TRANSFORMING INCLUSION IN MUSEUMS

The Power of Collaborative Inquiry

PORCHIA MOORE, ROSE PAQUET, AND ALETHEIA WITTMAN

American Alliance of Museums

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Porchia Moore, Rose Paquet, and Aletheia Wittman

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Acknowledgments

WITHIN ALL OUR RESPECTIVE WORK, and as individuals, we strive to build a ritual and practice of thanks and acknowledgment for those who came before us and work beside us. In honesty, we feel overwhelmed by the support we have received over the years. We thank our families, our friends, and our communities, who believed in us and in our work with *The Incluseum* project over the past ten years. Your support is what made this project and book possible.

It has been our goal, not just here but throughout the writing of this book, to recognize the many who have influenced our work and thinking and who we have worked with directly. Many of these individuals will be acknowledged in depth in chapter 1. The work of many more will be referenced and cited as sources. We hope you read the full acknowledgment of *Incluseum* blog authors that can be found at the end of this book in the appendix. To each of these contributors, we thank you.

We would like to extend special gratitude to Margaret Middleton and nikhil trivedi. As regular contributors, collaborators, and trusted advisors, we have relied on them at many points over the past decade to assess whether we are going in the right direction. They have been models for us. We have learned how to expand our individual and collective thinking about inclusion because of their labor and time and by virtue of being in community with them. Thank you.

Preface

As we have completed this book, our collective realities as authors, and *The Incluseum*'s codirectors, have no doubt mirrored many of your realities these past two years (2020–2022):

- supporting friends facing health challenges,
- grieving deaths of community members due to the COVID-19 pandemic,
- research plans scrapped—reformulated to respond to a shifting landscape,
- layoffs,
- new jobs,
- economic instability,
- political instability,
- caring for children,
- heartbreaks,
- the collective grieving of continued police brutality and social injustices,
- the continued global impacts of extreme weather/climate events,
- moving cross-country,
- the transformation of work as we knew it, and
- the transformation of our outlook onto what museums are and ought to be in this new emerging reality.

The question, as we see it, is *how* will we respond to the transformation we are going through. Are we ready to open ourselves up to this transformation? How should we approach this process? This book offers insights in response

to these questions rooted in what we have learned from *The Incluseum* project over the past decade.

The Incluseum project was an idea Rose and Aletheia had in 2012 that provided a solution to what we perceived to be a gap or a problem. The problem was that there was no central resource to chronicle and build community around new approaches to understanding inclusion in museums, a gap Rose and Aletheia were experiencing firsthand as they did graduate work at the University of Washington Museology Program (2010–2012). Scholarship and practice addressing inclusion felt scattered, siloed, inaccessible, and underprioritized in museum discourse. We started a blog as a way to invite museum practitioners and museum-adjacent partners to help us build a conversation and *a space to center* collaborative inquiry about inclusion. We used social media platforms to share what we wrote and to connect with people we could invite to write for the blog. The timing was right. Many museum practitioners and scholars who had been developing their own ideas and practices for years wanted a community to talk about inclusion in museums. One of these amazing practitioners who connected with *The Incluseum* in its earliest years, Dr. Porchia Moore, now completes our team of *Incluseum* codirectors. When Porchia first connected with *The Incluseum* (2013) she was pursuing her doctoral work at the University of South Carolina.

As *The Incluseum* project continued to evolve, Rose and Aletheia worked on projects based in Seattle (where we lived) that could serve as opportunities to put evolving ideas about inclusion into practice. First, *The Incluseum* launched a digital exhibit titled *The Power of Labeling* (2014) with the help of exhibit advisors and University of Washington Museology students.[1] *The Incluseum* also launched a community-specific art installation titled *The Power of Place* (2015).[2] Rose went on to do doctoral work at the University of Washington's Information School, developing an Incluseum Design Workshop in 2014. Since then, Rose, Porchia, and Aletheia have run the workshop with different student groups, at museum conferences, and as a facilitation tool at various museums over the years. And, in 2015, Rose, Porchia, and Aletheia started supporting and advising the MASS Action project launched by Elisabeth Callihan at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (MASS Action will be discussed in greater depth in chapter 1). These *Incluseum* collaborations have been ways to learn through doing as much as thinking, writing, and organizing. We feel proud of our work on each of these projects, but the process of learning through these projects is what we value most. Each collaboration has been a means to grapple with praxis (where our ideas meet practice) and to seek new understanding through contextual and relational accountability.

This book sets out to differ from *and* expand on our work to date with *The Incluseum*. It also strives for a degree of continuity, to uphold the values and

character for which *The Incluseum* has come to be known. *The Incluseum* blog has built a reputation over the years as a platform to find inquisitive, trustworthy, analytical, and nuanced perspectives on inclusion as a concept and a set of practices enacted within museums. We take the responsibility of this reputation seriously. We are in a relationship of accountability to you, the reader, and by extension all who trust our platform and believe in what it has come to stand for. In this spirit, we want to take this opportunity to clearly situate ourselves as authors and name our decisions about language and the writing process, aspects of this book that might not be immediately, or ever, apparent for you, the reader, otherwise.

First, we have made some intentional language choices to refer to groups excluded from museums. These are:

- **Historically Marginalized:** No matter how you slice it, the structure of museums, and those who lead them, operates from a place of marginalizing and codifying the marginalized as well as using power to marginalize.
- **Historically Underrepresented:** Indicative of a *pattern* of underrepresentation, not just current underrepresentation. It suggests the exclusions and discrimination precipitating being underrepresented as well as an evaluation of the representation a group experiences (that it is under the amount it should be).
- **Historically Disengaged:** Indicative of a past in which no relationship has been established with a group. It suggests disinterest of a group due to the irrelevance of a museum.
- **People of the Global Majority:** A critical term first introduced to us by PGM One, a BIPOC-centered project that is part of the Earth Institute, that pronounces the reality that people of color represent the numerical majority in the world's population. In addition, this term alludes to the relationship between power and perceptions of power between melanated and less melanated peoples.

We especially think that it becomes increasingly important to recognize this final term and the impending historical, political, and socioeconomic repercussions as the US Census Bureau recently reported that for the first time ever there is a shrinkage in the "White-only" population. This report is actually much more complicated than issues of race and is more about shifting notions of identity. In our field, as in society at large, we have long patterned our thinking in terms of dichotomies. We tend to think in terms of racialized groups: Black, White, Latinx, etc. Yet the steady increase in bi- or multiracial identities means that as our world continues to expand so must our thinking

about racial identities and inclusion. We lean on this term, People of the Global Majority, as a way to expand our understanding of power and to hold ourselves accountable for unlearning the ways in which this nation's complicated language regarding race requires continual explication and interrogation (US Census, 2021).

Likewise, it occurs to us that—at the same time as an individual might identify with a historically marginalized, underrepresented, or disengaged group—an individual might also identify with groups who form another global majority, or an otherwise well-represented population in society, such as people who live with a disability or people experiencing poverty. So we acknowledge that within these excluded groups are broader, deeper, and specific histories and relationships that themselves require our attention beyond a framework that uses the museum as the sole reference point for understanding group exclusion.

Second, we often have cause within this book to refer to clusters, or acronyms, of key concepts because they are often understood and discussed in relation to each other. For example, we use the acronym DEAI (diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion) in our discussion of the genealogy of inclusion in US museums. And we will use another acronym, IEAJ (inclusion, equity, accessibility, and justice), to refer to a collection of concepts that we feel have particular significance within our own approach to inclusion and the one we understand to be most critical for the museum field's attention today. There might not be a "right" acronym; these inevitably reflect and communicate evolving understanding of the shifting and growing process of finding the language to suit our times.

Another similarity that carries over to this book from our work with *The Incluseum* online is its coauthorship format. We (Rose, Porchia, and Aletheia) took alternating leads on developing each respective chapter; this included drafting chapters and outlines, sharing them, and coediting each other's work. We worked when we could, met whenever we could, but kept flexible to honor each other's schedule and capacity. Editing happened iteratively, through in-person discussion and inquiry about each other's ideas. For the reader, we imagine that this means there might be moments where our distinct voices shine through within what might be read as our collective ("we") voice. Deciding to write in this fashion felt natural because of our years working on *The Incluseum* together. It is familiar to us, and yet we acknowledge that it is a fairly unusual or uncommon voice to establish in a work of creative nonfiction. We want to acknowledge that, despite the familiarity we have with this mode of working, a book written this way is practically impossible without deep care and trust of each other.

