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A Museum as a Stage for Community Dialogue: Sharing the Stories of Underserved Ethnic Populations

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ABSTRACT

As a museum educator at several local museums in Western New York the author developed interpretive educational programs for institutions such as Explore & More Children's Museum and The Buffalo History Museum. One recent program titled Culture Day: Puerto Rico took place at Explore & More Children's Museum. The purpose of the project was to create a community based museum program about the deeply rooted cultural traditions and heritage of the Puerto Rican community that has shaped Western New York's history. Hispanics began relocating to Western New York in the late 1880s and continue to do so today. Twenty-first century museums around the world are focusing more on how underserved ethnic populations are represented and engaged in community programming, interpretive exhibitions, and artifact collections. International scholars and museum professionals are addressing both the difficulties and successes that many cultural institutions face when discussing the histories of immigrants, refugees, and other underserved ethnic populations. Museums have become a stage for community dialogue when sharing the perspectives of underserved ethnic populations of the twenty-first century.
A MUSEUM AS A STAGE FOR COMMUNITY DIALOGUE:

SHARING THE STORIES OF

UNDERSERVED ETHNIC POPULATIONS

A Thesis Project in

Museum Studies

by

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I. INTRODUCTION

Twenty-first century museums have an opportunity to serve as a stage for community dialogue, civic engagement, and social activism. Cultural institutions around the world are engaging in dialogue and interpreting the histories of underserved ethnic populations such as immigrants, refugees, and migrant citizens. Each institution serves distinct populations with diverse members, individual stories, and particular needs. Museums are experiencing both successes and difficulties in defining, sharing, and preserving the stories of underserved ethnic populations through educational programs, exhibits, and artifact collections. This paper presents current programming that has been successful in engaging underserved communities in Western New York.

Similar to refugee and immigrant histories, many Puerto Rican community members have been viewed as marginalized citizens with limited opportunities in society. The hardships endured by Puerto Ricans are comparable to those experienced by immigrants because when relocating to the mainland of the United States, they are leaving a familiar environment, culture, and language. Because of these struggles, they can be defined as an underserved ethnic population. Discussing Puerto Rico in United States history can sometimes be confusing. The island has been a commonwealth territory of the United States for more than a century, but it has never been granted statehood (Image 1). Because Puerto Ricans are legal American citizens they are referred to as internal migrants rather than immigrants. Migrant farmers from Puerto Rico began
relocating to Buffalo, New York in the late nineteenth century.\(^1\) Today Hispanic communities make up half the United States growing population with the largest concentration in New York State.\(^2\)

In 2015, the author assisted Explore & More Children's Museum in East Aurora, New York with creating community based educational programs about the rich traditions and cultural heritages of Puerto Rico, Burma, Poland, Ethiopia, and Yemen. *Culture Day: Puerto Rico* was held on Friday April 10, 2015. As part of the Museum's education staff, the author was responsible for finding the professional talent, coordinating supplies and materials, and communicating with museum staff and volunteers. To actualize the program this also involved working directly with the Museum's Education Department, volunteers, and leaders in Buffalo's Hispanic communities. How can museums around the world share the unique stories of refugees, immigrants, and other underserved ethnic populations through interpretive programming, exhibitions, and artifact collections? How can a museum become a stage for community dialogue for underserved ethnic populations to comfortably share their personal experiences?

Cultural institutions across the globe are attempting to embrace these ideas. Several national case studies in the following research will discuss museum programs, tours, and exhibitions that engage, define, and preserve the histories of underserved ethnic populations. International museums are creating opportunities for patrons to learn


more about how global issues effect their communities on extremely local levels. It is important for museum visitors and other community members to understand what defines an underserved population. How are immigrants, refugees, and migrant citizens different from each other and what commonalities do they share?

Definitions

There are distinct differences among between immigration, internal migration, and refugee resettlement. An immigrant is a person who chooses to leave his or her country of origin to reside in another part of the world. Often times it is to seek better opportunities. An illegal immigrant is an individual who enters a foreign nation unlawfully and resides in the country without sanction. Migration is the movement of people from one place to another with the objective of settling in the new location temporarily or permanently. Typically, the movement is over long distances. Internal migration is the movement of people within a geographic area in which they have citizenship. Immigrants, illegal immigrants, and internal migrants are drastically different from refugees who are forced to flee their country of origin without choice.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines a refugee as an individual who:

"Owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political
opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."  

