

Season 2: Episode 4- Owning the Past: Stewardship of modern museum collections

Transcript:

Rebekah Furey 0:00

So a quick disclaimer, we do mention a lot of topics related to burial remains and death. So if this makes you uncomfortable, please skip this episode.

Dylan Rawles 0:20

Okay, you're all live.

Easton Phillips 0:22

All right. All right.

Dylan Rawles 0:23

How do you get them small?

Rebekah Furey 0:24

That was very Matthew McConaughey.

Zoe Morgan 0:27

It was- All right. All right. All right.

Welcome everyone to another episode of 'This is problematic'- Connor Prairie's one and only podcast. We're here with Rebekah Furey- Conner Prairie collections manager. Rina Sim- collections assistant and myself, Zoe Morgan. I'm the educational curriculum specialist here.

Easton Phillips 0:45

So we wanted to let you all know for our dear listeners, Hannah is off doing the mom thing. And she wishes us well. We wish her the best. And our new co-host here joining us for the very first time is Zoe Morgan.

Zoe Morgan 1:00

Oh, well, thank you so much for having me. And thank you for your trust and belief in me. I am not a historian, those of you that are listening, but I'm a former educator and I'm very curious. And so I'm glad to be here. Glad to dig into some history, ask some questions. And Hannah's shoes are some big ones to fill. And I'm not even gonna try!

Easton Phillips 1:25

Well listen, she thinks the world of you. And we all do so much. You're a natural.

Zoe Morgan 1:30

Oh, well, thank you. And I think the world of her too. And, and so I'm happy to follow her example. She left a great example for me to follow. So thankful and grateful to her. And thank you, Easton.

Easton Phillips 1:42

Oh, well, thank you Zoe.

So welcome to 'This is Problematic.' We're back. And we've got three folks out here making their podcast debut with us. And we are tackling, well, it's not necessarily a happy topic, but it is a topic that we think needs some exploration. And we have a really good crew for it today. So thank you all for hanging out with us. We also have Dylan in here watching the levels and Sarah sitting in the corner to make sure we don't mess up. All right, so today we're talking about museums, like Conner Prairie, and why sometimes they're not always safe spaces. You know, they stand as these monuments, these, ummm, you know, places that really tell the history of colonialism and they have a legacy of violence, and they can reflect the history of looting artifacts that never belonged to, you know, certain people in the first place. It's a great place to go. If you have like kids, and you want to educate them in a non classroom setting. I've heard through the grapevine that it's a good place to take a first date. You know, maybe-maybe not.

Rebekah Furey 2:50

But you haven't taken any dates anywhere, though, for yourself?

Easton Phillips 2:53

I mean, it's it's been a, (laughter and heckling) it's been a while, but no, we did, we did not go. I have not taken a date to a museum yet. But we'll see what happens in the near future. With that being said, there's a topic of interest. When it comes to the exhibits there, a lot of folks don't get the chance to peek behind the curtain and see exactly what goes into putting what we call 'objects', what we should probably call 'belongings' or 'artifacts', on display and telling

the story behind those artifacts. And all museums are not created equal. Of course, we're kind of generalizing, but they all have their unique histories as to how they came into contact with the items they show to the public. So here contrary, there's nobody else we trust, to answer these questions truthfully. And truthfully, and with humility, (a lot of pressure) than Rebekah Furey.

Rebekah Furey 3:52

So all the lies I was planning to tell when I got on mic, I should not tell those?

Easton Phillips 3:56

Yeah, no, no, keep those for another time. So we're going to be using a term a lot in this episode, repatriation, and I know a lot of people don't know what that is, or may not know what NAGPRA is. It's an acronym by the way. And so do you want to maybe talk on that piece a little bit?

Rebekah Furey 4:12

Sure. Yeah, we can, we can start with 'what is repatriation?' And the simple definition is just returning objects to their home. So if you've been paying attention to the news, this has come up a lot recently, especially after this article that was published earlier this year by ProPublica, which announced that there are currently more than 110,000 remains still present in museums around the country. And those are remains of people who are Native American, Native Hawaiian, and even Alaskan Native ancestors. They're all still in museums. So repatriation efforts focus on trying to get these remains home, so returned back to the tribes that they were stolen from. And NAGPRA you mentioned is an acronym it stands for the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. So it's a very serious sounding word that every museum who receives federal funding is required to abide by and to Conner Prairie is one of those museums. So this law was passed in 1990. And it just essentially means if you have human remains, if you have funerary objects or any sacred objects, then those need to get returned back to their people. So, every culture has traditions for what they do with their dead. And it just so happens that Native American cultures have had their objects stolen from them and put in museums. Whereas, you know, my culture, my family hails from Italy and Ireland, I don't see those objects nearly as often fetishized and put on display, like Native American objects are, so.

Zoe Morgan 5:50

I think, right? That's because the reason that we don't see a lot of these like, again, white objects being stolen is because white culture persists, right, like, white culture has been persistent over time. And I think a lot of the reason these indigenous and like African objects

have been stolen is because it was thought for a long time that they wouldn't, and they were like these uncivilized cultures that would no longer persist, right? And it's also a way to, like show dominance over a lot of these people in these cultures. So I think that's why we, you know, typically see them more often in museums than we do. Yeah, these like, white objects.

Rebekah Furey 6:28

That's exactly right. And actually, the article that I mentioned, has a great, a great section where they discuss that exact thing, and they reference it back to the eugenics movement that was going on in the early, early American years. So it's, it's our, our idea that we we have to preserve their culture, because they 'can't'. And that's not true. And in fact, what we're doing with Native American objects isn't always the right thing to be doing. In some cases, you know, women shouldn't be allowed to handle those objects. And yet, the primary collections manager in most museums tends to be female, in which case, we are not allowed to handle certain objects. So there's just so many things that we'll never understand with these types of NAGPRA-related items, and it's just better to give them back and stop pretending that we know more than everyone else.

Easton Phillips 7:21

Well said. Do you think that NAGPRA is effective in the way that it's enforced?

Rebekah Furey 7:29

No, it's not enforced (or not enforced?) Yeah. So I think the worst example, in Indiana history that I know of that actually was enforced is the Strawtown County, Koteewi example. So we'll just let's just dive right into something horrible that Indiana has done in the last 20 years. So if you have never heard of that park, it's actually in Hamilton County. And from 2001 to 2011. There were just unending archeological digs in that area. And they recovered. Well, they removed more than 90,000 artifacts, all associated with human remains, and funerary objects and all that stuff was put into storage. So later, I don't know what year it finally, that information finally came to light, but Hamilton County was fined by the federal government because of that. So that's the only example that I know of where a public area was fined for not complying with NAGPRA. So usually, when we hear about people not complying, it's just kind of a battle, most notably with the British Museum where people keep trying to get them to return objects, and they just don't for different reasons. So they'll say things like, Oh, well, this object is unidentified, even though it is identified, but if they mark it as unidentified, they don't have to give it back. So and I think the Biden administration tried to pass a law to say that you're not allowed to classify objects as unidentified. So it's not not legal anymore.