As facilitators of *The Incluseum*, we have sometimes been content authors, often been editors and collaborators, and frequently been amplifiers. In addition to these roles, although not always consciously or explicitly stated, we have been space makers. We created the platform in 2012. We cultivated a sense of place around it; our agency as individuals has been expressed (maybe even felt?) through our early claiming of a mission statement and a vision for the project and through our intentional and invitational engagement with contributors. In the introduction, we will delve deeper into the beliefs that developed over time and have guided our work with *The Incluseum* project and shaped the identity of the platform.

At the same time, we have also sought to decentralize and redistribute how knowledge about inclusion is produced and represented through *The Incluseum*. We, as facilitators, have been but one partner in the relationship by which we endeavored to build collective understanding of inclusion in museums; the other partner in this project is *you*. So we have felt responsible to you to share what we have learned from this project over time. Likewise, we want to know:

- How do our learnings overlap with your own or put words to experiences you too have lived?
- How does your realm of museum practice bring the insights we offer into focus?
- How do our attempts to convey our learnings fall short of the fullness of your own experiences?

While a book is less suited than a blog for a two-way dynamic, this book is necessarily a continuation in an ongoing dialogue *and* an opportunity for this dialogue to reach new audiences. The platform we have tried to cultivate through our facilitation, coordination, and imagining with *The Incluseum* over the years is the "hometown" where this book project grew up. Whether we met you through the blog, in person, or are meeting you through this coauthored book, we hope *The Incluseum* offers you a place to feel connected with others in our shared work of inquiry and imagining.

Notes

1. With gratitude to our exhibition advisors Erin Bailey-Sun, Davida Ingram, Dave Kennedy, and Zachary Stocks, as well as our interns Jana Greenslit and Sarah Taggart. See incluseum.com/exhibits/.

2. See incluseum.com/exhibits/.

Preface

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Introduction

Our Original Musing

WHAT IS INCLUSION IN MUSEUMS? This is the question we started asking separately, and then collectively. This question had an urgency. Rose arrived at this question after working in community-based museums, then discovering more exclusionary realities outside of these spaces. Aletheia was encountering the many ways emerging curatorial practices engage with social justice as a pathway to address legacies of museum exclusion. Porchia arrived at this work deeply frustrated by the lack of scholarship and critical analysis of institutional racism in museums. We knew museums to be exclusive in many ways, shapes, and forms. This, it seemed, was the starting place. So what was the antidote to these storied and lasting patterns of exclusion? Where were the museum practitioners who were asking similar critical questions of the field and intervening through their practice? Did others in the field see and feel the gaps in access to resources and examples regarding inclusion?

As cultural scholars and workers ourselves, the stakes of answering these questions felt high. We wanted to resist replicating the practices that continued to consolidate power in existing, exclusive museum practices and structures. We needed to stretch our imagination. We wanted to put aside any presupposed limitations to museum practice and fix our attention on something new, an *Incluseum*.

This idea of an *Incluseum* proposed a future reality. *The Incluseum* project was our intervention, to claim a site for world building—a literal website—where we and other cultural workers could inquire about inclusion collectively.

The project has functioned like a web, cross-connecting a growing number of cultural workers interrogating existing practices and paradigms, language and frameworks—an Inclusive Museum Movement (Moore, 2016). *The Incluseum* became a springboard for grassroots understandings of inclusion but also for new notions of what it means to be a museum altogether.

Due to the sheer scale of published content and the temporal distance between entries, it is not immediately apparent to a casual reader or contributor what we have learned from *The Incluseum* project—until now. And so, a decade later, we look backward, forward, and side to side at what an "insurgent museum project" (Quinn, 2016, p. 11) can tell us about inclusion and the future of museums.

Museum Love Stories

Every museum professional can usually tell you three things: (1) what their favorite museums are, (2) why they entered the field, and (3) a list of things they wish they could change about either their museum, the field, or both. Perhaps after a packed day of inspiring conference panels and keynotes at an annual museum conference or sitting around a table or a bar while at a Drinking About Museums event someone will ask the question, "What is your first museum experience?" You might witness two dozen museum professionals close their eyes and think hard, seeing flashes of memory as they recall the first time they entered a museum and with whom. They will recall how that visit made them feel, what they could touch, or what was behind a glass case or rope that made them stop and stare for some unspecified amount of time. They will speak in great detail about the joys, the questions, the excitement of falling in love with museums. They will share about an unspeakable desire to connect to a particular institution or a revelation that a desire to work in a museum someday likely began at that very moment. Inevitably, the question can be viewed as one of significant importance because, in reality, what is being asked is a question about love. A museum love story, if you will. What is it about museums that so many of us dedicate our lives to? In fact, for some museum professionals, the love story has a different origin. There is first a love for community and a desire to change the ways in which museums function because that first museum encounter felt more like rage or disappointment. That feeling that their community or their people deserved more lit a fire in their hearts for change. What is the source of the passion that we hold for museums in a profession that is in need of major change, that has undergone significant transformation and turmoil, and that often offers huge rewards and often far less pay than we deserve?

One day we asked the question of one another: "When did you first fall in love with museums?" It sent us on a journey that helped us locate memories deep within ourselves and connect us to the work that we have dedicated the past couple decades of our lives to. We found it important to go back to our origin stories, if you will, to our beginnings to examine the roots of our work as a means of expanding the frame for our ongoing scholarship, examination, interrogation, and critique of museums. When you love something, you want the best for it and you want it to grow, prosper, and flourish, or else die and be reincarnated as a better version of itself. This is our desire for museums.

Our critical questions are propositions for reshaping and reimagining—for breathing new life into an institution and a profession rooted in harmful colonialist ideologies. We collectively found that our origin, or love stories were really about belonging. A deep sense of belonging and identity. A whimsy. A gnawing. A live-wired current running along our spines where we saw the importance of education, inquiry, fun and play, and connecting with our loved ones—the ongoing gift of a museum visit. With that, over the past decade, *The Incluseum* as a project has been a labor of love, a platform created to share stories and experiences, ask critical questions, and push our collective thinking and practice. In the process, it has also become a dreamspace and a brain trust of ideas and resources reaching thousands of readers across the globe.

As *The Incluseum* project developed over time, it became clear that the project was not just about an exploration of a single word—inclusion—it was about creating a place, an *Incluseum*, that could evoke a powerful sense of belonging. Inclusion and belonging are both tied to the notion of "being held" and being held gently and with compassion. What is love, if not that? In our respective journeys in the field as professionals and in our lives as visitors we wanted to unpack and clarify if and how enacting inclusion could eradicate exclusion. We view exclusion as the umbrella for all of the -isms and barriers to the field for professionals and to participation for visitors. Our love story, then, is focused on understanding inclusion and how it can expand all of our collective belonging.

Letting a Word Lead Us

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then is a single word worth a thousand blogposts? Tweets? "Inclusion." A decade ago that word was barely used in the US museum field. Diversity was the word of the day, just barely eclipsed by other coded terms such as multiculturalism or accessibility (Moore, 2014). Take, for example, Emily Kotecki, who has created a brilliant podcast called

Museum Buzz (see @museumbuzz1). Each episode, Kotecki asks insightful thought leaders and creatives in our field to explore a single word. The podcast is a meditative, fun exploration of the language and rhetoric museum professionals use on a daily basis. What do we mean when we use terms such as "community," "diversity," "social justice," "virtual learning," and more? Outside of the field, any of these buzzwords potentially take on a new meaning. Yet within the context of museums each of these words or any word deemed "buzzy" has the ability to refocus and/or problematize our best practices. They challenge our understanding of how and why we do things in the field. And so it is with *The Incluseum* and our eagle-eyed focus on inclusion. The project is titled *The Incluseum* because we felt strongly that inclusion was an umbrella term that, rather than having a short-term impact within the field, had far-reaching if not permanent implications of critical importance for where we believed the field needed to expand and aspire. More than the opposite of exclusion, we understood inclusion to be a concept full of potential for addressing a multitude of concerns plaguing the field, including and not limited to

- lack of BIPOC leadership in museums,
- issues with BIPOC retention in the field,
- lack of participation from BIPOC visitors,
- inequity caused by unpaid internships,
- a failure to adequately expand and apply disability and accessibility frameworks,
- lack of promoting and centralizing LGBQTI2+ leadership and histories,
- gross disparities in salaries between museum leadership and other professionals,
- inaccurate or poor interpretation of material culture,
- the fallacies of professionalism that failed to address legacies of White supremacist work cultures, and
- institutional and systemic racism and more.

