often a particularly clear and concretized understanding of how they perform this function for blacks. Black patrons' personal experiences, and the experiences of their families, give them intimate knowledge of how they can motivate and embolden African Americans.

The cultural engagement of Michael Moore, the president and CEO of the International African American Museum (IAAM), helps to further illustrate this point. Moore is a direct descendant of Robert Smalls, a politician who served in the South Carolina legislature in the middle to late 19th century. Smalls, who was once enslaved, gained fame and recognition after commandeering a Confederate ship and sailing to freedom. Moore's family has preserved his legacy through helping to produce a traveling exhibition that has been shown in museums across the United States, including the Museum of African American History in Boston. Moore references this family legacy when talking about fundraising for the multimillion-dollar IAAM (Knich 2014). The

museum will stand on the shores of Gadsden's Wharf in Charleston, which was an entry point for an estimated 100,000 enslaved Africans. Most African Americans today, including Moore, likely had an ancestor pass through there. Robert Small's enslaved grandmother is believed to have taken her first steps on Gasden's Wharf. Knowledge about his family history helped to strengthen Moore as he was growing up in the 1970s. "Having a connection to Robert Smalls really was a great counterbalance to help me kind of feel a little bit better about my identity and everything," he says. "But, there are a lot of those stories. We just need to tell them" ("Michael B Moore" 2016).

The black billionaires Oprah Winfrey and Robert Smith, the two most generous donors to the NMAAHC, with gifts in the category of \$20 million and above, also discuss their gifts in relation to African American pride: "This museum says that we African Americans are at the center of it all," Smith says (Alexander 2016). Winfrey comments similarly,

Everybody will get to hear how there's a shared story we, as African Americans, all have. And we'll get to see ourselves rooted in that story in such a way that it can do nothing but lift us to be better and to do better.  
(Davis 2016)

The basketball star Michael Jordan also describes his gifts to the NMAAHC in the frame of collective black pride. His \$5 million donation was memorialized in a named section of the sports gallery, the Michael Jordan Hall: Game Changers. He also donated his 1996 NBA Finals jersey to the museum. "I felt it was an honor to get involved with the museum," he said about his gifts. "It's going to be a special place, one where African Americans can take pride in our heritage, kids can learn about our history, and where we can find hope and inspiration" ("Game Changer" 2016, 7).

Winfrey and Jordan are not alone in noting the importance of African American museums for black youth. Some black patrons, especially women, describe patronage of African American museums as part of their personal efforts to socialize their children to develop positive black identities. This inclination falls in line with findings in the literature on black middle-class families, noting that the positive racial socialization of children is a common child-rearing goal (Banks 2012; Barnes 2016; Tatum 1987; Lacy 2007). Marion Hawkins, a mother of two young girls, talks about why she and her husband decided to donate to an African American museum in their community. After learning about the fundraising efforts through her job, she later discussed making a gift with her husband:

I went home and I said, "We have to do something. We have to do this. We have to get involved." And of course he [Martin her husband] signed on. "We have to do this for our daughters," he said, "and our legacy." So that's how my initial participation came about.

Ultimately, the young couple decided to give \$25,000 to the museum. Marion describes how an ethos of racial uplift, along with a desire to ensure that her daughters have a positive self-concept and understanding of their cultural heritage, motivated the family's gift.

Racial uplift has been kind of drilled into me from a young age. Attending an HBCU, you know how it is, it's drilled into you every day—not only by your family, but by the professors, by your community—that we have to uplift our race.<sup>14</sup> We have to continue to do whatever we can to uplift our race and to help our race, no matter what. So growing up, Martin and I just believed that wholeheartedly. ... We live in the Dotson area. It's very segregated, not very diverse at all, and Melissa [the couple's oldest daughter] is the only African American in her classroom. Sarah, our three-year-old, is the only one in her preschool as well. Growing up, I was one of maybe two or three in the Advanced Placement classes, and it was the same with my husband. He was maybe one of two or one of three. That was one of the reasons why our parents were like, "No, you're going to [an HBCU] because you need that foundation first before you go on to [graduate] school." So, because our children are growing up in kind of similar circumstances in terms of being "the only" in classroom settings and camp settings, it's important for them to get that foundation from us first. We teach them. We read to them. ... This [the museum] is the only place they're going to get it from. So, we have to help build this museum. Not only will they learn from it, but whenever we go into the city and they pass the museum site ... Melissa will say, "That's our museum. You guys are building that museum. They're brown like us." So she knows, and Sarah pretty much is three, so she just repeats what Melissa says. We want them to have that understanding, that knowledge, but also to be proud. We want them to have pride in who they are as African American girls, not only as Hawkins's but as African American girls. As African Americans this is what we're doing to better our race and to not only better our race, but to educate the world about African Americans and our contributions that made this country possible.