Easton Phillips 9:08

Yeah, it's actually interesting. You mentioned that park- David highway brought that park up in our last episode about Strawtown. (Oh, there you go). So we didn't dive into this piece, we dived into the problematic monument that's out there.

Rebekah Furey 9:19

Oh, sure. Yeah, well, it's very problematic. They literally stole 1000s and 1000s of funeral objects and human or actual human remains. And they never alerted the tribes who were involved who had buried their ancestors there. They just kept hoarding 1000s of these things. So that's an it's so it's not easy to get in touch with descendants, because you don't always know. But you have to try. And in fact, we're working on that right now. So Sara are curator of Native American life. And I just opened a discussion today to try to look into beginning the process of repatriating some of our Native American objects and we're We're fortunate to only have very few. But we're starting the conversation. So and there's an obviously we have no human remains, I'm going to put that yeah, in words on this fine. Yes, there are no remains in our collection. But it and again, it is very hard to just even get in contact with tribes because they're understandably not, not always receptive to outsiders contacting them. So and we are considered outsiders, even though we're trying to do something good. From our perspective, it's, we're still outsiders, so but that's the first step, just get in touch.

Sara in the Background 10:36

The majority of the labor is put on the tribes, which sucks. That's the way the law is written.

Rebekah Furey 10:41

And that's the biggest problem with NAGPRA is that the tribe has the onus to contact the institution that they think may have objects that belong to them. So there's all these gray areas everywhere, that you have to find a museum, you have to get in touch with them, you have to know what they have in their collection, and then they have to be willing to give it back to you. So yes, there was a law that was passed, but- but not really. It doesn't do anything.

Zoe Morgan 11:07

So, a big part of repatriation, too, is like the healing that goes along with it. And since we have this, like local connection with Koteewi, then like, have they been very transparent and apologetic I guess, about the way that they've like, acquired these?

Rebekah Furey 11:21

I'm not sure. Yeah, I don't know. And because they didn't pay the fine. Hamilton County was the one who had the fine assessed to them. So I'm not sure about that. That's a great

question. Because how do you how do you then apologize when you did something so heinous? You know, like, is the British Museum ever going to apologize to every country that they looted? (They should) No, that's never gonna happen? So and there's and I don't want to keep attacking the British Museum because every every major museum has messed up. Not everyone, but it feels like it. So yeah, feels like that. So we can't we can't lay blame on just one museum because we've all not not done something that we should so.

Easton Phillips 12:09

Okay, it will be great to see so we're in South Korea are you from? (Continues trying to pronounce Seoul)

Rina Sim 12:13

Seoul, Seoul, Seoul, capital city.

Easton Phillips 12:16

I've gotta make sure I'm saying this, right. It's not like sol. Sol, sol. Sol. Yeah. Seoul that's good. So, so I'm actually really excited to have Ms. Rina Sim in here. She's our Conner Prairie collections assistant who's doing the good work under Rebekah, of course. And where are you from?

Rina Sim 12:43

I'm from Seoul, South Korea,

Easton Phillips 12:46

South Korea! (woo!)

So, I was really excited to have your input on this, because I think you're the first- well, aside from Hannah- you're the first person coming from like, recently from another country. And I want to hear about your perspectives as far as like, what are museums over there? Like, what are they doing? Because we're looking at- we're coming from an American perspective of like, you know, our museums were a culturally, like, we're not a culturally homogenous country- diverse and, of course, we'll get into this later. But like, it's very rare that that museum leadership has the diversity that's reflected in the world that it's trying to cater to. But I'm just wondering how like, how did museums work in Korea? And how did they kind of tackle some of these issues? If they have any of these issues? Because we're dealing with a country that's like, basically 100%- for the most part the indigenous folks are still generally around.

Rina Sim 13:44

Yeah, I will say 90%. But so let me introduce my experience from the first so I actually majored in library science, not actually the museum field. So, I worked at the Korean Kyung-in Museum, as a librarian, and also Collection Manager for seven years.

Easton Phillips 14:03
It's an honor!

Rina Sim 14:05
Thank you. And it was very interesting experience. But when I start my master's degree at IUPUI, the most interesting, it was like we spend diversity, like at least one week for more than a week, like I haven't really thought about diversity that much because like, as I told you, more than 90% of people are the same nationality. So we didn't really think about it probably, I will say then it was low priority, or just got less attention, right. So I think maybe like 10 years later, or more than that. We started to think about diversity, like cultural diversity in the museum, because the Korean Society also recognizes the issues with the immigrants and international workers. But like according to United Nations, they said we are kind of below the world average for immigrants- like 2.3%. And the average is 3.5%. So we even don't really have immigrants in our country. So we didn't really think about that. personally, my institution wasn't really thinking much about cultural diversity. And also, we don't have to think about decolonization because we haven't really colonized other countries.

Rebekah Furey 15:36
You've never heard of the great Korean occupation of France. (Sarcasm)

Easton Phillips 15:41
They took a trip back then! (Sarcasm)

Rina Sim 15:44
So it's more focused on how can we take all the stolen heritage from other countries? Yeah, no wonder than decolonize.

Rebekah Furey 15:53
So do you have an example of that?

Rina Sim 15:55
Yes. Yeah.

I actually brought two examples, which is really famous in South Korea. First one is Jikji, J-I-K-J-I and also called Jikji simche yojeol. chi Ching chi. So Jikji is the world's oldest existent book printed with mobile metal types, and it is 78 years earlier than the Gutenberg Bibles.

Rebekah Furey 16:25

Yeah, I think you told me about this. So 78 years before the Gutenberg Press this existed, yeah.

Rina Sim 16:31

So we consider this as the oldest printed book, and this one belongs to the National Library of France. And it is covered by a Korean librarian, Park Byeng-sun, who worked at the National Library of France. The book was bought by a French diplomat, Victor Collin de Plancy. I'm not sure if I pronounce it well, but yeah. He was a diplomat. While he worked in Korea he bought the book around 1900-ish in Seoul, and then took it to France. And then Henry Vever. Also, I don't I'm not sure how to pronounce this, it's French. And he was a collector. So he bought the book and then donated the book to the National Library of France when he died. So, but then, like, there is no clear record how the diplomat bought the books in Korea. So we kind of assumed that he- Yeah, we don't really know how he exactly bought it in Seoul.

Rebekah Furey 17:53

Hence the controversy and why Korea wants it back.

Rina Sim 17:56

But they claim that they officially bought it not stolen, it is not stolen the heritage or something. So because they bought the book, they don't even loan the book for the exhibition in Korea, because they kind of worry about we're not-

Rebekah Furey 18:13

Gonna give it back. Yeah.

Rina Sim 18:16

Nowadays, they've started to talk about it again, but I don't know if it's actually going to happen. And they even use it for their own economical benefits because the French president, François Mitterrand, promised to investigate the way to return various Korean books including Jikji. In the case of the French high speed rail technology, which was exported the Korea- the Korean government decided to take the French speed rail technology. So, they started to think about what book they have to return. And then they actually returned the 297 Volume 'Uigwes', which is the Korean's last kingdom: Joseon Dynasty Royal special events

record book, and they were restored by the French in 1866. So they decided to return it but Jikji wasn't included as a returned book.