The concept of buzzwords is that they endure repeated use over a short period of time to the point that some or most of the original intent behind the word is lost, muted, or changed in some manner. There is a time stamp on buzzwords as the problem or situation associated with the word is either resolved, glossed over, or no longer holds our attention. We felt strongly that there was something significant about inclusion, that it held an endurance over time and operated as a functional way to problem solve. In addition, we believed that there were opportunities to nuance and expand on inclusion to unlock its deeply imaginative potential. We see our work as imaginative,

expansive, and participatory. Therefore, as a collaborative project, the platform is designed to allow museum workers to explore the dimensions of inclusion beyond mere rhetoric and to solidify the term as a valuable framework for our field. While buzzwords are often associated with showcasing a familiarity with language used in a profession, they are not often fully defined and critical principles are not usually applied. In the ten years that we have interrogated inclusion, contributors to the project have taken a single word and fleshed it out to give meaning, nuance, and applicable insights to the entire field, that is, museum studies and the professional sector of museums and cultural heritage. And so we let a single word lead us into a global dialogue on space making, leadership, activism, racial equity, and change. We practiced deep listening and centered collaborative inquiry and community building as principles in motion for the platform to flourish. We see and continue to view vast promise in what was once considered "buzzy."

From Digital to Print

It is not lost on us that *The Incluseum* is a born-digital project, residing on the internet—a project that spans global time zones and connects thousands of readers. In the first several years of the project, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were powerful tools to connect to new contributors, build a network of readers, and expand the platform's reach. When the project started in 2012 as a blog and website it was a base for intentionally and consistently weaving together a web of voices and ideas pertaining to inclusion in museums in the public realm—free for all to access and inviting to all who might imagine themselves a partner in weaving this web with us. This web of voices and ideas began to take on its own form, significance, and meaning beyond us and our seed of an idea. That *The Incluseum*, a born-digital space, could develop attributes through collective visioning and collaborative inquiry—becoming a world of its own—was unimaginable then. Ten years later, we find that this digital platform served as an excellent incubator for community building, bringing together both digital and offline engagements (*The Incluseum*, 2012). The strength of the web that we wove in the digital sphere translated fairly naturally to offline community connections. That community spurred new and side collaborations.

Coming to understand the power of a digital project offering free content—including printable, shareable resources and tools—has been one of the most satisfying parts of *The Incluseum* project. In 2020, we saw the museum world "pivot" to digital content in an unprecedented way and rapidly develop "hybrid" (in-person and online) models for engagement. With attention,

time, experimentation, and energy, the digital life of museums large and small grew. Most of this new digital museum content has been free, taking the place of the physical museum "experience" as the main museum offering. While backgrounded by the grief of a pandemic that isolated us in different ways, museums made strides in accessibility and virtual event production and reached a remote audience ready to engage. *The Incluseum*'s decade-long experience facilitating a digital platform, inextricably linked to offline community and in-person engagements, seems particularly pertinent to reflect on as we witness museums on a field-wide scale navigating a hybrid mode for the foreseeable future, considering the lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and embracing the power of digital place making in building communities and relationships that bridge the in-person and the digital realms.

So why move to print now? Print allows us the space to chronicle the collective wisdom accrued on *The Incluseum* digital platform over the past ten years and to engage new audiences. The tactility of the printed page, we hope, evokes a new kind of creative energy—the potential for blank pages to become filled with new notes, new questions, and new musings. In addition, we hope to disrupt our own patterns of learning and knowing by making a new offering. Change is vital for growth. And while we do not subscribe to the notion that the written word, or the academy only, legitimizes knowledge and represents the full spectrum of necessary and valid knowledge, translating our born-digital project to print has been a means to stretch our thinking and share the fruits of our collective web weaving.

What This Book Is and Is Not

This book is a celebration of *The Incluseum* project and the fruits of the collaborative inquiry that it has catalyzed to date. It is designed to present a powerful look at what we have learned and what you have taught us through your sharing, reading, writing, and digital participation over the past ten years about the value and practice of inclusion. It is a celebration of our contributors and readers and how this brain trust of museum professionals across the world has activated vital shifts in our field.

It is a book that summarizes, synthesizes, and archives a genealogy of inclusion in US museums including a burgeoning movement, The Inclusive Museum Movement (chapter 1), and delves into the limits of the concept as it is used today (chapter 2). This book shares a thematic analysis of *The Incluseum* content archive and synthesizes findings into a new paradigm for understanding inclusion that can open us up to necessary and timely transformation (chapter 3) and introduces the implications and uses of such

a paradigm for the museum field in an era of uprising and upheaval (chapter 4). In our final chapter (chapter 5), we call for a complete reorientation of the field's understanding of inclusion moving forward.

The book arrives at a crucial junction. It comes at a time when a global pandemic has threatened the cultural heritage sector and terms such as "diversity," "equity," "access," "social justice," and "inclusion" went from ubiquitous buzzwords and purported necessary values to being included in policies, statements, and trainings to being challenged and even outlawed.

This book is not a magic wand. It is not a step-by-step guide to ending institutional racism or even a workbook for solving every problem in the field or your institution. This book is not a means of saying we have all of the answers (we don't). This book is a purposeful analysis and accountability for the collective work that we have done as a project toward understanding, expanding, working toward, and achieving inclusion. Most critically, it is an attempt to ask the hard questions on the progress that we have made in our field regarding diversity, equity, access, and social justice as an output of inclusive praxis. Doing the work means that each individual museum commits to the transformation required for each unique, locally situated community. There are no blanket strategies or techniques. For every museum exists a unique plan for inclusion. What inclusion looks like for one community will look vastly different for another.

This book does not reinforce current and previous standards of "best practices" for museum work. This book is a call to action. We deserve a new paradigm for inclusion in service of antiracist institutions dedicated to new ways of being and leaning heavily on new ways of knowing—trusting in the knowledge and wisdom we have created in these past ten years. We want Incluseums!

How to Read This Book

Take notes. Take photos. Write in the margins. Color code. Screenshot. Share. Post on social media. We want this book to be well worn and have the feel of a workbook, the tone of a passionate accomplice, and the historical archival memory and analysis of memory workers, activist-scholars, and practitioners. The main way to read this book is in communication with the following:

a. *The Incluseum* blog (past, present, and future posts)
b. Current media and content regarding race, inclusion, and museums
c. The Museum Twitterverse (join in any number of conversations and threads regarding museums)
d. In community

Read this book with an open mind. We hope that even if you have been a contributor, have followed *The Incluseum*'s journey these past ten years, feel well read about the work of IEAJ in museums, or are actively leading inclusion work in your own museums that you will still learn something new. We intend for this book to read as a primer and a reference tool. We envision it as a kind of historiography and a map for the journey ahead.

What We Believe In

We believe that museums have the ability to sustain and educate our communities in new ways. We believe that the museum field is full of brilliant, capable people who deserve excellence in leadership, who can be excellent leaders, and who benefit from new ideas and creative solution-driven strategies for transformative praxis. Therefore we do not view ourselves as content creators but facilitators, activist-scholars, and practitioners. We believe in collaboration. Creating and sharing ideas. We believe in the wisdom of the collective. Always.