Some black mothers' commitment to African American museums as a site of black identity socialization for their children is practiced through involvement with Jack and Jill of America, Inc. Established in 1938, and with chapters across the United States, Jack and Jill is a black family organization for mothers and children (Lacy 2004, 908–930; Graham 1999). It focuses on children's social development and civic engagement. Jack and Jill is part of the broader set of black middle-class social organizations that are engaged with African American museums. Indeed, the national organization, along with one local chapter, gave large gifts to the NMAAHC and are listed on the donor wall. When I was at the NMAAHC opening, I noticed a



Jack and Jill chapter wearing matching t-shirts touring the exhibits. Other chapters, including the Rockland Orange Chapter from New Jersey, also attended and posted photos on their Facebook page. In one photo, the group is posed in front of the Robert Frederick Smith Corona Pavilion holding a sign with its chapter name. Under the chapter name, the phrase “The Power to Make a Difference” is lettered in cursive. The caption on Facebook reads, “The Takeover: JJROC visited the National African American Museum of History & Culture in Washington DC. 33 mothers, 4 dads and 37 children (Tiny Tots to Senior Teens)!”

Among black supporters particular emphasis is often placed on the role that African American museums play in preserving, interpreting, and exhibiting heritage that centers and empowers African Americans. There is typically deep appreciation that African American museums also highlight how the history and culture of African Americans is intertwined with those of other racial and ethnic groups, such as whites, and that the heroism of African Americans can inspire all people. Yet, they and many of their forebears have experienced the United States as African Americans, and so black patrons are often especially attuned to the value of African American museums for institutionalizing the history and culture of the nation through a black lens and transforming the black psyche. In comparison, white supporters are often particularly attuned to the interracial dimensions of black museum stories and their relationship to whites’ feelings and understandings surrounding race.

There are multiple lenses through which to view the past. All pasts involving people categorized as black can be understood through a lens that makes visible those who are nonblack. For example, Jeff, a white patron, describes his interest in the black museum he supports as related to his broader interest in the Civil War. When he talks about the role of the museum in illuminating the lives of significant figures of the past, each person he names, such as Abraham Lincoln, is white. His interpretation of the past is an implicitly interracial one in that the broader institutional context is black, but his angle highlights white figures. More commonly, the emphasis on an interracial narrative by white patrons is not articulated through implicit black absence but rather an explicit discussion of the interconnections between whites and blacks as a whole, or between specific white ethnic groups and blacks. For example, a white trustee who is very involved in music, praises the museum he supports for highlighting historical patterns of cultural interaction between blacks and whites. “The reality is that black and white people were playing music together,” he says.

The image is they never crossed paths. They never played together. Well, they did, and we have a fabulous collection here ... where you can see that the races played together. They were very creative about it. It’s about the psychology of us figuring out how to mature our country and come together. In spite of current rhetoric and our political happenings,

we do a much better job of coming together than we give ourselves credit for, and we will get much better at it in the future.

For him, black museums are notable for telling lesser known stories about the interconnections between blacks and whites. The interconnections between African Americans and whites are also made manifest in a statement from the private foundation of the white hedge-fund billionaire Louis Moore Bacon about his \$1.5 million donation to the NMAAHC. Bacon, an environmental conservationist, made the donation to support an exhibition about rice fields in South Carolina's Lowcountry. He is a direct descendant of Roger Moore, who owned a rice plantation cultivated by enslaved blacks. In a press release from Moore's private foundation, through which the gift was made, the conservationist's family history on the Orton Plantation is interwoven into the discussion of the gift (Moore Charitable Foundation 2016):

Recent archaeological excavation efforts at Orton Plantation revealed for the first time the remains of the lost Kendal Plantation, a site originally founded in the 1720s by Moore. The site is also a testament to the heartache, sacrifice and accomplishment of all enslaved African Americans.