Rebekah Furey 19:29

And it becomes so financially important to the country now- so it's like yeah, why would that go? Yeah, it's the same thing with the British Museum. They have the Rosetta Stone. (Oh, yeah.) Which was originally from Egypt. Why would they let that go? That has to be one of the biggest draws to the museum. So it's it's the same thing it's France thinks they have a claim to it, but Korea thinks they have a claim to it. And that's exactly the heart of repatriation, deciding who has real ownership of things. Yeah, if we want to if we want to note some other things, you've got the bronzes from Nigeria, the Parthenon Marbles from Greece and preserved Maori heads from New Zealand, they have those at the British Museum. They have everything. "This place has everything" (Sarcasm).

Rina Sim 20:21

I think the more funny thing about it is like they didn't even know it was the first printed book, before the Korean librarian discovered this, they didn't really treat it well. When they had 'Uigwes'- the Korean's last kingdom: Joseon Dynasty Royal special events record book, it was actually categorised by Chinese books, since it was all Chinese characters. So, it was in some annex of the library. They just dumped it in the annex.

Rebekah Furey 20:56

Oh, my gosh!

Rina Sim 20:57

Yeah it was, and then she was having a press interview with that. And then she got fired because she revealed the secret.

Rebekah Furey 21:05

Well, that kind of can lead us to the next point, which is part of colonialism and and museums, this whole topic we're talking about is the idea that we can take care of objects better than their original cultures can. And one of my favorite things to talk about is arsenic. If you've ever had a conversation with me for more than a minute, I will talk about it. And it does relate to this topic. Because when we accepted these amazing ethnographic objects, a lot of them have natural materials, which are very attractive to pests. Thus, museum professionals in the early years of museum work used to treat these types of Native American and other objects with arsenic, which is just a lovely, lovely history. Yeah, and that is, this is problematic. And arsenic has been around, obviously, forever. It's an natural element. So it's not something we created.

But we did realize how to use it as a pesticide. And it's been used as a pesticide since the 18th century. So, nothing new. But it was used up until, you know, the middle of the 20th century, despite us understanding how poisonous it is to humans. So so my concern and the museum's concern is what happens to these objects that have been treated with arsenic once they're repatriated? You know, how do they affect the people who are now handling them? Who are not handling them with nitrile gloves who are not wearing Kn95 masks, which is what you should do if an object has arsenic? What if they're repairing the object? How does that affect the Earth? We don't know. There's there's not a lot of information about that right now, because we're still talking about it. So yeah.

Dylan Rawles 22:55

It's like the modern-day version of smallpox blankets.

Rebekah Furey 22:57

Yeah, Rina- Do you have a version of smallpox blankets for Korean culture? Did any anybody invade Korea and decimate the population with "harmless" objects, "accidentally?"

Rina Sim 23:10

I don't know. I don't know what that is?

Rebekah Furey 23:13

Yeah, so during the I'll just say during the early years

Easton Phillips 23:18

We are a mess. Well- not "we."

Dylan Rawles 23:28

I love how we're making these visual references and it's an audio podcast.

Easton Phillips 23:34

I'm pointing to Zoe and sayind 'not us', because our ancestors did not come here willingly.

Rebekah Furey 23:43

Anyway, as people were colonizing the United States- Colonizing is the right word-as Europeans were colonizing the US, okay. So, as Europeans were first coming here and colonizing, they would gift blankets to indigenous people. Some people in the room seem to think it was intentional, I don't know. (I had heard it was intentional).

Sara Schumacher 24:12

We have actual letters from British officials saying 'we're going to these blankets were used by people who died of smallpox, we're going to give them to the Native Americans in the hopes that they catch smallpox and then die'.

Rebekah Furey 24:25

So the Europeans who settled here purposefully gave infected diseased blankets to indigenous people, and it decimated the population. So is there anything like that that has happened in your country's history?

Rina Sim 24:36

Oh, as I know, I mean, as I know there is not really anything like they'd intentionally give you like blanket or something, but they forced people to work in war. We now have the problems with sex slavery. And also some people were even used for their medical experimentations- like I saw some Record that people just put the the ocean water in other people because they needed more blood because they had a lot of people wounded and an injured from the war. So they needed a lot of blood so they experimented with the Korean people with the used the ocean water to see if they could replace the blood. So many people died with that. As I'd heard, there are many more experiments like this.

Rebekah Furey 25:35

And who's "they"- who's doing these experiments?

Rina Sim 25:38

Korea was colonized by Japan from 1910 to 1945. And, yeah, we had a really hard time with that. And then even before they officially occupied the whole of Korea, they started to invade for food and other materials they could take like, but the blanket is very interesting.

Rebekah Furey 26:03

Like that's a very, very famous example in history. (Oh, yeah) Yeah. So are there a lot of Korean objects in Japanese museums?

Rina Sim 26:11

A lot, yes.

Zoe Morgan 26:14

I am curious kind of going back to the idea earlier that museums, specifically I guess, in America or the British Museum, right, know how to take care of objects better than the

communities that we've taken these, artifacts from? What is the role of the museum once you've repatriated the object? Because, and I'm thinking like, a specific example, I attended a session during AMM, I think that Newfields did on repatriating the Congo, the funerary objects to this tribe in Kenya. And I think it took like, least a year, maybe two years to return these objects back. But I think they're, I don't know if they're in storage. I don't want to like butcher this story. But well, they were returned. (They were returned). Yes, but they haven't. Like they aren't because I think they were just like, kind of like planted in the ground is my understanding of the Vigango. But they can't return them back to their original spot, because I mean, they're just going to get stolen again. And so the hope is to create or build like a community center where they they'll be able to house these vongo sculptures for people to come and visit and still, like pay respect to their dead. So is, is there a role I guess for like, a museum like Newfields to play a role in, in I guess, like building a center or whatever it is, after the fact? Or like, does it feel? Or does it almost feel like not like almost invasive in like for the community itself? Like what I guess, what is the community like that you're returning the auditors to like their perspective on do like getting receiving help afterwards to take care of an object? I guess?

Rebekah Furey 27:54

Yeah, that's that's a really interesting question. And I think it's, of course, dependent on each tribe or each community to which the objects are returned. And I know with this specific example, that the objects were returned and then maybe a year later, they did the welcoming ceremony for the objects to formally be introduced back into the community. So and members of Newfields flew out there to participate which, which tends to be the extent of the involvement to my knowledge that, you know, you act as a courier, but then you don't you don't give advice on taking care of the objects, because it's not up to you they had there are systems in place for how communities treat their objects. They don't need to hear from the white museum people how to take care of their objects. However, your question of are, is there an onus on us to then build some kind of structure to take care of the objects? I've never heard of that? That's really interesting. And you could probably make a legal case for a museum potentially being responsible for financially kind of creating whatever it is the the culture wants for these objects? I don't know. Almost like punitive damages. Yeah, kind of like-

Zoe Morgan 29:05

Reparations, Yeah. Because we have artifacts in our in our collection, right that have arsenic on them. So when you again, you're like in your in talks with these communities to return these objects, I guess, instructing them or helping them to care for these objects that you're returning back to them specifically, because there's arsenic.