We work in a particular way that has continued to develop over time and we feel that it is necessary to outline our values:

Incluseum Values and Guiding Principles

Critical Dialogue
- We believe that disruption is a powerful tool for learning and growth.
- We are nourished by the intuitive power of curiosity.
- We are not tied to best practices, outmoded notions of professionalism, and common ways of doing things just because.
- We aspire to the courage and freedom to learn new things.
- We believe that action should be responsive, not reactive.
- We learn through engaging with one another.

Community Building
- We grow through the wisdom of the collective.
- We understand there is no one-size-fits-all approach to inclusion, and intensive labor is required to manifest a path toward inclusive practice.
- We uplift and acknowledge ways of knowing and working outside of current museum standards.
- We approach partnership with sincerity, authenticity, and truth.
- We create and share tools because they facilitate the exchange of ideas and are necessary for the expansion of community.

Collaborative Practice
- We work together.
- We invest our time, labor, and attention in innovation and ideas.
- We move freely between honoring urgency and respecting the need for slow learning and active listening as a model for cultural responsiveness.
- We trust in the potential of shared knowledges to correct/restore.

We believe we can all benefit from a community in which innovative and experimental approaches to museum practice, curiosity, questions, successes, and failures are amplified to help us collectively approximate the solutions most suitable in our own contexts and the future we want for the field and our workplaces.

Inclusion is a collaborative, multimodal, expansive, and inquisitive process.

This shared visioning work is indebted to, and an outgrowth of, its deep roots in conversations, collaboration, movements, and individual activism begun many decades earlier. In the following chapter, we turn to these precursors to situate *The Incluseum* within the broader, ongoing story of influential moments that have shaped and continue to shape how we understand inclusion in the US museum field.
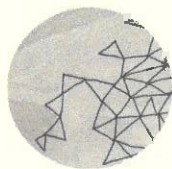
Key Questions

1. What is your museum love story?
2. What do you know for sure needs to change about museums for both museum professionals and their visitors?
3. What is your vision for museums and what tools, conditions, information, or leadership styles do you need to realize this vision?
4. What are your personal values and how or where are these values supported in your institution?
5. In what ways have you contributed to the global digital community of museum professionals and what was its impact?

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1

What Is Inclusion?

A Genealogy of Inclusion in US Museums

IN THIS CHAPTER, WE DEVELOP a genealogy of inclusion in US museums. This genealogical work helps us trace back—and forward—different influential moments that have shaped contemporary understandings of inclusion in the field. This account emerges from the authors' collective memory, research, and dialogue, but, as all accounts go, is partial. We encourage you, the reader, to consider other aspects and forces that we might have unintentionally omitted.

Tracing the roots of inclusion in US museums takes us several decades back to the 1960s and the emergence of community- and culturally specific museums in the civil rights, or the "second reconstruction," era. This is followed by the theoretical contributions of the New Museology in the late 1980s and the development of social inclusion theory in the late 1990s in the United Kingdom. This genealogical work then brings us back to the United States when in the 2010s the US museum field saw a flurry of activities pertaining to inclusion. We will first discuss AAM's uptake of corporate diversity and inclusion language to formulate its first definition of inclusion in 2014. Next, we will look at how practitioner pushback and activism contributed to AAM reconsidering inclusion within a more comprehensive framework called Diversity, Equity, Access, and Inclusion (DEIA) in 2018. Finally, we will highlight the significant role of grassroots activist projects and initiatives in shaping the US museum field's contemporary understanding of inclusion from a justice-centered perspective. Overall, these projects and initiatives provide ongoing pushback, depth, substance, and accountability to discourses of inclusion and DEIA in the field.

A Community Museum Movement

Community museums (also referred to as culturally specific or neighborhood museums) have long been an embodiment of ground-up inclusion efforts—amplifying counter-narratives, heritage, culture, and local knowledge. In the midst of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, museums too were a mode of making and claiming space as well as representation—necessitated by long-standing erasure of community-based knowledges within the dominant, primarily White, US museum system. Within this broader movement, sub-movements mobilized, like the Black Museum Movement (Burns, 2013). Notable museums founded in this era and in following decades include Anacostia Community Museum, The Studio Museum, and the Wing Luke Museum. These museums laid the groundwork for the continuing emergence of community museums in the coming decades, like the Chinatown History Museum in New York City. Even before the boom in community museum projects, there were community museum precursors such as the Museum at Hampton University (an HBCU) in 1868 and the Osage Tribal Museum in 1938.[1]

These varied and unique community museum projects serve as radical models for remaking museums by and for communities. However, because of the ways the dominant museum system has received and engaged with the Community Museum Movement, the potential of the movement to shape museum practice broadly has been marginalized and resisted. Rather than recognized as paradigm-shifting projects, instructive to the direction of change in the US museum system, community museums are often "othered" and relegated to their own "type" of museum. The signs of broader institutional shifts in the dominant US museum system have taken decades longer and continued collective efforts since.

New Museology Arrives

Since museums' early days between the birth of the Enlightenment and the end of the colonial period, a time span of roughly 150 years (from approximately 1650 to 1800), museums have engaged in collection, preservation, curation, and exhibition. The collections at the center of these institutions often reflected, and still do, the whims of individual collectors and efforts to amass material wealth during the colonial period. Given this historical legacy, most museums are rooted in the notion that the world can be known and categorized to tell a definitive narrative (Patterson, Wittman, Phillips, Guillotte, Quinn, and Russell, 2017). Academics, curators in particular, have supported this epistemology. As curators sought to best transmit the rational and

definitive narrative, they applied themselves to developing "proper" methods for organizing and displaying collections.

The emergence of the New Museology as a theoretical and practice-oriented lens for museums came about as a response to this dominant museo-logical paradigm.[2] It is often ascribed to the 1989 publication of Peter Vergo's germinal work, an edited collection titled *The New Museology*. Vergo aimed to break with what he called the "old museology," a field of theory and prac-tice focused too heavily, in his opinion, on "museum *methods*, and too little about the purposes of museums" (Vergo, 1989, p. 3). According to Vergo, this disproportionate focus on "how to" matters and best practices (that is, museum methods) had, over time, left the assumptions and motivations underlying these methods unexamined and thus undertheorized.

This collection, which was the first of its kind in the field, built on and ampli-fied ideas and debates regarding the political nature of representation that were circulating across various academic disciplines at the time. For museums, this meant that their main activities of collecting and displaying artifacts to represent and speak on behalf of others came under scrutiny and were prob-lematized; these knowledge-producing activities could no longer be carried out under the guise of neutrality (Mason, 2006).[3] In his introduction to the collec-tion, Vergo reminded the readers that, "whether we like it or not, every acquisi-tion (and indeed disposal), every juxtaposition or arrangement of an object or work of art, together with other objects or works of art, within the context of a temporary exhibition or museum display means placing a certain construction upon history" (Vergo, 1989, pp. 2–3). This construction, he clarifies, is shaped by subjective cultural values as to aesthetic, intellectual, and other preferences (p. 2). In other words, the knowledge-producing activities of collecting and displaying artifacts have political, ideological, and aesthetic dimensions, ema-nating from the institution and its legacies, as well as the individuals that make up a particular institution (see also Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; Bennet, 1995; Clifford, 1997). The nonneutral nature of these knowledge-producing activities thus demands that museum professionals do more critical reflection on these activities' contexts and processes (Macdonald, 2006).

Vergo's edited collection also extended one of the motivations that had led to the opening of ecomuseums[4] and other forms of community-based or culturally specific museums discussed earlier. This motivation was that muse-ums should go "from being about something to being for somebody" (Weil, 1999). It's not that museums were for nobody prior to this but that museums were seen to cater to a small, privileged group that did not reflect "the public" museums purported to serve. In other words, museums were called on to become more *visitor centered*, places of enjoyment, leisure, and participation in addition to being places of study and knowledge.

In sum, the New Museology sought to address the role of museums in society, calling on them to become more reflexive, that is, more critical of the assumptions and motivations that underlie their practices and to focus more on people rather than on "how tos" and best practices lest they become "living fossils" (Vergo, 1989, p. 4). This critical turn in museums led to a number of publications that have become key in the field of museology and to the proliferation of educational and community-oriented programming. Since the early work described here, the New Museology has seen a return to "old" museological concerns for methods. This return to how-tos is enriched by the conceptual work developed through the "first wave" of New Museological work (Macdonald, 2006). This focus on practice is crucial if those invested in the New Museology wish to see the changes they have advocated for take place.