By contextualizing the seven-figure gift within Moore's ancestors' involvement with slavery, this statement emphasizes the interconnections between African Americans and Moore's cultural and economic inheritance. Other white supporters emphasize interconnections between white ethnic groups and blacks through their giving. For example, Andreas Dracopoulos, who was born and raised in Greece but now lives in the United States, gave a million-dollar donation to the NMAAHC. He is the great-nephew of the late shipping magnate Stavros Niarchos and co-president and director of his great-uncle's foundation, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF), which gave a two-million-dollar donation to the museum. The two donations were covered widely in the Greek newspaper the *National Herald* and announced on the SNF website. In one press release about the foundation's gift, there is a photograph of Dracopoulos smiling and standing next to Kobe Bryant, who is also seven-figure donor to the NMAAHC. Dracopoulos's personal gift and the foundation's donation were made to honor Archbishop Iakovos, the former primate of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America.<sup>15</sup> Iakovos, who was involved with the civil rights movement, marched with Martin Luther King, Jr., in Selma, Alabama. A black-and-white photo of Iakovos is displayed in the museum's Reflection Area, next to a series of photos of other social activists, including Booker T. Washington, Ida B. Wells, Dorothy Height, and Malcolm X (see Figure 2.3). Dracopoulos describes the donation in relationship to this revered figure in the Greek-American community (TNH Staff 2015). He was inspired to give to honor Iakovos "who dared under very difficult conditions of that time to



*Figure 2.3* Photograph of Malcolm X (left) and Archbishop Iakovos of America (right) at the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

march alongside Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the 1965 Selma, AL, civil rights march.” The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America also released a statement heralding the donations noting, “These grants were made in honor of Archbishop Iakovos’ leadership and legacy in the area of civil and human rights ...” (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America 2015).

Intersections between the Greek and African American experiences are emphasized in these comments. Among some Jewish supporters, parallels between the black and Jewish experiences are especially significant aspects of their black museum patronage. In addition to being a longtime trustee at his local African American museum, Bernard also supports Jewish cultural organizations. He believes that slavery is the central experience that the black museum he supports should emphasize. “I think it’s absolutely a vital part of the story,” he says. His view that slavery should be at the center of the museum’s narrative is framed in reference to the Holocaust.

I have to go back for a minute and talk about Judaism, and the Jewish experience, which is different than the African American experience, but there are some similarities. You know about the Holocaust. There was great resistance to creating a Holocaust museum. Why? Because people

were ashamed of it. They were embarrassed by it. They felt we hadn't done enough. The people there weren't smart enough. They were led like sheep to the slaughter. We here had a level of guilt in those days. Our voices were very muffled. We spoke quietly because in those days, this was before your time, there was a great deal of anti-Semitism that was out in the open, and we weren't in the big banks, insurance companies, law firms, hospitals, universities. There were strict quotas. So that's the era that I was born into and grew up, and now we have this wonderful new world where Jews at least are almost on an equal footing and are so much on an equal footing that we are starting to disappear by inner marrying, which is another whole—we won't get in to that.

Bernard goes on to describe his vision for his local black museum. It is a vision where slavery is placed at the center of the historical narrative. "I tell you, I have not gotten a real reception with the people [at the museum] over the years and I've said this to them also. But so far, nobody has glommed on to it."

I think just like with Jews when the idea of the Holocaust museum came up, "That's ugly, let's bury it, that's ancient history. Let's strive to forget about it." But you know, we don't want to forget about it. It's what has impacted this country in a negative way. It's impacted the black community. It's impacted the white community. It needs to be exposed and then tried to deal with it at a societal level. Society needs to deal with it.

In Bernard's eyes, Jewish Americans and African Americans both have a defining historical experience of collective trauma that has been difficult to publicly memorialize in some contexts. In her research on memory, the sociologist Arlene Stein explains the rise of Holocaust consciousness. How is it that memorials of the Holocaust were largely hidden from broad public view prior to the 1980s, but by then "the destruction of European Jewry, the subject of numerous documentaries and Hollywood films, was widely recognized as a moral touchstone"? she asks (Stein 2014, 3). While the assertion that there were no Holocaust memorials until this period is a myth, she describes how anti-Semitism and a collective American reluctance to turn an eye towards suffering kept widespread acknowledgement of the Holocaust at bay. Stein argues that the memorialization of the Holocaust at large emerged within a broader cultural and political context in which public consciousness surrounding the marginalization of other groups, for example around African Americans and slavery, coalesced (Stein 2014, 5).