Refugees are individuals who are forced to leave their homelands because of war, political oppression, violence, torture, famine, religious persecution or other life threatening situations. Human civilizations have granted asylum to individuals seeking safety from persecution for more than three millennia. Ancient texts from over 3,500 years ago reference the displacement of individuals during the development and growth of empires such as Hittites, Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon.  

The term *refugee* was first used in the late 17th century when Calvinists fled from France because of religious persecution. They immigrated to countries such as Switzerland, England, and the Netherlands where they received protection. The neighboring areas were described by the Calvinists *la réfuge*, and they referred to themselves as *réfugiés*. The UNHCR is the largest contemporary organization to aide individuals seeking asylum worldwide. Legal refugees are from communities across the globe. The majority of stateless individuals in the 21st century are escaping life-threatening situations in Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia.

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The Census Bureau indicates that between 2010 and 2014 12,196 individuals from foreign nations relocated to Erie County in New York State. Individuals living in Buffalo are arriving from Burma, Bhutan, Nepal, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Eritrea, Sudan, Rwanda, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Liberia, Russia, Cuba, Mexico, Columbia, and Puerto Rico. International refugees, immigrants, and internal migrants come from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Each ethnic group and individual case has a variety of needs. There are four major organizations in Buffalo that assist immigrants, refugees, and internal migrants including The International Institute of Buffalo, Jewish Family Services, Catholic Charities, and Journey's End Refugee Services. These agencies provide services such as language and cultural orientation, food assistance, medical care, clothing, and employment training. Some individuals arrive with knowledge of the English language and experience with living in urban areas. They will need only initial support with housing, registration for school, and job placement assistance. Others arrive without any English fluency and are accustomed only to rural settings. Once an immigrant or refugee is granted entry in the United States they must complete interviews with the State Department, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, and Homeland Security. All refugees and immigrants are


medically screened by a government appointed health care professional and they must undergo security clearance procedures.

The experiences of internal migrants are vastly different. They are legally allowed to move freely among all fifty states in America. Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship in 1917, although when relocating from their homeland they leave behind a culture, history, and unique identity specific to the island. Puerto Rican community members face many hardships and difficulties similar to immigrants. Although they are moving within a nation where they have citizenship, their new home is far from their place of origin and they are often referred to as outsiders.
II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In "Forgotten History: Refugees, Historians, and Museums in Britain," scholar Philip Marfleet discusses how until very recently mainstream historians and museum curators have marginalized the histories of underserved ethnic populations such as refugees and immigrants. According to Marfleet refugee history has received more recent recognition from politicians and mass media in North America, Europe, and Australia although the exclusion of refugee stories from public interpretive spaces is an ongoing issue.\(^9\) Traditionally refugees and immigrants experience low visibility in society and are often viewed as marginalized citizens with limited social opportunities. This is a direct similarity to the struggles of other underserved ethnic populations, such as the internal migrants of Puerto Rico.

In 1993, The Museum of London organized the exhibition *The Peopling of London*. Objectives of the exhibit were to address controversial issues such as cultural diversity, personal histories, and the questioning of how national identity is formed. The Museum strived to attract new audiences, particularly ethnic minorities. About 100,000 patrons visited the exhibit and it was seen as a general success by museum staff. Unfortunately the refugee and immigrant communities of London were not among the visitors who attended the exhibition. Marflett references Australian historian K. Neumann, author of "Remembering Refugees: Then and Now," when stating that "historians have failed to identify refugees as participants in the...long history of

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immigration...there has been 'almost no mention' of their significance in the past."¹⁰ (page 19) Some museums are guilty of excluding the histories of underserved ethnic populations from their collections and interpretive plans. The Museum of London was criticized for creating the most in-depth exhibition about immigration history in Great Britain and failing to organize a significant space for refugees. There are many disadvantages newly arriving refugee and immigrant populations face. Although they are highly vulnerable community members, Marfleet points out that they are not helpless.

Philip Marfleet is a professor in the School of Law and Social Sciences at the University of East London (UEL). He is currently Associate Director of the Centre for Research on Migration. He has worked in the fields of Development Studies, International Politics, Migration and Middle East Studies. Primarily, his research is based on the dynamics of mass displacement, migration patterns, racism and exclusion in Europe, globalization, and religious activism.¹¹

"Traditional Methods and New Moves: Migrant and Refugee Exhibitions in Australia and New Zealand," by Katherine Goodnow describes recent trends and changes in the representation in museum exhibits of refugees, immigrants, and other underserved ethnic populations.¹² Goodnow's article focuses on how issues can arise when attempting


¹² Katherine Goodnow, Museums, the Media and Refugees: Stories of Crisis, Control and Compassion (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 30-57.
to interpret cultural diversity using the perspectives of immigrants and refugees.