The Influence of Social Inclusion

Following the development of the New Museology, the field saw the profusion of initiatives centered on values such as community, democracy, and participation. These initiatives extended and amplified themes brought about by the New Museology, exploring their implication for theory and practice. Within this emergent landscape of public-oriented efforts, the value of inclusion explicitly surfaced in the United Kingdom museum field as social inclusion theory.

In the 1990s, a series of policy moves linked museums to the United Kingdom's greater *social inclusion* policy agenda (Department of Culture, Media, and Sports [DCMS], 1999; 2000a; 2000b; 2005). Through these policy efforts, museums were mandated to address the various barriers that had been identified to prevent people from historically underrepresented groups from accessing museum resources. Moreover, museums were called on to tackle social exclusion occurring on a broader, societal level by linking their services to the four main social exclusion indicators the UK government identified as critical, namely, poor health, high crime, low educational attainment, and unemployment (Sandell, 2003; Tlili, 2012). In the words of Chris Smith, the UK secretary of state in 2000:

> Combating social exclusion is one of the Government's highest priorities, and I believe that museums, galleries and archives have a significant role to play in helping us to do this. They are often the focal point for cultural activity in the community, interpreting its history and heritage. This gives people a sense of their own identity, and that of their community. But the evidence is that museums, galleries and archives can do more than this, and act as agents of social change in the community, improving the quality of people's lives through their outreach activities. (DCMS, 2000a, p. 3)

From this perspective, museums were expected to align themselves with the state's policy agenda and transcend their traditional roles of collecting, preserving, and educating to take on a more *socially purposeful role*, that of acting as *agents of social inclusion* (Sandell, 1998; Tlili, Gewirtz, and Cribb, 2007). In other words, museums were expected to harness their resources and services to help alleviate factors that contribute to social exclusion in their communities, thus delivering positive social outcomes that extend beyond the confines of their four walls.

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Museum Studies Department at the University of Leicester undertook notable research projects to help provide insight into museums' links with social exclusion. Sandell (1998; 2002), for example, cited the ways in which museums often promote and affirm dominant values and beliefs as factors contributing to an institutionalized form of social exclusion, a theme that will be echoed in the US museum field's inclusion discourses. He articulated this form of exclusion as particularly problematic as it not only reflects an individual or group's preexisting exclusion from the political, economic, and social realms of society but also perpetuates it (see also Bourdieu, 1993). As a result, Sandell described museums as exacerbating an individual or group's "position of exclusion by broadcasting an exclusive image reinforcing the prejudices and discriminatory practices of museum users and the wider society" (Sandell, 1998, p. 408). Subsequent research projects explored what constitutes barriers to access across UK-based museums, and what approaches address and remedy these barriers (Dodd and Sandell, 2001; Group for Large Local Authority Museums, 2000; Sandell, 2003).

While these insights were primarily UK-based, a number of key publications followed that helped contribute an international perspective to museums' role in society. For example, the edited volume *Museums, Society, Inequality* (Sandell, 2002) brought together international case studies and theoretical insights into social inclusion in museums. This early work was influential to many museum studies students and scholars in the United States, as it presented different approaches to thinking about and working on inclusion in museums.

It is to the US museum field that we turn next. The adoption of inclusion in the United States presents several discontinuities and new directions from the UK context. Aspects that remain the same across contexts, however, are the importance of museums making their resources available to wider segments of the population and having a positive impact on society. The discussion here will clarify this and bring to the fore the context of inclusion in the US museum field.

Inclusion in the US Museum Field

The US museum field's focus on inclusion has intensified over the past decade. It is marked by a diversity of actors and initiatives that have aimed to "inform, educate, and actively pursue the best practices in inclusion" (Shellman, 2019, p. 126). In this section, we highlight some of these initiatives and actors.

a) AAM's 2014 Diversity and Inclusion Policy Statement

Inclusion in US museums gained momentum in 2014 when AAM released its first inclusion-related document, a *Diversity and Inclusion Policy Statement*. This policy statement built on the Alliance's previous efforts centered on the realities of museums in a pluralistic, multicultural society with the publication of *Excellence and Equity* (1992) and the toolkit *Mastering Civic Engagement* (2002). The 2014 *Diversity and Inclusion Policy Statement*, however, was the first to explicitly focus on the language of inclusion.

i. Background and Development

Beginning in 2014, the AAM engaged in a couple of concerted efforts to develop a definition of inclusion for the field. These efforts had two main objectives: (1) to make the organizational culture of AAM more inclusive and (2) to set the tone for the museum field through the formulation of standards and best practices that center on inclusion.

In 2014, AAM recognized that its membership was not carrying out diversity and inclusion goals as comprehensively as it would have liked. Additionally, AAM recognized it needed to make internal changes as well. In response, the AAM's board formed a task force centered on diversity and inclusion with the mission to formulate a policy statement that would clarify what diversity and inclusion means conceptually and in practice for the Alliance and the field (Harris and Staveloz, 2014).[5]

According to the AAM, the policy statement's focus areas were human capital, key stakeholders, and products and resources. It aimed to create change on two levels. The first was internal to the operations of the Alliance. For instance, when the policy was released in 2014, it was incorporated into AAM's Operational Plan, where it affected hiring, promotion, and other facets of the organization. It also shifted the focus of the Alliance's online Information Center to include more resources on diversity and inclusion for its members. The second level of impact was focused externally toward the Alliance's membership. Namely, AAM set the intention to make revisions to

its museum accreditation expectations to center diversity and inclusion (Harris and Staveloz, 2014). This level of impact is still developing. In 2019, the Alliance launched the *Facing Change* initiative and established a task force to develop recommendations to embed diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion more significantly into its excellence programs, including accreditation (AAM, 2018).[6]

In the AAM's 2014 policy statement, the task force defined inclusion as follows:

> The act of including; a strategy to leverage diversity. Diversity always exists in social systems. Inclusion, on the other hand, must be created. In order to leverage diversity, an environment must be created where people feel supported, listened to, and able to do their personal best.

In contrast to the United Kingdom, where the museum field was linked to inclusion-specific governmental mandates, the US museum field was required to craft its understanding of inclusion outside of a comprehensive national framework. As such, AAM turned to the business world to formulate its stance on inclusion.[7] Indeed, by 2014, it had become increasingly common for big businesses, such as Nike and Coca-Cola, to develop diversity and inclusion statements.

In its statement, the Alliance framed diversity as an institutional asset to be leveraged through inclusion, that is, through the creation of an environment where people can feel supported to achieve their personal best (Harris and Staveloz, 2014). This approach to formulating diversity as an asset to be leveraged is known as the *business case* for diversity and inclusion. The business case for diversity and inclusion holds that leveraging and shifting the internal demographic makeup of an organization, in other words, its diversity, can lead to outputs that will better represent and appeal to a broader base (Hyter and Turnock, 2006). In the business world, this case for diversity and inclusion is presented as a means for increased profits to an organization's bottom line.

The Incluseum was the first venue to publicly publish AAM's *Diversity and Inclusion Policy Statement*, which had only been released internally up until that point.[8] We aimed to bring this statement within *The Incluseum*'s dialogic space and collaboratively inquire about it. How did the perspective promoted in the statement fit within the ongoing dialogue on inclusion in museums? Did the community of practitioners and scholars invested in this conversation find it satisfactory? How could this work be built on? Moreover, AAM's Diversity Committee (DivCom), a professional committee of the Alliance, organized several actions centered on bringing the policy to the Alliance's members. For example, in April 2015, DivCom organized a live, online question-and-answer session between AAM members and AAM leaders who chaired the diversity

and inclusion task force. DivCom's goal was to generate bottom-up engagement with a policy that had been generated in a top-down manner.

ii. Criticism

The position of the policy as a business case created tension in the field. To many, it seemed that framing the goal of diversity and inclusion as a business case confused its intentions. Indeed, instead of either being about addressing legacies of exclusion or better fulfilling museums' public responsibilities and aspirations, the business case seemed to reduce inclusion as a way to contribute to an institution's financial bottom line. Reflecting this tension, Porchia Moore explained her reservations about AAM's decision to frame diversity as an asset, stating, "The truth is that I do not like the term 'diversity' because I find it to be a racially coded term which exacts all sorts of confusing sentimentalities and hidden agendas" (Moore, 2014). Moore's perspective is in line with critical race scholars who, like Susan VanDeventer Iverson (2007), warned that without criticality about power, diversity and inclusion discourses run the risk of reducing people of color to commodities that organizations can strategically utilize to "acquire or maintain a competitive edge in the market" (p. 600). Nancy Leong (2013) coined this problematic practice "racial capitalism," or "the process of deriving social and economic value from the racial identity of another person" (p. 2153).