In an interview about his family foundation's \$2 million gift to the NMAAHC, Peter Kovler references the United States Holocaust Museum, to which his foundation also gave a seven-figure donation (Thompson 2016). Kovler's gift was earmarked for an exhibit on Emmett Till, a teenager who was murdered in 1955 after being accused of whistling at a white woman. The exhibition includes the 14-year-old boy's casket. He comments that

The Holocaust museum is about mortality, lethality and human ugliness but this casket really speaks to that. ... The Smithsonian and the mall can be about the glory of things but it can also be about the worst of human behavior as is illustrated in parts of this museum.

Some Jewish supporters also explicitly reference not only the Holocaust but also the broader experience of Jewish marginalization in describing the value of black museums. One patron describes his commitment to racial equality in relationship to his family's long commitment to dissolve racial boundaries:

I come from an East European Jewish family. My grandparents came at a young age from Russia, from Poland. ... [T]hese Jewish refugees who came from Poland and Russia, they saw that the treatment of blacks in this country was worse than the treatment of Jews over there. "How could that be?" So it's in the DNA of my family I guess and part of the Jewish mission. Like [Elie] Wiesel who just died said, "The mission of the Jew is to make the world more human, not to make it more Jewish." So my family has always been keyed into that. We've always been taught that there are two types of people in the world, not just black, white or Jew, gentile, or man, woman, but decent and indecent, and to strive to be decent. So when you see indecency you're supposed to stand up, not just stand by it, and that's really what I try to do every day.

For these patrons, the black past is one where the intersections with white and white ethnic experiences are particularly salient. They relate to the African American experience by drawing parallels with white and white ethnic experiences and making visible points of interchange between the groups. But it is not only that the interracial dynamics of black pasts are especially salient to some white supporters, but also that the importance of these narratives for recasting white attitudes are particularly highlighted.

John, who brings white friends and colleagues to the black museum that he supports, emphasizes how the visits have the potential to make whites more racially tolerant. After visiting, he says, his guests "tell me they have a shift in perception."

They tell me they do, and I think it's usually true. I'll give you an example. I brought one couple in here twice ... and about a year ago they invited me down to Café BBT [a nearby bar and club] in the afternoon because there was a musician that they thought I should see. So, that was them inviting me back into the community. I guess I should say that I have had some success. I had never really thought about that until right now. There was some kind of a little bit of a circle. ... I don't think you can overstate the importance of it particularly in our time right now. It seems to me that everybody's pulling back into their tribes and

feeling intolerant. Maybe it's the media, but I feel like there's a growing intolerance in this country among the different tribes, and so I think it's hugely important that we get back to becoming one community. I don't like what I see going on right now. I'd like to think that when you come here, if you have a prejudice against African Americans, I'd like to think that when an African American extends his hand and greets you and welcomes you when you walk into the museum—and they do—that you feel, “Wait a minute. This isn't what I thought I was going to see here. I thought I was going to see antagonism. I thought I was going to see a backlash, ‘Like, what's this white guy doing here?’” and there's none of that. I think that that can begin to build bridges. Maybe I'm naïve, maybe I'm living in a dream world, but I have to believe that it has some impact. A minor wind, but maybe it grows.

While John emphasizes the potential of the black museum that he supports to open the hearts and minds of whites in his circle, Anne, a white trustee at a black museum in a different city, describes how she has personally become more informed about race as a result of her interactions on the board. “It's like anything, the more you learn, the more you learn,” she says about her experience as a trustee.

It's interesting, I suppose, as a white person. As a woman coming up in the corporate world, I was usually the only woman, but at least they were all white. At our museum, I'm usually one of the only. There were maybe two or three white people on the board. So, I'm a minority in those settings, and it's really kind of interesting to feel. But I don't feel isolated. I suppose that's just a typical white person who's dominated everything. I think ... that there is a world here that we think we understand as white people that we don't really. ... But I think you probably talk more about race relations with people of different races than you do all in one. So, I think it has helped that. ... I do think that organizations that can help people see a fuller picture are all for the good. It's very, very, very important. I think as a white person, I need to help do what I can, and I just think that's an important thing. I really do. So, that's why I'm doing it [serving on the museum board]. ... I don't mean to be Pollyannaish, but it's just obvious. Whenever you limit yourself, you really limit yourself. ... I have tried very hard because I'm white, I'm really white, to listen and to really try to say, “I'm wanting to go more than 50 percent of the way,” and that's the way I conduct myself. ... That is something that I can do in my little corner to bring better relations and just to have fun. I don't know, we had fun at this dinner party the other night [a dinner for the museum where she and her husband were in the racial minority]. I started, I don't even know how we got into it, astrological stuff. We just had fun as people. So, I have all these endless conversations. But, at least I think it's important to be aware of racial