Rebekah Furey 29:28

Right, specifically, because there's a danger Yeah, community. So NAGPRA does not require you to do any, anything with those objects that are being returned, obviously, you need to let them know that they're, that they're contaminated. Essentially, you need to let the tribes know that their objects are not safe to handle and you can inform people the best way to handle these objects, but at the end of the day, it's it's up to them what happens and, and legally, there is no responsibility on the part of the museum to do anything to the objects to make them safer.

Zoe Morgan 30:08

Why? Why Not!?

Rebekah Furey 30:14

The law is not- the law is not 'let's fix these objects and return them back to their original state of existence.' The law is just return them to their original state where they came from, like 'state' as in country. So there's just no..... (.....location not). Yeah, because 'state' also refers to just sovereign nations. So I was making a pun, but it didn't go over very well. So anyway, yeah, there's- there's nothing that we have to do aside from say, "hey, these objects are contaminated." And then that's it. So

Zoe Morgan 30:48

I just yeah, I'm just I don't understand why if if we're the ones and again, I'm not saying "you", but.

Rebekah Furey 30:54

No, I did it (Sarcasm)

Zoe Morgan 30:56

I'm saying Rebekah did it. Rebekah did it. What like, I guess I'm just confused- If you ruined it, why wouldn't you be responsible for fixing it before returning it?

Rebekah Furey 31:08

I don't think there is a way to fix it, because Arsenic. it's just, it's a heavy metal. And it's used in this- in these dramatic ways. So when you, when you use arsenic as a pesticide, you actually form it into a soap. And in the case of taxidermy animals, you rub it on the animal's skin, and then you lay the fur or feathers or whatever, have you overtop of that. So arsenic is just innate at that point into the object. Okay, so if you wanted to remove it, you would just have to decimate the entire thing,

Zoe Morgan 31:44
Which is worse.

Rebekah Furey 31:45

I mean, what will be the point of right and returning that you've flipped inside out and flayed like a fish. So yeah, and obviously, the things that we're talking about returning that are sacred are not taxidermy animals, they're, you know, things like rattles and funerary objects and pipes, and pottery and anything, it could be so many things, but But yeah, to my knowledge, there's not a way to remove arsenic. And the other issue is even testing for it is so expensive. It's so expensive. So the only reason that we were able to test for arsenic is because I partnered with the Children's Museum and with Newfields, to be able to borrow their handheld XRS reader, which is this crazy thing, it's a crazy tool that you can literally point at an object and it will tell you if that element is present. So that's how we were able to test for arsenic. So but again, to rent that tool, it would be 1000s of dollars. And that's just to test for some elements, who's going to spend that kind of money if you're a small institution. And the other issue with testing is that it can be super, super invasive. And a lot of indigenous tribes are obviously incredibly against invasive testing on their objects. If you don't have that extra fruit or you actually have to, you know, remove tiny pieces of an object to be able to test for it. That's another way or add invasive chemicals or something like that. So you if you think there's arsenic and then you're adding more chemicals on top of that to test for it. It's making it worse, we're just making it worse. We're putting band aids on top of band aids on top of band aids, ripping them all off and then giving this damaged thing back to the community. So it's just a bad bad situation. So, yeah, in our curator Sara makes an excellent point- Off mic that you can't hear. So we're gonna tell you. A lot of these sacred objects are treated as you know, considered to be people, they are living members of the community. And the fact that we spray them with poison, literally just to protect them for our own sake is an even additional layer of trauma that we've added.

Easton Phillips 33:58

So, at their inception, museums were actually called "wonder rooms" or "cabinets of curiosity." Everyone, close your eyes and put yourself in the mind of a British person in the late 1400s. Through the early 1600s.

Rebekah Furey 34:14

Do we have wigs? Can we put on wigs?

Easton Phillips 34:16

Yeah, they put on your powdered wigs.

During the "age of exploration", the spoils of the "age of exploration", as they call it. Because these houses and buildings were just, I mean- the wealthy would just flex by showing people like, "This is what I found!" It was defended by those involved saying that, "we want to preserve it." Because the "uncivilized world" I'm using air quotes here, around "uncivilized."

Rebekah Furey 34:40

Our eyes are closed, we don't know what you're doing.

Easton Phillips 34:44

I am using air quotes to say the world that they deemed as "uncivilized", they didn't think they would persist into the 'modern era' for a variety of racist reasons. So now, in many museums, Conner Prairie included, we want to work to do our part to at the very least, eliminate biases and tell the complete stories of the historical pieces we show because our new- I don't want to say our like 'slogan' but our mantra's like, you know, when when it comes to Promised Land is Proving Ground. One of the main signs for it, it says like "the whole story is waiting to be told." And if we're going to try and decolonize a museum.

Rebekah Furey 35:25

What does that mean, though?

Easton Phillips 35:27

Well, I'm glad you asked.

Rebekah Furey 35:30

Yeah, so I have a couple of projects to share. And then you I want you to finish what you're saying- it sounds really cool. But let's just define decolonizing because one, that's a huge, huge, word. So I found two definitions that I think are interesting. And then one that's actually better. So one is- creatively reimagining the way museums work, which is just vague nonsense. The second definition that I found was- a process that institutions undergo to expand the perspectives they portray beyond those of the dominant cultural group, particularly white colonizers. Okay, interesting. And then what I think is the best most practical comes from the abbey Museum in Maine, which is unlike the British Museum doing very well in the way that they deal with the their native peoples. And I think they're just a great example, if you want to look at a museum that knows what they're doing. And part of that is because their former director, Cinnamon Catlin-Legutko, who recently passed away that was a big loss for the museum world (may she rest). But she was an amazing and amazing director for that

institution. So and what how they define it is at a minimum sharing authority for the documentation and interpretation of native culture. And so obviously, that in that case, it's specific to the Wabanaki people who live in that area. But I think we can apply that to any culture who's living within the realm of the community that we serve. And just, and so what that means to me is bringing letting people work in our institution who represent the cultures that we want to support, instead of just having all these white people named Rebekah running collections.

Easton Phillips 37:15

Speaking of serving the communities that we want to talk to, we hear this word "decentering." Decentering, the common narratives, and explore the previously quote unquote, 'silenced histories', to the credit of museums, you know, even those that have a lot of diverse people in positions of influence, you know, you're gonna have to hire outside of that realm sooner or later. And so, we actually talked about this in the United States in our season one episode with Brandy Whitaker about museum education. Because our system is we're kind of at a disadvantage in museums, because there's the whole thing of like, "it's different because it's not a school"- but you're dealing with a wider lens. Everyone comes to museums from different places.

Zoe Morgan 38:03

Or with like, different, like forms of knowledge.