These critical voices extend beyond the museum field and are part of a larger chorus that has encouraged greater critical reflection in how the term "inclusion" is used. Many have noted that the positive valence ascribed to inclusion tends to obscure how dynamics of power and oppression structure social group differences, or diversity, hampering the ability to question how these structures operate within an organization and society at large (Ahmed, 2012; Gotsis and Kortezi, 2015; Grimes, 2002; Herring and Henderson, 2012). How did AAM take this into consideration? How would it ensure that its approach to diversity and inclusion reached beyond a surface-level position and would instead be rooted in a critical yet generative understanding of the ways in which inclusion is tethered to social justice (Deem and Ozga, 2020; Paquet Kinsley, 2016)? These questions, among others, reverberated in the US museum field in the years following AAM's release of its policy statement.

b) AAM's 2018 Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion Report

Reflecting the ongoing, field-wide momentum to center inclusion as a key value for the sector, AAM continued its efforts to refine its understanding of inclusion and bring this value to the core of its operations. Beginning in 2015,

the Alliance engaged in dialogue with thought leaders, practitioners, and activists organizing for greater inclusion in museums in view of formulating diversity and inclusion as crucially important areas of focus for the field. Specifically, the Alliance's strategic plan for 2016–2020 stated that it would focus on "diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion in all aspects of museum structure and programming," identifying this topic as one that the Alliance's membership "strongly believes to be vital to the future viability, relevance and sustainability of museums" (AAM, n.d.).

In 2018, the AAM gathered a working group to explore inclusion within the greater context of diversity, equity, and accessibility (DEAI). The working group was made up of twenty museum professionals, representing a variety of disciplines, organizational sizes and types, and perspectives. Together, the group produced a report titled *Facing Change: Insights from AAM's DEAI Working Group*. This report addressed some of the criticism discussed earlier pertaining to AAM's 2014 *Diversity and Inclusion Policy Statement*. In this report, inclusion is no longer framed as a mere business case, but understood in relation to equity, an approach more rooted in social justice which recognizes that genuine inclusion requires that past exclusions be acknowledged and fairly and justly remediated (AAM, 2018).

The report opens with a statement from AAM's now former director of inclusion Nicole Ivy, who places inclusion within the context of historical inequalities that have shaped the field, echoing the earlier discussion of the New Museology and the need to contend with systemic exclusion in museums. Furthermore, she calls out the problematic labor practices that have made it difficult for people of low income and racially minoritized groups to have access to museum employment opportunities. Situating inclusion in such a way brings it within a reflexive frame, addressing the critics and limitations of inclusion as a business case.

The potential reflexive nature of inclusion is further emphasized in Ivy's opening words to the *Facing Change* report. She says,

> The work [of inclusion] doesn't begin "out there," in some space external to museum staff, directors, and boards. Nor does it hinge solely on outreach to underserved populations. Effective inclusion work begins inside the structures of our museums and within each of us. (AAM, 2018, p. 2)

Her focus on the structural/institutional and individual changes that inclusion work calls for echoes the perspective that Chris Taylor (2016), former founding director of inclusion and community engagement at the Minnesota Historical Society, presented on the AAM's Center for the Future of Museums (CFM) blog. He explains that

museums typically "Do Diversity" through programming aimed at audiences from diverse communities. Many of these programs—though engaging—are created in Euro-centric organizations by staff who seldom represent the target community. *Systemic inclusion* calls for museums to look internally at their processes, procedures, policies and the cultural competence of staff. (emphasis added)

Both of these statements emphasize the reflexive nature of inclusion work and the need for it to be systemic; inclusion requires that the internal structures of museums, their processes, procedures, and policies, be examined and transformed.

Moreover, the reflexivity Ivy and Taylor both speak of encompasses the self, or individual staff members' competence for the work. This final point is important as it stresses the fact that genuine inclusion requires more than new internal processes, procedures, and policies; it implicates the self and requires a willingness to see reflexively the noninnocent and nonneutral realities of our embodied subjectivities.

The AAM *Facing Change* working group developed five insights that structure the report and contextualize inclusion work:

1. Every museum professional must do personal work to face their unconscious bias;
2. Debate on definitions must not hinder progress;
3. Inclusion is central to the effectiveness and sustainability of museums;
4. Systemic change is vital to long-term, genuine progress;
5. Empowered, inclusive leadership is essential at all levels of an organization. (AAM, 2018, p. 4)

These five insights constitute a greater context that inclusion is placed within, making clear that the pursuit of inclusion is fundamental to museums' sustainability. Again, self-reflexivity (examining unconscious bias) is emphasized as a central practice. Moreover, systemic change is underlined as vital. Finally, supportive leadership is also stressed as being at the core of inclusion work, an insight that AAM is now building upon with its *Facing Change: Advancing Museum Board Diversity and Inclusion* initiative. Taken together, these insights highlight how AAM is shaping an understanding of inclusion for the field in a way that focuses on individual and institutional/structural work to shift museums' work culture and practices. This internal work is prioritized as key to generating inclusive relationships with audiences and creating inclusive programs.

Within this greater context, AAM further describes the distinction between inclusion and diversity, defining inclusion as follows:

The intentional, ongoing effort to ensure that diverse individuals fully partici-
pate in all aspects of organizational work, including decision-making processes.
It also refers to the ways that diverse participants are valued as respected mem-
bers of an organization and/or community. While a truly "inclusive" group is
necessarily diverse, a "diverse" group may or may not be "inclusive." (2018, p. 8)

Inclusion, from this perspective, factors into a museum's managerial strategy
rather than only being a guide for the development of products and services.
Specifically, this definition focuses on the intentional and ongoing nature of
creating inclusion as a focus of an organization's culture.

In comparison to AAM's 2014 formulation of inclusion, this definition no
longer describes inclusion as "a strategy to leverage diversity." This indicates
an evolution from primarily framing diversity and inclusion as a business
case, and thus a move away from the problematic connotation of racial
capitalism evoked by that framing. Moreover, it is important to note that the
2018 formulation of inclusion represents a polyvocal process. The AAM was
upfront about who participated in the process of developing these definitions
and what the process entailed. This matters because it demonstrates greater
transparency and accountability to the field.

c) Beyond AAM: Voices from the Field

While AAM was working toward defining inclusion and related concepts
between 2014 and 2018, widespread dialogue and action was also occur-
ring in the field about what genuine inclusion entails. This dialogue was
characterized by museum professionals leveraging social media such as blog
platforms and Twitter to connect, share ideas, and organize in a grassroots
and activist fashion to learn together and have their voices heard (Cole-
man and Moore, 2019). Examples of such digitally mediated dialogue and
social organizing includes *The Incluseum*, #MuseumsRespondToFerguson
(#MRTF, whose leadership is discussed in the next section), Museum Hue
(founded and directed by Stephanie A. Johnson-Cunningham and Monica
O. Montgomery), Museum of Impact (also founded by Monica O. Mont-
gomery), #MuseumWorkersSpeak (#MWS, whose founders are discussed
in the next section), #museumsarenotneutral (founded by La Tanya Autry
and Mike Murawski), Visitors of Color (founded by nikhil trivedi and Por-
chia Moore), and the Empathetic Museum (founded by Gretchen Jennings,
with current members also including Janeen Bryant, Stacey Mann, Kayleigh
Bryant-Greenwell, Jim Cullen, Charlette Hove, Jackie Peterson, Nayeli
Zepeda, and Ryan Hill).[9] Many of these movements quickly grew to include
more people and have had evolving leadership cohorts. While not fully
digitally mediated, another noteworthy collaborative and impactful action

that took place during this time frame is Museum As Site for Social Action (MASS Action).[10] FWD: Museums Journal, based within the museum and exhibition studies program at the University of Illinois at Chicago directed by Therese Quinn, was also a unique project that came about in these years and put graduate students at the center of editorial decisions about publishing content emphasizing vanguard and social justice–oriented approaches to museum work. Taken together, these initiatives form a network we call the Inclusive Museum Movement (Moore, 2016), all of which emerged during a unique moment of insurgency (Quinn, 2016).