divides and racial tensions in the effort to end them and I do believe that eventually it will.

In an editorial for the *Washington Post* on the NMAAHC, the columnist Petula Dvorak, who is white, also articulated the view that a primary function of African American museums is to teach tolerance to whites. It begins, "My fellow white people: Listen up, please" (Dvorak 2016). She goes on to encourage whites to visit the museum even if it might induce feelings of shame:

Some of what you see might make you feel ashamed at parts of our past. But now you know. And in knowing, that shame will give way to the deep respect and pride that we should have in all our fellow Americans.

Dvorak's comments are reminiscent of some white patrons' heightened sensitivity to the role that black museums can play in decreasing white prejudice and discrimination and also their awareness that some "fellow white people" are reluctant to confront the nation's racist past. Chris, a white trustee who has had difficulty soliciting donations from his wealthy white clients, says,

I think that many within the white community here, those who took the time to come here, left here seeing this as a slavery museum. The thinking was, "Okay, I get it. I've seen how bad this is. I've seen it once. I don't need to go see it again. ... The perception is that the message that's communicated here is that slavery is bad and that you caused it. I don't agree that that's what's being said here, but that's the interpretation."

Chris's comments speak to how some white visitors to black museums get the sense that even if their families were not directly involved in slavery that they are viewed as guilty by association by virtue of their race. As one white supporter shared, some of his extended family members have little interest in visiting a local African American museum because of their belief that their ancestors who immigrated to the United States after Emancipation "had nothing to do with slavery" and that "they shouldn't be blamed for racism." In his view, this sentiment leads to an irony that "whites who may learn the most from a visit are the least likely to come."

White supporters are often particularly attuned to the interracial dimensions of the black past and the potential for white transformation through engagement with black museums. This emerges from their especially intimate familiarity with white and white ethnic realities and lived experiences as whites and white ethnics. The racial and ethnic value of black museums cannot only be articulated within interracial and black frames but also within a frame that emphasizes the African diaspora. Next, I describe how first- and second-generation supporters from Africa and the Caribbean

place particular emphasis on the value of African American museums for these groups.

### The African diaspora

Most blacks in the United States are descendants of enslaved Africans who were brought to the Americas during the transatlantic slave trade. However, in the last several decades, the black population in the United States has become more ethnically diverse. Shifts in immigration law, along with other global political and economic changes, have increased immigration from Africa and the West Indies (Imoagene 2017; Thomas 2014, 1–18).<sup>16</sup> Across the nation, immigrants constitute only around 10 percent of the black population (Imoagene 2017, 5). However, in some areas, such as New York and Massachusetts, they constitute over a quarter (Smith 2014, 10). Moreover, 18 percent of blacks are now either immigrants or the children of immigrants (Anderson and López 2018). On the one hand, immigrants of African descent are often racialized as black, so their experiences and identity overlap with native-born blacks in some ways. On the other hand, even into the second generation their ethnic identities and cultural practices often remain salient, along with structural ties to ethnic community members and institutions (Dávila 2008, 2012; DiMaggio and Fernández-Kelly 2010; Imoagene 2017; Pierre 2004, 2010; Vickerman 1999; Waters 1999).

In the context of philanthropy and black museums, this orientation towards communities of origin is articulated in first- and second-generation supporters' emphasis on the interconnectedness of black museums with broader African Diasporic communities. One way that this manifests itself is that these supporters' philanthropic commitment to African American museums is often coupled with a commitment to giving to issues and organizations that specifically address ethnic communities. For example, one first-generation supporter from the West Indies describes how after moving to the United States she started to take on an African American identity. "Coming to America, I think I'm identifying more with African Americans. Most of my new friends are African Americans," she says. Yet, she continues to have a strong West Indian identity. Her sense of connection to both communities is articulated through giving through her family foundation. "We [focus on] kids with African American and West Indian heritage," she says. This donor and other first- and second-generation supporters from Africa and the West Indies often emphasize how their giving to African American museums is intertwined with philanthropic commitments to their ethnic communities.