Sensitivity to an individual's personal experiences and past traumas are necessary when collecting, exhibiting, or sharing stories. Goodnow uses the 1995 exhibition A Twist of Fate from the Migration Museum in Adelaide, Australia as an example of the successes and difficulties in interpreting recent displacement history. The exhibit was created before a rise in public acknowledgement of refugee and immigrant communities in Australia. Curator Vivian Szekeres is quoted saying, "It was before it's time.. it's probably the best I have ever done but not enough people got it." Szekeres created three sequential sections of the exhibition including the refugee experience of departure from their country of origin, the journey to another country, and arrival to Australia. Goodnow describes the exhibit has having "a...gritty edge to the story" (page 35).

The first section provided a definition and general description of the concept of a refugee. It portrayed a physical reality of their experiences. In the curator's words:

"We had a little space you walked through which was the bomb site- we had walled it off...so it was smaller than the space we had-...the far wall...had a projector going all the time from the UNHCR...about a hundred images- as recent as we could get- in between each set of images we had one of their facts...And then (visitors)...went into the long gallery- it had a false floor which was metal and went up and down and was very uncomfortable. Just the sound of your feet on it made you feel very uncomfortable and it echoed, which was deliberate, and this led to the Vietnamese story." (page 35)

The second section included three stories visitors could choose to follow including an Eastern European story from 1939-1945, a Vietnamese story from the 1970s-1980s, or a Latin American story from the 1970s-1990s. The exhibit included a recreated Vietnamese refugee boat at sea. The floor was designed on a tilt forcing visitors to stumble and struggle to maintain balance. Adding to the uncomfortable environment was
a photograph of Vietnamese people looking up at you from underneath the floor.

Szekeres recalls visitors weeping in the exhibit and one man saying "we used to bomb them, we had no idea." (page 35)

The third and final section was designed to relieve visitors of the deep emotional impact of the exhibit. Data and images from the UNHCR highlighted personal stories and accounts of resettlement. Difficulties came from having to curate an exhibition with little or no three dimensional artifacts and the challenges refugees have in sharing personal and painful stories. The Museum created a reference group of about ten individuals including mental health workers, educators, and people who worked with new arrivals. Szekeres states on page 36:

"It is difficult to work with refugee groups because of the lack of objects...so many people I wanted to talk to did not want to talk about it. They had never talked about it and they were not going to start now. The agreement was not to talk about how they (refugees) had got here but to talk about their lives since they got here and they agreed to that. A Sudanese woman wanted to have that it writing twice- it was dreadful stuff...People...will only talk about it when they are ready..." 13

Goodnow also examines the exhibit Walk With Me: The Refugee Experience in New Zealand from the Petone Settlers Museums (PSM) in 2006. This institution is a social history museum on the northern island of New Zealand. Four main stories were included covering an array of ages and genders so that museum visitors could make a personal connection to the refugee experiences. The exhibition discussed the journey of a refugee and included details typically overlooked by museum interpretation. Four refugee stories invited visitors to "walk through" their journey. Six of the twelve phases

13 Katherine Goodnow, Museums, the Media and Refugees: Stories of Crisis, Control and Compassion (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 30-57.
that visitors "walked through" were phases that occur when a refugee arrives to the country of resettlement. Attention was also given to the experiences of refugee children.

Curator Natasha Petkovic-Jeremic states,

"My interest was focused on the continuum, or how stories from the past can be connected to the present and how contemporary stories can find their place in a traditional social history museum. There was a range of people/experiences represented (in the exhibit). (Including) a woman who fled her country at the age of 13 and spent 15 years in a refugee camp. She walked for three months, saw women leaving their children behind unable to care for them; experienced violence in camps. She has been living in New Zealand for years and is still lonely and isolated" (Page 37)

Stories such as the one above rarely have any three dimensional objects or artifacts to represent the experience. The Walk With Me exhibition resolved the lack of objects by the use of photographs and recordings of personal accounts. Katherine Goodnow is a leading scholar in contemporary media and museum studies. Her research focuses on how cultural institutions engage and represent international refugees and displaced people. She is Professor at the Department of Information Science and Media Studies at the University of Bergen, Norway. She is co-series editor of Museums and Diversity a research series published by the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The article "Engaging Immigrant Audiences in Museums," discusses the relationship between immigrants, as underserved ethnic populations, and cultural institutions. It addresses important issues that should be recognized when a museum aims to represent or work with these populations. If an institution desires to engage with underserved ethnic groups, museum professionals are encouraged to consider language