We now focus on three of these initiatives, namely, #MRTF, #MWS, and MASS Action, to highlight their contributions to the ongoing meaning making and dialogue on inclusion in museums.

i. Museums Respond to Ferguson (#MRTF)

#MRTF emerged in December 2014 as a response to the numerous recent acts of unprosecuted police violence against people of color and the overall lack of responsiveness from the museum sector (Jennings, 2015).[11] Initiated by museum practitioner and consultant Gretchen Jennings, a group of museum and arts bloggers coordinated digitally on drafting a joint statement urging US museums that purport to care about inclusion to respond to events like the ones that took place in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014. During this time of escalating outcry about police brutality and unnecessary use of force targeting Black people, many asked: Are we at a turning point for discussions about race in the United States? And by extension, a turning point in our museums that desire to be inclusive, function as a forum, and be relevant to local communities they are situated within? Each blogger then released the statement on their respective platforms.[12]

This statement spurred an ongoing professional dialogue in the US museum field that led to several online and offline actions that continue to have ripple effects to this day. Most immediately following the publication of the statement in December 2014, a group of museum practitioners and scholars led by Adrianne Russell and Aleia Brown hosted monthly Tweetchats using the hashtag #MuseumsRespondToFerguson.[13] These chats offered museum professionals from all over the country a chance to join the conversation on race/racism and its intersections (that is, other systems of oppression such as gender, class, and sexual preferences) in museums, responding to current events in our communities, and continuous issues of inclusion in cultural spaces (Fletcher, 2016; Jennings, 2015). Two characteristics of these chats are that many of the discussions centered on the "continued lack of progress in

diversifying boards, professional staff, and volunteer corps in museums" (Jennings, 2015) and that they relied on a diverse group of museum professionals, particularly younger individuals (Jennings, 2015).

In May 2015, another action that arose from #MRTF was the formation of the group Museums and Race. This group was initially convened during the 2015 AAM Annual Meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, and was facilitated by members of The Museum Group (TMG).[14] This initial action is the seed that has grown into an ongoing movement called Museums and Race: Transformation and Justice, which aims to challenge and reimagine institutional policies and systems that perpetuate oppressions in museums. Museums and Race organized museum professionals through, for example, a gathering of museum practitioners and thinkers in Chicago in 2016 as well as events and unconferences that have taken place in conjunction with the AAM annual conferences every year since.[15] Two of the twenty-four participants at the 2016 Museums and Race Chicago gathering who have continued to lead on the project's steering committee since that time are Omar Eaton-Martinez and Janeen Bryant.

Overall, the #MRTF statement and its ensuing activities helped create a tighter knit community of practitioners and scholars, helping them "understand that they are not alone in their pursuit towards more inclusive spaces," especially in a context where "several museums gave official directives to personnel not to discuss Ferguson or any of the other related incidents" (Fletcher, 2016). Today, these practitioners and scholars who center equity, accessibility, diversity, and inclusion in their work continue to work together. Examples of collaboration include special topic publications,[16] conference workshops and presentations, *The Incluseum* blogposts, and large-scale collaborative projects such as Museum as Site for Social Action (MASS Action), which we come back to shortly.[17]

#MRTF brought forth two aspects of what authentic inclusion entails. The first centers on the need for greater understanding of how racism has operated—and continues to operate—in museum spaces and in museums' relationships with their local communities. As Gretchen Jennings (2015) states, "Ferguson in its broader sense has given the field an opportunity, and a kind of permission, to raise the specific issues of race, racism, and white privilege in the context of museums in a way that has not happened before" (p. 101). The second element of inclusion that #MRTF illuminated is the responsibility of museums to respond to issues that are affecting the country and the local communities in which they are situated and that they purport to serve. Museums do not exist in a vacuum, and they are not neutral spaces; inclusion is about relationships.

ii. Museum Workers Speak (#MWS)

Another activist movement that brought insight into what genuine inclusion entails is #MWS, "an action-oriented platform for social change at the intersection of labor, access, and inclusion" (Museum Workers Speak, n.d.) that organized emerging museum professionals, graduate students, and museum staff members. #MWS arose in 2015 with a "rogue session" at AAM's 2015 conference in Atlanta. This gathering highlighted a couple of important facets of shifting toward more inclusion in museums. The first was how internal museum practices including hiring, leadership, and work environment present barriers to entry and advancement rooted in race and class. One of #MWS's focal points was the common museum practice of unpaid internships, which are often required for entry into the field. Given their unpaid status, these internships privilege those who can afford unremunerated labor, thus directly undermining the diversity among museum staff (Walker, 2019, p. 125). The second facet was the intersectional nature of labor practices in museums. In the words of #MWS cofounders Alyssa Greenberg and Nina Pelaez (2015),

> A discussion about museum labor practices is inevitably a discussion about racism, sexism, misogyny, elitism, and various other social inequalities. We found that by speaking openly about labor, we opened the door to frank conversations about race and privilege that might not otherwise have gotten off the ground.

#MWS was truly a grassroots movement facilitated "by a diverse team of emerging museum professionals [who are] uniquely aware of the challenges presented by working in this field" (Greenberg and Pelaez, 2015). The group hosted a Tweetchat every month for a year and organized regional groups for face-to-face gatherings in six US cities. Moreover, members of #MWS participated in several conferences between 2015 and 2016 and put pressure on AAM to center internal labor practices in its inclusion-related efforts, which was reflected in its 2018 *Facing Change* report discussed earlier. Through this activism, internal inequities related to labor practices were brought to the forefront of dialogues on inclusion in the field.

FIGURE 1.1
MWS flyer distributed at the 2015 AAM Conference in Atlanta announcing a "rogue session" held at a local art gallery to discuss employment issues in museums.
Design by Jillian Reese

iii. Museum As Site for Social Action (MASS Action)

Inspired by the calls to action of #MRTF and #MWS, MASS Action was a three-year collaborative project that launched in 2015, centering on the question: How do you transform museums from the inside out and align them with more equitable and inclusive practices? The project emerged when Elisabeth Callihan, former head of multigenerational learning at the Minneapolis Institute of Art and cofounder and project manager for MASS Action, reached out to and invited five museum professionals and scholars "who were asking questions and challenging the field" (Callihan, 2018) to act as advisors.[18] Together, they created a road map, "a plan for collaborative action that would be a call for greater equity and social justice in museums" (2018). Specifically, this road map outlined a three-year plan that would entail the cocreation of a tool kit (year 1) followed by its dissemination (year 2) and application (year 3).

The cocreation of the tool kit in year 1 represents a remarkable collaborative and multivocal process through which fifty-five museum "change-makers and thought-leaders" were identified and brought together (Callihan, 2018). This group gathered in person in Minneapolis in the fall of 2016 for an action-oriented conversation around topics of equity in museums, relevant programming, and community engagement. In addition to Elisabeth Callihan, Anniessa Antar and Amy Batiste took on crucial roles in MASS Action's evolution during this period.[19] Participants worked collaboratively to identify the most pressing issues in the field (MASS Action, n.d.). As Callihan recounts,

> For three days, we discussed the issues of institutional transformation, creating an inclusive culture, widening interpretation, sharing authority, decolonizing collections and the museum. We formed small working groups around these topics and began outlining our vision for a "tool kit."