Sarah is also from the West Indies, though she is second generation. She is a trustee at her local African American museum and on the board of an ethnic-focused professional organization that is directed at nurturing relationships within, and empowering, the ethnic community. Sarah works



in the culture industry and describes how she organized an event at the museum for the ethnic professionals group. "I was on a lot of boards, so it's connecting those dots," she explains.

I was the president of one of the organizations, the Caribbean Professionals, and we wanted to do a fundraiser. "Why not do it in the museum," I said. So, my board connection is, "Oh, I'm on a board. I can rent out the museum and make money for the museum." While making money for the museum, I'm also giving my audience a nice look in terms of arts and culture.

At the event, which was focused on a celebration of the West Indian nation where Sarah was born, event-goers were served ethnic cuisine and given a tour of the museum. This event took on significance for Sarah not only as a potential business booster but also because of its relationship to the Caribbean and African American communities to which she is committed. It helped to nurture the space of philanthropy at the museum as a specifically West Indian space for the evening of the event.

It is not only a heightened concern with coupling African American museum philanthropy with philanthropy in ethnic communities that distinguishes some immigrant supporters, but also a particular concern with the museums being a part of diasporic neighborhoods. As the population of immigrants from Africa and the West Indies grows, the spatial landscapes of communities in the United States are also changing. The historically black neighborhoods where some African American museums are located have experienced an increase in African and West Indian immigrants. One second-generation patron with relatives who live in the community where the black museum she supports is located describes the immigrant world of her family. "It's all immigrants—friends, church, stores, everything," she explains. While the African American museum is part of the physical matrix of their community, her relatives are not directly involved with it. "Sometimes I question if we [the museum] do enough to reach out them," she says. "The African American focus is fine but there is room for branching out more. Just in terms of something as simple as labels—they're all in English. I have some relatives who aren't [fluent in] English," she says. In the streets surrounding some African American museums, the sounds of people speaking in accented English and other languages, such as Spanish, are part of the broader cacophony of voices. These voices testify to the ethnic diversity in the communities of some African American museums. In the mind of this supporter, her museum will not be fully integrated into its changing neighborhood until it begins to place more emphasis on the culture of its ethnically diverse neighbors. In particular, she highlights the lack of bilingual texts as a barrier for engagement.

First- and second-generation supporters also often display a particular interest in narratives in black museums that center broader African

Diasporic communities. While there is often a centering of the African American experience within African American museums, many also feature exhibitions that highlight the broader diasporic experience. For example, museums with sections on slavery often begin the story of the transatlantic slave trade in Africa. It is also not unusual for contemporary art exhibitions to include artists from across the African diaspora. Some museums also display traditional African art, and still others have mounted exhibitions that focus on black immigrant groups in the United States. Bikila, who is an African immigrant, praises the museum where he is on the board precisely because it addresses the distinctiveness of the recent immigrant experience in its exhibitions. Along with serving on the museum board, he is active in his local ethnic community and in international philanthropy directed at his country of birth. He praises the museum for telling a story of global black migration that begins with the Middle Passage and continues into the 21st century. "In the last 25 to 30 years ... several immigrants from Africa have come and made this area their home," he says.

Now, there are over 50,000 people that are in this area, whereas 20 years ago there was probably 20 or 30. So, that's a big change in terms of the culture and the historical perspective. ... They [the African immigrants] came either of their own will or they came running away from oppressive governments. As such, when they come here, the cultural connection is still there because they have families there. But, at the same time, now they have children in this country. How are you going to pass on that cultural connection to your children and also inform others around you in your new community? ... So, at the museum we had an exhibition [on the immigrants] which I think is really great because it taught two things. It taught the immigrants. We appreciate what the forefathers have done because they came here and they sweat[ed] blood, faced oppression and because of their movement, because of their struggling to really get us to where we are now, we are benefiting as productive members of the society. Within that, you've got the Americans who were born in this country, and the immigrant children who were also born in this country, coming from two different sides of the story. So, the way you can really create a bonding between these two, and learn and share, would be by preserving all the culture and the history—the arts, music and culture ... to really open up a better dialogue.