Rebekah Furey 38:07

Different places of knowledge and experience and everything. Yes.

Easton Phillips 38:12

So in my opinion, that's why I think storytelling through physical belongings, (yes), is so effective, because instead of lecturing to them, you're actually like showing and telling them with an actual piece of the past or something that they can touch. That's a recreation because we don't want people just touching art. No, I certainly don't the real objects No, no.

Rebekah Furey 38:34

So, and explain why you very pointedly used "belongings" instead of the customary "artifact" lingo.

Easton Phillips 38:42

I don't like ethnocentrism. I don't like the mentality that, "my culture is the right one, just because it's always the way we've done it" (Sarcasm). Okay, we can't be doing this. I use "we"

meaning the United States as a whole. And I just think that in general, there's just this thing of like, these are objects.

Rebekah Furey 39:01

"It's our stuff, don't touch our stuff." (Kidding).

Easton Phillips 39:04

Yeah, "don't touch our our stuff". You know, I've had plenty of instances, like when I've gotten too close to a thing, and a security guard runs up to me and is like, don't touch that. No, sir. Not that I just go around touching random things. But like, you know, it's like, if you're dealing with a thing, that's not, it's not actually yours, it belongs to another culture. It was made by a person that may never see the object again, or it may never be returned to their family again. So I think that calling it a belonging is a lot better than calling it a slew of other things.

Rebekah Furey 39:38

Yeah. And belongings, to me implies more of a stewardship instead of ownership. Because belongings could be a community's belongings, it could be part of a museum collection, it could be a lot of things, whereas an object feels so stagnant and cold. And I definitely don't want to refer to, you know, sacred indigenous things as objects. I mean, it's so tough for us to even switch that lingo when we talk about our profession, because we're so used to just referring to everything as a cold dead object on a shelf. And that's not necessarily the case with museum objects.

Zoe Morgan 40:14

As Sara said, they're like living beings are members of a community. So I need to work on switching that language myself. So thank you for pointing that out. Yeah, no more object/artifacts.

Rebekah Furey 40:24

No more 'objects' and definitely no more 'artifacts'. That word I hate for always hated. And I switched to using objects. But now I think the language is, is switching again, for the better. And English is very fluid and very impactful. And just making a small change like that. I mean, it just makes you think more. It's nice.

Easton Phillips 40:46

I think that that's a really good example of what we talked about earlier about, like, the intentions of a museum changing. Yes, exactly. It's it's the little, it's the little part, you know, it's not necessarily about, "oh, we need to hit, you know, we need to hit it out of the park on the

first try!" If we're going to tell the whole story. It's more about, you know, showing the public that, "hey, we've changed."

Rebekah Furey 41:08
We're trying to.

Easton Phillips 41:10
Or we're trying to change at the very least. And so, I don't know, how do you think we do this here? Or have we done it yet?

Rebekah Furey 41:17
Well, you know, part of decolonizing how we mentioned earlier, the first steps of it are changing the culture within the museum. So DEAL is a huge part of decolonizing. It is not the only thing. I think that's something that Conner Prairie has really put a lot of focus on over the last couple years is our DEAL initiatives.

Easton Phillips 41:35
And what does DEAL mean?

Rebekah Furey 41:38
Diversity, Equity, Access, and Inclusion! (Beautiful) Yeah, some people say DEIA. And then you know, maybe the next step to decolonizing is starting to repatriate things, but then you have to take it even further. And as you were saying, What are your intentions for, you know, maintaining a museum collection? If we're if our whole purpose for having a collection is just to collect and show off our 'trinkets' and our "cabinet of curiosities", and that's, that's not why any of us should be here. That's the wrong purpose.

Rina Sim 42:07
While I was researching the Korean examples, I found them- they're trying things for how to collaborate with the Korean cultural heritage, they they are not planning to return it, but at least they're trying to collaborate work. For example, the National Library of France have a collaborative work with the Korean institutions, like they are trying to do all the scientific research with Korean institutions and have more work with that. And they have three, three exhibitions with the Jikji that I talked about. The first one was in 1900, for the older books from like Asia. And then second one was when the Korean library and found out it was the first printed book, and they showed it in their library convention. It was a second time in 1970s. And then actually this year, 2023. They had a exhibitions with the Jikji and the Gutenberg Bibles and other first printed European printed paintings. This year, after the conference, there

were more meetings with the Korean institutions. So when they had the exhibition, they published the conference reference. And then also they also published the Korean explanation in the Korean language and they try to respect the Korean culture, I think. So that kind of collaboration and then trying to respect the original culture. Is that one of the better steps for the the colonizations? I think from the museum perspective. And I have another example.

Rebekah Furey 43:57

Can I ask a question? (Yeah) Who did they work with in Korea for those exhibitions? Was it a specific museum or the government,

Rina Sim 44:05

It generally is governmental institutions, let me see (are all museums governmental institutions?) For the scientific research, it was the Cheongju early printing Museum, and then Chungbuk National University. And then the French conservation research center. There, we're doing all the physical and chemical analysis on Jikji. Since it's made of- and really is the first print. And then the cultural heritage administrator of the Republic of Korea, signed a three year cooperation agreement aimed to the strength the scientific cooperation around the Korean collections of the National Library offerings. I think it's generally Korean governmental administrative office.

Rebekah Furey 44:59

That makes sense. The government has to keep their hands on it.

Rina Sim 45:03

I think that's the also biggest difference between American museums and Korean Museum. A Korean Museum has like big control over all over the Korean museums. And then they have a lot of grants to use for the small museums. And then also our there was like really big example of it, like Korean National Museum ID system for like, oh, museum had to use it. So people like my museum also had to move all the collections information to the system. It's cloud based system. So yeah, so (that's so interesting) Yeah, we use that and then so we can go you can go just one website to search whatever. Korean museum any museum is. Yeah. But generally, probably museum not private museums. Not Yeah. Yeah, they don't have to use it. But when, like, if you want to get some grant from the museum or government, you had to kind of have to use it.

Rebekah Furey 46:07

So you follow our rules, they get our money. Yeah. I would love to see a museum in the U.S. try to control how every single museum operates!

Rina Sim 46:16

There are pros and cons. So we don't have to like think about our system to change that which which program we need to use the cloud program.

Rebekah Furey 46:27

Because a lot of thought goes into choosing the way that we manage our collections.

Rina Sim 46:36

And then we don't need to pay for it. So I like that. Can I talk about the second one second example? This example is actually like I was talking about it as an example of the returning the cultural heritage. This one is actually a British Museum. (Do it!) The British Museum have earrings all the jewelry from the Korean kingdom of Silla, I think and we expect production ears in like fifth century or fifth to sixth century which is very like more than 1600 years old. Yeah. And then they said- they, this website doesn't exactly say that this person bought from Japan but like people assume that they the person bought it from Japan because it was under the Japanese colonial era. So there is not not much control of over Korean government to sell the stuff and then also it's very old- over over 1,000 years old so people also assume that they just you know robbed the graves from the ancestors (Wow) Yeah, so

Rebekah Furey 47:52

So, the story is that the Japanese were grave robbing potentially that's the idea. (Yeah) Then it got sold to the British Museum- got it.