The resulting tool kit includes eight coauthored essays that focus on the topics mentioned in the previous quote. These represent a guide to the emerging lexicon around equity and inclusion, some strategies to address inequity, along with seven accompanying worksheets to foster the development of more inclusive museums practices and a few other "tools" such as key terms and a DEAI staff engagement survey from the Minnesota Historical Society.
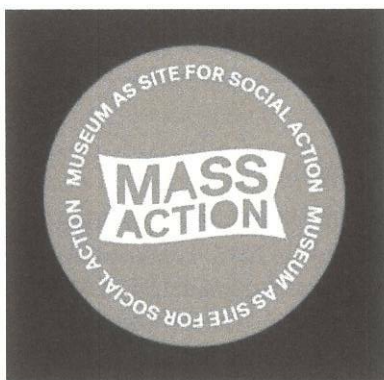

FIGURE 1.2
MASS Action Logo

In year 2, a larger convening was held to include staff teams from thirty museums that intended to use the tool kit and were committed to embedding strategies of inclusion into their institutions. The convening featured case studies, peer-to-peer learning opportunities, and other discussions of how to put theory into practice. This momentum was carried forward in year 3 when staff teams from sixty-four participating museums gathered to build upon the commitments to equity and social change agreed upon at the 2017 Convening (year 2), creating more inclusive practices in their own institutions and the field at large.

In sum, through the cocreation of the tool kit and a public convening, the intentions of MASS Action were to gather and share strategies and frameworks needed to align museums with more equitable and inclusive practices

as well as build a network of practitioners and thinkers committed to this work. In the words of Callihan (2018):

> *MASS Action* is not a project anymore. It is a network of people, individuals committed to seeing the museum field change, connecting in solidarity, recognizing there is strength in numbers. That, like fractals, if we all individually commit to do our part on a small scale, we will start to see change on a large scale. That with enough voices, we can make change.

Beyond the three-year plan, MASS Action has maintained momentum and continued to organize museum professionals through the MASS Action Community of Practice and MASS Action Accountability Project, both of which place an emphasis on antiracism work in museums (more on this in chapter 4).[20]

The three projects presented here, and the many others mentioned in the opening paragraph of this section, represent a collective of museum workers, individuals personally motivated to organize because of their desire to change the field. These projects were unprecedented and groundbreaking in their ability to mobilize museum professionals at the grassroots level to demand a more capacious and justice-centered approach to inclusion in museums. They did so through providing pushback to top-down approaches to institutionalizing inclusion, mobilizing peers, promoting dialogue and horizontal organizational structures, as well as leveraging digital technologies to connect and amplify people and messages. These projects continue to have a significant impact in the field through the network of museum professionals they have woven and the outputs this network continues to generate. Taken together, these projects provide ongoing pushback, depth, and accountability to discourses of inclusion and DEIA in the field.

Finally, it is important to note that the list of projects, initiatives, and collective of individuals invested in this work has continued to grow since 2018. Examples of these include OF/BY/FOR/ALL, Death to Museums, and Change the Museum.[21] There have also been notable shifts in project activities, such as #MWS organizing mutual aid relief in support of museum workers laid off during the COVID-19 2020 pandemic, something we come back to in chapter 4. This widening web of projects continues to expand the field's understanding of inclusion.

Concurrent to the more project-oriented work described here, there have also been numerous individuals who have made distinct and significant contributions to the US museums field's understanding of inclusion.

The Importance of Understanding Where We Come From

Tracing the precursors of how inclusion is understood in museums today illuminates a conceptual genealogy, mapping the relationships of individual and group-authored ideas that have shaped our understandings of inclusion over time. For those working in the museum field today, we inevitably encounter ideas about inclusion intersecting with our practice. We are better prepared to assess existing and new approaches to inclusion, or consider how they should inform our practice, when *we know where and from whom they come from.* This awareness additionally supports the field's ability to accurately acknowledge intellectual contributions. Our dominant, White supremacist culture manifests itself in the resistant, and sometimes reactionary, character of museum responses to new critiques. This can distract from and erase the contributions of those authoring and advocating for new approaches to inclusion, most commonly BIPOC authors and authors from historically marginalized backgrounds and identities. This chapter is intended to interrupt the forgetting of where the US museum field has come from regarding inclusion in museums and the initiatives and voices that have shaped these conversations along the way over the past decade.

Inclusion is a developing discourse, descended from, and related to, many connected efforts over time.

In the next chapter, we will deepen our discussion of the development of the concept of inclusion in museums by discussing contextual limitations, appropriation in practices that maintain White supremacy, and other abuses of the term that reduce, instead of expand, inclusion's potentiality for our field's reimagining of itself from the ground up.
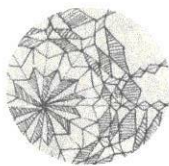
Key Questions

1. What are other important examples, events, people, or movements that have shaped the course of inclusion in museums?
2. Flex your visionary muscles: Where would you like to see this journey of expanding inclusion in museums go? How do we get there?

3. What are your personal and institutional histories? How could taking stock of these narratives empower you to implement transformation?
4. Where do you see yourself in this movement? What can you do to amplify your voice and choice for movement and community building?
5. Who can you connect with now to add on to the work that you have done and will continue to do?

Notes

1. See https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/fifty-years -ago-idea-museum-people-came-age-180973828/; http://www.thehundred-seven .org/museums.html; http://www.6floors.org/teaching/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/ Creating-a-Dialogic-Museum.pdf; https://www.osagenation-nsn.gov/museum.

2. This paradigm constitutes the Western museum field's historical legacy, remnants of which are still alive today.

3. Of course, the veil of neutrality wasn't once and for all pierced; debates about museum neutrality are ongoing. See #museumsarenotneutral.

4. Ecomuseums emerged in France in the early 1970s as a form of community-based museum focused on the preservation and celebration of local cultural heritage and reliant on the participation of local communities for all aspects of their activities.

5. Part of the process involved in developing this policy statement entailed researching other organizations' diversity and inclusion policies and assessing how other organizations beyond nonprofits and museums carry forward their diversity and inclusion programming and policies (Harris and Staveloz, 2014).

6. See https://www.aam-us.org/programs/facing-change1/the-excellence-in-deai -task-force/.

7. It should be noted that official documents that AAM released pertaining to this policy do not indicate who was part of the task force and what was the process they engaged in.

8. See https://incluseum.com/2014/08/25/aams-diversity-and-inclusion-policy -statement/.

9. See https://www.incluseum.com/; https://adriannerussell.wordpress.com/ museumsrespondtofergusonarchive/; https://www.museumhue.com/; https://sites .google.com/view/museumworkersspeak/; https://www.museumsarenotneutral .com/; https://visitorsofcolor.tumblr.com/; http://empatheticmuseum.weebly.com/.

10. https://www.museumaction.org/.

11. Specifically, the spark that brought about #MRTF was the acquittal of policeman Darren Wilson in the shooting of an unarmed Black young man of eighteen years old, Michael Brown (Rest in Power), in late November 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri.

12. See https://incluseum.com/2014/12/22/joint-statement-from-museum-bloggers -colleagues-on-ferguson-related-events/.

13. See https://twitter.com/hashtag/museumsrespondtoferguson?lang=en; https:// incluseum.com/2015/12/17/we-who-believe-in-freedom-cannot-rest/.

14. The urgency of this dialogue and the need for subsequent action was heightened with the murder of another unarmed Black man at the hands of police officers in Baltimore, Maryland, Freddie Gray (Rest in Power), as we were convening in Atlanta at the time.

15. See https://museumsandrace.org/.

16. See, for example, https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rjme20/42/2.

17. See https://www.museumaction.org/.

18. This initial group was made of Adrianne Russell, Aletheia Wittman, Chris Taylor, Porchia Moore, and Rose Paquet.

19. By this stage in the project's development, Anniessa Antar had also become a critical MASS Action staff lead at Mia, and Dr. Amy Batiste, CEO of Creative Catalysts, Inc., was working with Mia to orchestrate MASS Action gatherings and tool kit–creation efforts.

20. See https://www.museumaction.org/massaction-blog/2020/8/31/from-statements-of-solidarity-to-transformative-action-amp-accountability.

21. See https://www.ofbyforall.org; https://deathtomuseums.com/; https://www.instagram.com/changethemuseum/?hl=en.

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