14 Stein, Jill K., Engaging Immigrant Audiences in Museum (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2008), 179-195.
barriers, religious values, cultural perspectives, perceptions of leisure time, and ideas of education. It is important for a museum to address the unique complexities of various immigrant groups and the staff must initiate a sense of dialogue with the new community members. Values, morals, and principals will vary between ethnic groups and the perspective of the larger community may be drastically different from how the underserved populations view themselves. The article asks relevant questions all museums should consider such as; are underserved audiences different from other museum audiences? How can a museum become an educational sanctuary for newly arriving populations to safely learn and to share their experiences?

Many cultural institutions commit to serving a wide range of diverse audiences. Some museums incorporate this idea directly into a mission statement while others use it as a foundation for interpretive programming or educational outreach. Most often these audiences tend to include underserved populations. It is important for museums to consider it's motivations for initiating relationships with these communities. How will the museum, community members, and other stakeholders value programming, exhibitions, and diverse artifact collections about immigrants, refugees and migrant citizens? Will the museum be able to change in ways that will be valuable to newly arriving populations?

The article, "Hey! That's Mine: Thoughts on Pluralism and American Museums," by Edmund Barry Gaither describes how museums are serving bigger, more diverse populations in more ways. The authors discusses how museums have an educational and social obligation to contribute to the growth and restoration of a community. Gaither states, "They (museums) ought to increase understanding within and between cultural
groups in the matrix of lives in which we exist." Museums can impact society by discussing difficult and complex issues rather than shying away from them. Cultural institutions must find a balance between offering programs and exhibits events not only educate visitors but also create awareness. Museums must also find ways to connect with underserved ethnic populations. Some underserved ethnic populations may have never attended museums in their home countries. Some may have had negative experiences as a visitor. They may see a museum or gallery as a place that is not welcoming or designed for them or their families. A museum can help resolve these issues by teaching underserved visitors what a museum "is" and "how" to visit a museum in addition to helping the visitor create connections to the collections. In this relationship we see a museum as a place of dialogue rather than a lecturing hall.

Dr. John H. Falk, is the Sea Grant Professor of Free-Choice Learning at Oregon State University and Director of the Center for Research on Lifelong STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics) Learning. He is recognized around the world for his research, promotion, and extensive publication on free-choice learning; such as the learning that occurs in settings like museums, galleries, the outdoors, and on-line. In the article "Understanding Museum Visitors' Motivations and Learning," Dr. John H Falk suggests that a museum experience is impacted by an individual's personal identity.

The formation of a personal identity is heavily influenced by both internal and

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external social factors such as culture, physical environment, and both learned and innate behaviors. He believes that the development of one's "self" is a lifelong process and it is shaped as we experience different situations throughout time. This theory is important to consider when discussing immigrant and refugee museum visitors. It is essential for a museum to understand the underserved ethnic population from their own perspectives before creating intensive projects about them or designed for them. Collections, exhibitions, and programs should be designed for immigrants, refugees, and migrant citizens with their individual and unique needs in mind. This perspective also influences museum goers who are not part of the refugee, immigrant, or underserved ethnic populations.
III. AN UNDERSERVED ETHNIC POPULATION

Puerto Rico and the United States

Puerto Rico was ceded by Spain under the Treaty of Paris of 1898 and the island became a United States sovereignty at the turn of the 20th century. Puerto Ricans were eventually granted citizenship in 1917 and the island did not become an official commonwealth until 1952.\textsuperscript{17} Operation Boot Strap was an effort to intervene American industry, economics, military, and social beliefs into the lives of Puerto Ricans.\textsuperscript{18} Many United States politicians saw the island as a Third World location and feared the potential of communist influence or take over. American businesses viewed Puerto Rico as a place for cheap labor and low tax laws. Migration to the U.S. mainland was encouraged and relocation programs supported dependence on American efforts. Low wage jobs were offered to Puerto Ricans in relocation programs, which were highly sought after because of the economic hardship of the island. Overpopulation in Puerto Rico was also viewed as a high stakes issue by the American government. Women were encouraged to use contraceptives and to participate in sterilization surgeries. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s it is estimated that 35\% of the Puerto Rican female population living on the island were surgically sterilized.\textsuperscript{19} The U.S. Navy purchased two thirds of the entire island during World War II and used the space to create a naval base. The base eventually