For Bikila, this exhibition has significance as a didactic and honorific tool that can be used within the immigrant community to nurture memories about the past and reverence for forebears. However, he also places value on the role that it can play in reciprocal education, or helping the immigrant and native black communities learn more about one another. In the eyes of Rosa, a second-generation Afro-Latinx from the West Indies, even the African American focus of the museum that she supports speaks to

the immigrant experience. Both of her parents were born in the Caribbean, and though her mother “was on the opposite side of the spectrum,” her father has a strong black identity. “I grew up with my dad teaching me so much black stuff,” she says. “My dad taught me the words to the African American anthem. He took me to see black movies. He introduced me to black culture and black music. He identified as a black man.” While the 19th-century African American historical narratives that are featured at the museum she supports do not generally highlight the specific ancestral pasts of recent immigrant families like her own, she sees them as identifiable via their broader arc of encountering and overcoming inequity. “The museum can be a space that represents home and represents self-determination for so many of us,” she says.

I think about the immigrant experience and how much war has been fought, and is still being fought, to create space, and have space for ourselves and for our families, and for our futures. The museum represents a community [African American] that has that ability, and that has done that, despite all of the challenges that were presented at that specific point in history [the 19th century]. ... I just feel like there is a framing that can be done to invite several different types of communities to that space that is housed on shared grounds. ... There is a need to make this relevant to everyone because it is. There is a very proactive approach that we have to take to inviting communities that we weren't traditionally engaging with because we didn't see them as being part of this conversation.

In her view the African American story of overcoming challenges is one that is shared with immigrant communities. While she thinks that more outreach is needed to help her museum better connect with its increasingly first- and second-generation neighbors, she does not think that the basic mission of the museum is inherently at odds with their experiences. She believes that by highlighting how the immigrant community faces different versions of the African American experience, the museum can help to draw in this audience.

These first- and second-generation supporters from Africa and the West Indies are especially sensitive to African American museums as situated within the broader African diaspora. Their philanthropic priorities are often particularly attuned to their communities of origin, such that giving to African American museums is balanced with these other interests. As members of multiple communities, they often feel a commitment to philanthropic leadership across these spaces. Moreover, lived experiences and close ties to others with lived experiences as immigrants often attune first- and second-generation supporters to how various aspects of black museums—such as the narratives featured in them or the languages used in them—do or do not connect with broader African diasporic communities.

## Conclusion

This chapter highlights how the value of African American museums is defined by supporters in relationship to race and ethnicity. At the most basic level, supporters see these museums as both African American and all-American institutions. However, awareness of and sensitivity to these different sides of black museums are conditioned by the material and cultural realities of their supporters' lives, which themselves vary by race and ethnicity. This means that while black and white patrons alike typically insist on the racial and ethnic specificity and universality of these institutions, black patrons are often especially attuned to the functions and contributions of these cultural institutions for blacks, and whites are often particularly cognizant of the institutions' role in the lives of whites. Still further, it is first- and second-generation African and West Indian supporters who often have a heightened awareness of the position of African American museums as black diasporic institutions. I account for these differences by structural factors, such as the distinct lived experiences of patrons from various racial and ethnic groups, along with cultural factors, such as their various identities.

This chapter builds on the sparse sociological literature on race and ethnicity and museum patronage. Although class is at the center of Ostrower's (2002) study of trustees at majority museums and opera houses, she finds that some black and Latinx board members make sense of their board roles in connection with their racial and ethnic identities. Here, I extend Ostrower's analysis not only by examining the links between race, ethnicity, and patronage at African American museums, but also by examining a more diverse range of identities. I elaborate how consciousness of one's racial and ethnic identity informs how not only minority patrons define what is important about museums, but also white patrons. In this context, whites are often highly conscious about their race and ethnicity, and this awareness is intertwined with how they assess what matters about black museums. Also, while Ostrower's analysis considers that black patrons may approach cultural patronage in ways that vary from their white counterparts, here we see how black patrons' museum values vary from one another based on ethnicity.

As we saw in this chapter, some supporters, such as the black entrepreneur who redirects a portion of his business profits to black organizations in his neighborhood, see a close link between their support of African American museums and their professional lives. In the next chapter, I take an in-depth look at these ties by exploring the world of work and giving to African American museums.