Rina Sim 48:01

So like we we will consider as the official people they bought it from, they officially bought it from someplace where it's just, we should say is stolen from Japan or other countries. So, but still

Rebekah Furey 48:20

So yet another example of looted items and an alleged an alleged sale taking place that nobody has any evidence of-under the table.

Rina Sim 48:31

But I was also wanting to mention about how the British Museum tried to collaborate with the Korean government- they hired the curator for the Korean collection. And that was a help with the Korean administrator. Wait a minute, it was under supporting by the Minister of the Culture Republic of Korea. So at least they hire a person for the Korean collections, and then

have another bit of collaborative work with the Korean researchers. They allow Korean researchers to inspect and then investigate all the Korean collections in the British Museum from 2002 to 2016. So, it was a long project and then they have one book about all of the Korean collection explanations. So the website actually also have Korean language explanation about it, so

Rebekah Furey 49:31

Yeah, it's so what you just told us is basically a great example of how the British Museum did one thing right- to decolonize. Yeah, that specific collection.

Easton Phillips 49:45

One point for the British Museum.

Rebekah Furey 49:47

One could argue, they should just give those things back. (Group heckling and laughter) However, what you've explained is what museums here can also imitate, which is if we have these objects, bring people in who are experts in those objects. So if you have native collections, if you have collections from Africa, bring people in to take care of those things who actually know what they are, what they mean is can treat them appropriately. Instead of just letting it collect dust on itself.

Rina Sim 50:20

At least they have some value on it. Like instead of it just being dumped in the some annex or some storage.

Rebekah Furey 50:29

Yeah, an annex that's the "Korean" stuff. Yeah (Sarcasm).

Rina Sim 50:31

Actually "Chinese" stuff.

Rebekah Furey 50:35

We sound like we hate museums. Maybe we should just say art. Let's go around and say our favorite museum. (We love Museums!) Because- No, I know, but we're just really ragging on our field. And I do have to admit, like, I grew up going to museums, I love museums. That's why I do this.

Easton Phillips 50:51

I've taken date to a museum.

Rebekah Furey 50:53

Easton takes all his dates to Museums!

Easton Phillips 50:55

Heck Yeah, I do.

Zoe Morgan 50:56

"If he could get one." DYLAN!!!!!!! (Dylan is being a hater)

Rebekah Furey 51:01

Easton, what's your favorite museum? Don't say Conner Prairie.

Easton Phillips 51:06

Well, I do want to say something nice and that PLPG that's good, but later. Does anybody have to bounce in the minute or are y'all good to stay? (We're good!) Okay, great, great, great. Just Just wanted to respect everyone's time. Except you Dylan- that's why your Boilermakers lost- with your Purdue hat on!

Rebekah Furey 51:20

Stop it! Tell me your favorite museum, Easton, I want to know.

Easton Phillips 51:22

I may need some time to think.

Rina Sim 51:25

And before that, I have another example!

Rebekah Furey 51:27

Yeeees!!!!

Easton Phillips 51:33

Talk your talk, Rina!!!!

Zoe Morgan

(Group hype and support)

Rina Sim 51:38

There is another way to decolonize this stuff- so I talked about Uigwes the before which is the Joseon Dynasty's special event record book it was actually "returned", we say with Air-quotes, returned but like it was actually like permanent loan so we need to re contract it every five years.

Rebekah Furey 51:59

What's the point of that.....why not just give it back?

Rina Sim 52:01

As you said like maybe ownership or stewardship. They wanted to have that I guess....

Rebekah Furey 52:06

But it's just symbolic ownership at that point. (Yeah, maybe) Because a permanent loan is....

Rina Sim 52:10

Maybe they just want some credit for the preservation of things until now from the-

Rebekah Furey 52:19

Well that's exactly right- if it's on loan they get credit for, again, quote unquote, "owning" the object even though it's in Korea's possession.

Rina Sim 52:29

But at least, at least we have possibility later, like maybe more some years, there is a possibility that ownership and stewardship also just transfers to South Korea. So like, just could be the one way Yeah.

Rebekah Furey 52:45

Yeah, that's that's a better situation than with the book that the library of France has.

Easton Phillips 52:56

I had to do some thinking there because I really do want to say where I first had my my first museum love, The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati. However, I have to say that honestly, it might be the National Museum of African American History and Culture, the Smithsonian.

The new one?

In D.C.

Rebekah Furey 53:15

When did that, open? Do you remember?

Easton Phillips 53:19

Recently, I'd google it. If I had, hang on, do I have signal? Hang on? Let's see. Let's see real, real briefly.

Rina Sim 53:27

I actually like recently went to the National Gallery in D.C. and then like, I feel like all the pictures are actually from like Italy in Spain or somewhere else. It's like what's the point? I want to see some American art then like all the French and I mean, at least after 19th century, at least, like maybe it's could be still European or like indigenous people but still, like, consider as American history? Like other Italian or Spanish arts were kinda like- I already saw it from Spain and Italia. Like, what's the point of it? It's not really fun for the tourists to see, like, who like to see American culture.

Rebekah Furey 54:15

Well, you could consider indigenous artwork to be American. Artwork. But I think Easton pointed this out to me earlier today that indigenous artwork tends to be in what we would call an ethnographic museum, or specifically an indigenous museum instead of just considered art, which is what it is, it is art. Why does it have to-Why does the Eiteljorg have to have its own collection? And obviously that was donated by the Eiteljorg family, so- whatever. Why does it have to be separated all the time? It's art. Oh, yeah, it's art. It's not supposed to be in its own little qualification- its own little corner.

Easton Phillips 54:53

Why does it have to be segregated? Why?

Zoe Morgan 54:56

Why Yeah. And that's why I know you're about to say your favorite museum, but-That's why honestly, Newfields has become one of my favorite museums, because it's not a black museum, but they are still centering black stories. Like with their "We the culture" exhibit that they just had, or I think they had like a Juneteenth exhibit as well all featuring local black artists. And then there's another one that just opened, I think it's called, like, "What I have you have", it's curated by another like local black artist, I believe. But again, they're centering black and Indigenous stories without it being a black or indigenous museum. So, I really appreciate

that. And I see myself in the art that's being you know, presented there. And so that's why it's one of my favorites, I just always feel like welcome and safe in that space whenever I'm there. That didn't always used to be the case. They've done a lot of work to, for me to feel that way. Right. But in a very short amount of time. But yeah, but that's, that's why it's one of my favorites, I'd go back again and again.

Rebekah Furey 55:58

And that's such a beautiful point that you just made that you can see yourself in the museum. Now finally, finally, finally,! (Yeah) And you know, taking it back to the indigenous art point, if you have to go to a "special museum" to see artwork that has people that look like you you don't, you're not going to feel accepted, you're not going to feel like part of the community that you live in. So if you can go to the art museum and see beautiful portraits of black women on display next to all these, you know, famed European painters and put up on the same level, that's, that's what we got to do. I don't know why it's taken us so long to figure that out!