\textsuperscript{19} University of Chicago at Illinois, "35\% of Puerto Rican Women Sterilized," The Chicago Women's Liberation Union https://www.uic.edu/orgs/cwluherstory/CWLUArchive/puertorico.html (accessed May 7, 2015)
closed in 2003 after years of protests and from the killing of a civilian during a bomb exercise in the 1990s. In the twenty-first century, citizens living in Puerto Rican are considered U.S. citizens but do not have the legal right to vote in presidential elections. The island is considered a commonwealth and not a U.S. state. Therefore the Federal Government and Electoral College do not give Puerto Ricans the constitutional right to vote in major American elections. However Puerto Rico is permitted to participate in the presidential primary and has granted delegates by the two major political parties. It is the same for other U.S. commonwealths including the Virgin Islands, Guam, and American Samoa.

The Puerto Rican Community of Western New York

Buffalo, New York has been home to Spanish speaking people since the late 19th century. In 1880, the Census identified sixteen Western New York residents who relocated from Spain, Mexico, South America, Central America, and Cuba. Many of these new community members first settled in Lackawanna, New York. Latino populations drastically increased soon after the Civil War in 1864 and 1865. There were approximately 140 Hispanics living in the City of Buffalo by 1920. A dramatic increase or Puerto Ricans migrated to Western New York in the 1940s and 1950s. Many were

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migrant farm laborers encouraged by the federal government to move to the U.S. mainland for work.  

According to a 1953 news article in the Courier Express there were about 1,500 Puerto Ricans living in Buffalo. They were seeking better work opportunities and often found low paying jobs in factories or industrial companies. Discrimination, language barriers and a lack of formal education made finding work difficult. Many of the migrant farmers were looking to flee from the poor economic conditions of Puerto Rico although most would travel back to the island during the farm's growing seasons to ensure financial stability. Many settled on Buffalo's East Side but by the 1960s, most relocated to the Lower West Side.

Because of the growing population in Buffalo, many Hispanic social groups were formed, including Las Amigas Leales and Los Buenos Vecinos, which met weekly at the International Institute of Buffalo. During the 1950s and 1960s, Puerto Ricans created the Borinquen Club, the Unión Puertorriqueño de Ayuda, and the Latin American Democratic Club. The Catholic Diocese also formed a branch of the church known as the Spanish Apostolate to specifically service Hispanic community members.

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community discussions, and social services. The Latin American Democratic Club still exists today and they coordinate annual community celebrations such as the Grease Pole Festival, the Puerto Rican Day Parade, and Three Kings’ Day.

The 1970s brought political and social change to the Hispanic communities of Western New York. The Puerto Rican American Community Association (PRACA), the Puerto Rican Chicano Committee (PRCC), and the Buffalo Hispanic Association were all formed to provide health and human services to Latino families in Buffalo.²⁴ The groups served all Hispanic communities and did not support only Puerto Ricans. Each organization aimed to raise awareness of education, employment opportunities, health, social justice, and housing. Three of the largest social service organizations merged in 1986 including the PRACA, PRCC, and a substance abuse agency La Alternativa. Together they formed Hispanos Unidos de Búfalo (HUB), a non-profit organization that supports the Hispanic community of Erie County.²⁵ HUB coordinates community cultural activities and aims to support political and social Latino movements.

The Hispanic Heritage Council of Western New York is a nonprofit organization that was founded in 2010 by community leaders, Latino activists, and spearheaded by Casmiro Rodriguez who serves as its Executive Director. The Council's mission is, "to foster and inspire awareness, understanding, and appreciation of past, present, and future

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contributions of the Hispanic community in Western New York." 26 It develops annual programming and community events such as Hispanic Heritage Month which celebrates Latino culture, history, and art. The events are held at a variety of local cultural institutions. Hispanic Heritage Month began in 1968 by President Lyndon Johnson. In August of 1988, President Ronald Reagan enacted a law to honor and recognize the accomplishments of Latino Americans every year from September 15th to October 15th. Buffalo, New York annually participates in Hispanic Heritage Month with cultural and community celebrations throughout the city.