## Notes

- 1 This bill, H.R. 3442, was introduced by Representative John Lewis of Georgia and focused on the formation of a special commission to put together a course of action to establish the NMAAHC. As noted in the legislation, the commission was directed to create racially specific fundraising plans.

- 2 I also discuss whites' greater emphasis on black museums for specific white ethnic groups such as Greeks.
- 3 In making this argument, I build on the sociologist Peggy Levitt's (2015) research on the cosmopolitan-nationalism continuum at museums. Levitt argues that museums often fall along a spectrum of emphasizing either the collectivity of the nation or the humanity of all people. In her analysis, these are objective differences between museums that are a function of the broader historical and cultural contexts in which they are embedded. Here, I extend Levitt's research by turning the focus to a particular type of museum, the African American museum, and exploring the balance between African American and all-American, as well as the weight of African American and African Diasporic. Moreover, instead of analyzing objective differences between museums themselves in these orientations, I focus on perceptual distinctions among patrons.
- 4 Research on museum-going also finds that race organizes cultural consumption. For example, in her research on natural history museums, Monique Scott (2008) finds that black visitors are more likely to emphasize Africa as an important site of cultural heritage and to offer more critical interpretations of exhibitions.
- 5 Highlighting race and ethnicity as poles of difference render internal variations within racial and ethnic groups less visible. These differences do exist, and some, such as gender, are explicitly touched on in this chapter. Others, such as profession, are not formally accented but are manifest in the discussion. While intraracial and intraethnic differences in understanding racial and ethnic value do exist, the focus on intergroup variations highlights patterns of evaluation that are more or less common within particular categories.
- 6 Black fraternities and sororities are foundational organizations in black middle-class life (Graham 1999, 83–100). These organizations are highly active outside of colleges and universities. Individuals who pledge in college often maintain active membership after they graduate. In addition, it is common for members to join these black fraternities and sororities after graduation.
- 7 The role of black museums in black middle-class life is also illustrated by the fact that in my sample of more than 2,000 donations of \$25,000 or more to black museums, all of the gifts from social organizations are from black middle-class social organizations.
- 8 These are both single-sex professional and social organizations. The former is for men, and the latter for women.
- 9 Lucy's comments are brought into further context when considering the sociologist Milton Gordon's work on race and class (Banks 2017). In his research on assimilation, Gordon (1964) distinguishes group boundaries based not only on racial and ethnic "vertical stratifications" but also on social class "horizontal stratifications." He describes groups created by these intersecting boundaries as "ethclass" groups. Under Gordon's classification, the middle and upper class are subdivided into specific ethclass groups such as the black upper-middle class and the white upper-middle class. According to Gordon, while the middle and upper class "tend to act alike and have the same values even if they have different ethnic backgrounds" (1964, 52), social participation within the middle and upper class, including primary relationships and organizational affiliations, is concentrated within the ethclass group. Put into Gordon's terms of ethclass groups, Lucy emphasizes that for the black elite, African American museums are a central organization that facilitates ethclass bonds. In contrast, majority museums bring together the white elite.

- 10 For twenty years, Joan Weill was a trustee of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, serving as board chair from 2000 to 2014. Over several years she and her husband Sandy donated over \$50 million to the organization, including one-time pledges of \$18.4 million and \$16 million. The former gift by the white couple was the single largest donation to the organization to date. In recognition of the gift, the company's new Manhattan building was named the Joan Weill Center for Dance (Catton 2014).
- 11 In an analysis of more than 2,000 donations of \$25,000 or more to a small sample of black museums, I found that at most museums it was more common for 60 percent or more donations from individuals (including family foundations) to come from whites than blacks.
- 12 There are also exceptions to this pattern. For example, there is a black patron at the Goldsville African American Museum who is highly integrated into the city's white elite, even extending to the prep school that she attended as a youth.
- 13 In educational research, the term "temporary minorities" has been used to refer to white students who attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Strayhorn 2010).
- 14 The couple met while attending a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). Their school is an elite HBCU that is part of the black middle-class organizational network (Graham 1999, 63–82).
- 15 In November 2015 when historical photographs were projected onto the NMAAHC's facade, one image showed Iakovos standing next to King.
- 16 The major immigration law contributing to this shift is the Hart-Cellar Immigration Act (1965), which eliminated national quotas favoring Europeans.

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