Zoe Morgan 56:39

It makes it accessible because I'm like, I can't go all the way to D.C. to the, what is that museum called?

Easton Phillips 56:45

National Museum of African American History and Culture!

Zoe Morgan 56: 48

Like, I'd love to travel out there. But I'm like that I can't do that. I can't just like drop everything and go out there who's paying for me to do that? Someone should, someone should. But again, it's like if we can center all of these stories within these museums already, like it just becomes so much more accessible to all of these communities. And it really becomes a welcoming space for everyone.

Rebekah Furey 57:09

Well, and to bring it back to the fact that you've got your two collections people here from Conner Prairie, it starts with the objects in the collection. Because if we only have things that were owned by white European settlers, then we're not going to be able to put these other types of objects on display or create exhibitions around other narratives. And our collection is you know, is definitely lacking in that area. Because we were started as a museum by Eli Lily. And Eli Lily had an affinity for a lot of these traditional 19th century objects and also randomly Chinese objects. He loved Chinese artwork and sculptures. Obviously, it's beautiful, but what place does that have in a little history museum in Indiana.? So to bring it back to PLPG, let's

you wanted to talk about that. So in order to 'beef up' our collection and actually be more representative, we've been collecting- over the past couple of years- for our Promised Land as Proving Ground exhibit, and specifically trying to get objects from African American families into Conner Prairie. And that has been really tough because, well, why don't you explain a little bit more about why that's been difficult for us to source?

Easton Phillips 58:24

Yeah, because people are not trustful of museums sometimes. And it's understandable.

Rebekah Furey 58:32

Lenders aren't comfortable lending things because they think that we're not going to treat them with respect, because they're not these traditional European objects.

Easton Phillips 58:41

No, yeah, lenders are not comfortable. Because this is a different museum space. And there are areas where people- we're not always going to have people in blue shirt or interpreters in certain spaces, and that sometimes for their benefit, and just our benefit as a whole. And so there are instances where people will touch things they shouldn't, and mess with things they shouldn't. And sometimes they hop in our beds with muddy shoes. And so it's like, a lot of people are afraid in general. So they're already hesitant because this is a museum space, a predominantly white museum space catering to a predominantly white clientele.

Rebekah Furey 59:21

About a white man started by a white man. Yes, yeah, all those things.

Easton Phillips 59:27

Yeah. But then it's like, this museum is kind of this historical 'fantasy land' where you cross the line, and it's 1836 or 1863, depending on where you go. And so that's why I think PLPG is so- why I'm so excited for its opening, because it's like, it's not a separated or segregated experience. It's both book-ending and implemented into prairie town with, you know, Time-looper and all the ways you're going to be able to interact with voices without putting actors in danger. And then we're also doing it in a way that's presenting it from a 21st century perspective. And so with the videos that are going to be there and the rotating exhibit space, that's going to be in the final piece, I think it's just doing a really good job of recontextualizing. Unfortunately, it's understandable why people aren't necessarily in a super huge rush to volunteer to put their belongings into these spaces. But we hope that if we come correct and do it right, when it opens, and it's supposed to open on March 26th 2024. And if it changes, we'll let you know.

Rebekah Furey 1:00:34

Well, and I like I like kind of what you were referencing there, because in fact, the museum that you said was your favorite, I want to say that this is where this was happening, what I'm about to say, when they first opened their gallery attendance- the people working in their galleries were so verbally abused that no one lasted. Because of the content of the museum, you know, centered around black history, people were verbally abusing these employees it to the point where they quit.

Easton Phillips 1:01:00

And this was back in 2016. This wasn't ancient history.

Rebekah Furey 1:01:04

This is not ancient history. This is now this is our country. This is how we treat people in what's supposed to be a sacred space, dedicated to a different culture that's not white, and we go in and we just tear it down. So why the heck would anybody trust us with their stuff? Why would they? We're going to cover in arsenic and then just leave it on a shelf to collect dust. (Not us).

Easton Phillips 1:01:28

But not Rebekah, though,

No

And not Conner Prairie, No.

Zoe Morgan 1:01:37

Well, especially like, as we've said earlier, museums control the narrative. And so if I, you know, have an, like, sorry, a belonging, or that's very sacred to me, I yeah, I would have a hard time, you know, surrendering, that not knowing what the narrative is going to be from the museum, about my community, about my belonging about the importance of it. So it's understandable why there are a lot of people that are just, you know, not very trusting of museums and their belongings with them, so.

Rebekah Furey 1:02:04

It's true, and even even if something is in a museum collection, it doesn't mean it's going to be there forever. So if you gave me something that was really important to you, you're assuming that it's going to just be safe in perpetuity, but museum collections ebb and flow. Things don't always stay forever. So who knows? Then what happens to an object once it's removed from

the collection? Then there's no laws guiding its, you know, stewardship anymore. That's even more scary. So, so yes, while it's within our grasp, we can absolutely do everything we can to take care of it to, you know, display it correctly to put out that correct narrative. But then, you know, in 100 years, if somebody else has my job, I don't know that they're gonna feel the same way as I do, I believe. Actually my first volunteer job was at the Children's Museum. And my mentor there taught me that. "Yes, seashells don't seem important to you, but they are important to somebody." And because he taught me that I've just I've always treated everything even if I don't like the object or find it interesting. I treat everything with the same respect that I would treat a Rembrandt or anything like that. And that's just how I approach my job, but who knows, if somebody comes after me?

Zoe Morgan 1:03:18

I just have one question. One last question maybe. So let's say you're an institution where, because we're talking about like museum leadership, right? They don't have the resources to bring in someone in collections that's like an expert on Korean belongings or Native American belongings. How do you navigate working with those communities without feeling like you're placing the responsibility on them without compensating them? You know, to educate and help take care of those belongings?

Rebekah Furey 1:03:49

Well, unfortunately, that's part of why repatriation is so difficult, because you do have to ask the culture or the tribe or community to work and, you know, and kind of help you resolve your problem that you created. And, how do I say this? Return the object that was stolen from them. So there is unfortunately, an amount of, of ask required of the groups that you work with? So I don't know how to answer that. Because there's no answer.

Zoe Morgan 1:04:19

There's no answer, there's no solution as of yet.

Rebekah Furey 1:04:23

I mean, if you don't have money to hire an educated person, then you just don't unfortunately, that's the truth. That's what happens if, like we this is the first time that we've had curators at Conner Prairie in years. You know- we only recently have hired Sara in her position as Native American curator- I don't even, I can't tell you the last time we had curators at Conner Prairie so yeah, I don't have an answer. Oh, should we all say our favorite museum? We haven't all done that.

Dylan Rawles 1:04:55

I like the Hello Kitty Museum, Boy!!!

Zoe Morgan 1:04:59

I have one- Well, I did mine earlier. Oh, yeah. So you go ahead.

Rebekah Furey 1:05:04

No, you go.

Easton Phillips 1:05:07

I did. I didn't get to see my reasoning as to why it was my favorite.

Zoe Morgan 1:05:09

Oh, I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Easton Phillips 1:05:10

Oh it's fine. It's just the national, African American Museum of History and Culture. It's like Zoe said, I could see myself there. When I started in. And this is no fault of anybody at the Freedom Center. But when I started the Freedom Center, you know, I was in high school. And it was kinda like, I don't know, I would bring back my, the things that I was learning. And I tell the people around me, and they just kind of think like, "it's funny that you're a black guy, and yet you're working at like the slavery museum." And I was like, what's not the slavery museum, but by that time, they weren't really listening. So by the time I went to the museum in D.C. I was, you know, I was in college. And again, I was with a more diverse group of people. And when I went, it's like, when you go in, you start at the very bottom, the basement, it's subterranean, and you work your way up. It's actually built to resemble a basket (Oh, cool). It's like everything in it. It was very tasteful, and it seemed intentional, it's intentional, the way you work your way up, it's like, you're gonna get like, the heavy stuff is at the bottom. But the more you work your way up, it gets like slowly, slowly, "better and better and better" until we get to the very top. Now, of course, there's lots of nuance in that, like, 'how do you define better for black folks in America?' and all that stuff. But it was like, I felt really proud after I left that museum, because I was like, that was really like, there's nothing wrong with- there was nothing wrong with pursuing black excellence, because I'm sure the people who lived in the areas that were in the bottom of that museum probably didn't think they were gonna get all the way up there to the top. But they did. Look at that! But who knows when PLPG opens, who knows, maybe Conner Prairie will be my favorite museum. (Awwwww)

All right. That was a lot. Sorry.

Zoe Morgan 1:06:51
No, That was beautiful.

Easton Phillips 1:06:53
Rena!

Zoe Morgan 1:06:55
What's your favorite museum?

Rina Sim 1:06:59
Favirite museum? I mean, my favorite museum would be the National Museum of Korea. It's not just because it's the national one. They they do a lot of work for the Korean museums overall, but also they try to get close with the people. I think, so they also have like a yoga class in the Buddhism room. (Oh, that's cool) That does the peaceful yoga. And then they also they have like, so many programs that people can just join without any, you know, pressure-being a museum like you know, educational purpose. (That's so nice)

Zoe Morgan 1:07:39
Yeah, that's really cool!

Rebekah Furey 1:07:40
Every example that you've brought is exactly where you should be doing here in the U.S. that those are the best ways to decolonize like you're bringing it the museum down to earth instead of keeping it up on this pedestal that it's been on for forever.

Rina Sim 1:07:58
Yeah, so that's why I like National Museum. I like their program a lot.

Easton Phillips 1:08:10
Okay, so I want to ask to the three of you. What would you all I say, is the most challenging experience that you all have had, in doing the work to tell stories through collections or other tangible storytelling means?

Rebekah Furey 1:08:24
Yeah, I mean, I kind of already said it- and it's that our collection is so centered around 19th century white European settlers. And with this wonderful PLPG exhibit, we've, we haven't found a lot of things to add- to curate. We haven't been able to source a lot of objects for PLPG and I'm really just disappointed that we don't have more stories to tell in that exhibit.

And I just, I'm really excited to see where our collection goes. And I'm can't wait to just be able to have have a variety and stop looking at spinning wheels all day, because I'm sick of them.

Easton Phillips 1:09:04

Rina, you got a challenge for us?

Rebekah Furey 1:09:07

And it doesn't have to be here, you can talk about your previous work too.

Easton Phillips 1:09:09

You can talk about being on this podcast. (Light chuckling)

Rina Sim 1:09:13

Okay, so I think- although I said I haven't really tried to think about diversity, but in the ratio, like race way, but we now are they think about how diversity in society like vulnerable people's community or the disabled people's community, like all kinds of diversity. So when, although- I was a Collection Manager, so I didn't really curate or try to tell stories about it. But, we as an institution had some claims from from people that we hired, some may be political, or has some issue with the sexism or some issue for our festival. So they just people just made claims about it. So we tried to hire or tell the stories with our collections, without harming any other community- nowadays I think. So, that is getting actually harder and harder to explain our collections without harming anyone.

Zoe Morgan 1:10:27

Um, I would say, okay, the most challenging thing, being a former teacher. But speaking from my classroom experience, about using belongings, to teach you about different cultures and history is; As a teacher, you're supposed to be the expert, right? Especially as a history teacher, you're supposed but it's like covering so much history, so you can't be an expert on anything. And then also not having the resources or the bandwidth to do the research that you need to to know the belonging that it is that you're showing. You know, who belongs to. and so I just feel like, thinking about some of the lessons that we taught in the classroom, were probably like- some of them are probably inappropriate, and like disrespectful, honestly. Because we just didn't know. But again, you're teaching like seven classes a day, you're in meetings all the time; When am I going to have the time to look those things up? You know,

Rebekah Furey 1:11:29

And you're teaching what you're required to teach? Yes, you don't really get to choose

Easton Phillips 1:11:33

And the curriculum chooses for you, you can't stray from it unless you make it up elsewhere.

Zoe Morgan 1:11:38

Right.

Easton Phillips 1:11:39

Which is really hard.

Zoe Morgan 1:11:40

Exactly. So I would say that would that was one of the biggest challenges. And if like, I could go back and do it over again, especially after having this conversation. Like there's so many things that I would have done differently. Yeah, so that's, I'd say the biggest challenge. But one of the really cool ways that I feel like we're also- Okay, so are we Play trip: "It's about time" which- I haven't seen it done, so my goal is to hopefully observe that this fall, but they use like a lot of that I wouldn't necessarily call them like, I mean, I guess I did belong to like someone, but it's like old like cellphones and things like that like to teach about, like time and just understanding the concept of time. And so like they're using these Yeah, just like there's like a whole- I'm using air quotes like "Time Machine" that they go through, where they're like, you know, kind of playing with these, like old CD players and old cell phones and like, so I think that's a really cool way that we're kind of like using these belongings to teach about history!

Easton Phillips 1:12:41

Hands on. (Yeah) We love it! This has been- this has gone so overtime, but you guys have shared so much. And we really- this was a lot of fun. So I want to thank you, Rebekah, for coming! Thank you for speaking, especially because you said at one point that you would never do it. So I appreciate you. Thank you Rina for coming and sharing with us your expertise. Thank you Zoe for coming in and helping- helping me.

Zoe Morgan 1:13:06

Thank you for having me!

Easton Phillips 1:13:07

Well, thank you all so much for sticking with us through another journey through some problematic history. As always, you can find us anywhere you get your podcasts that Spotify, Apple podcasts and, the Conner Prairie website. Follow us on Twitter at problematicpod2, and Instagram at thisisproblematicpodcastscp- all lowercase all one word. Also, thank you all for 8,062 downloads across 30 countries- I have them listed here but we'll read them out another

time. We need to get people out the door. So with that being said. Y'all take care, be safe out there and see you next time.

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