The Latino population in Western New York continues to grow in the 21st century. According to the U.S. Census, more than half of the nation's total population growth between 2000 to 2010 was due to an increase in Hispanic populations. Out of 308.7 million people living in the United States about 50.5 million, or sixteen percent, identify as Hispanic or Latino. The Puerto Rican population in the United States grew thirty six percent increasing from 3.4 million in 2000 to 4.6 million in 2010. 27

Nine percent of the nation's Hispanic population identify as Puerto Rican in the 2010 U.S. Census. Approximately 53% of the Puerto Rican population, or 2,443,175 people, reside in the Northeast. There are approximately 1,070,588 Puerto Ricans in New York State alone. The Buffalo News reported in 2012 that 41,356 Latinos are living in

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Western New York with 27,519 residing in Buffalo. 10.5% of Buffalo's population identifies as Hispanic with Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Cubans representing the largest groups.

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IV. EXPLORE & MORE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

Culture Day: Puerto Rico

Explore & More Children’s Museum is a nonprofit organization that strives to encourage the art of play and to inspire the creativity of children. It was founded by a grass roots collection of educators, parents, and community members in 1994. The Museum aims to provoke, "curiosity, creativity, and imagination." The institution continues to grow and offers various public education programs and community outreach workshops for students, children, and families. Explore & More is currently undergoing a capital campaign titled Play it Forward with the goal of raising funds for a new facility at Canalside in downtown Buffalo, New York. The new location will provide easier accessibility for the socioeconomic and culturally diverse families of the Western New York region. As of April 2015 the capital campaign exceeded its six million dollar mark with major contributions from companies such as Wegmans and the Western New York Power Proceeds Allocation Board. 

At its current location in East Aurora, New York the Museum offers a diverse range of interactive exhibitions and educational programming. The exhibit Culture Corner focuses on various international countries such as South Africa, Vietnam, and the

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Families are encouraged to learn about each nation through play and exploration. This multicultural dialogue allows children visiting the Museum to learn about different perspectives of people from around the world. Visitors can engage in hands-on learning by playing traditional instruments, dressing up in cultural garments, and observing maps of the different nations. Suggestions have been made for the Museum to create exhibits based on foreign nations that have shaped Buffalo's immigrant and refugee communities such as Poland, Italy, Yemen, and Burma.

*Culture Day* programs at Explore & More Children's Museum teach youngsters and their families about the deeply rooted ethnic communities that have shaped Buffalo's history. The objective of each program is to create an energetic environment in a museum setting where families can enjoy hands-on meaningful learning experiences such as storytelling, traditional music, folk dancing, foods, and crafting. In April of 2015 the countries of Puerto Rico, Burma, Yemen, Poland, and Ethiopia were represented and celebrated by the Museum (Image 2). Families had the opportunity to learn about individuals living in Buffalo from these parts of the world and the cultures they bring with them to the United States. As part of the Education staff the author was responsible for developing the *Culture Day: Puerto Rico* program on April 10, 2015. When asked to design a program based on the history of the Puerto Rican community in Buffalo, the author immediately reached out to the cultural group *Amor and Heritage*. The founder

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and Executive Director, MarCe Zerrate-Sandel, created the group in 1999. She is originally from Cali, Columbia and founded *Amore and Heritage* upon her arrival to Buffalo. MarCe specializes in folkloric Hispanic dancing, traditional choreography, and local history. Amor and Heritage is dedicated to community outreach focused on multiculturalism, education, diversity, and Hispanic dance.

_Culture Day: Puerto Rico_ was an immersive, interactive, and energetic program at Explore & More Children’s Museum. The event began with a performance by *Amor and Heritage* of traditional Puerto Rican dances including the Bomba, Salsa, and Plena. Each performer wore handmade Puerto Rican cultural garments designed specifically for dancing. The garments are known as Flag Dresses because they have red, while, and blue colors to represent the flag of Puerto Rico (Image 3). Several of the dancers were young children, which interested many of the families visiting the Museum. MarCe provided historic context about each dance before it began. She explained how African, Caribbean, and Spanish cultures have shaped Puerto Rican music and dance. For example, the bursting hip and shoulder movements of African dance heavily inspire the rhythms and expressions of the Puerto Rican Bomba. Children and their families were excited to participate and many people interacted with the dancers to learn the intricate moves of each dance style. Dancing proved to be an intergenerational activity that all families could enjoy (Image 4). It also supports *Amor and Heritage*’s goal of staying healthy through dance and movement.

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The next phase of the program included crafting, storytelling, history, music, and food. Families enjoyed tasting Puerto Rican pastelillos and bizcocho cake (Image 5). Niagara Café, a local restaurant in downtown Buffalo that specializes in Hispanic cuisine, catered the event (Image 6). Families helped to design and decorate a sculptural Puerto Rican dancer wearing the Flag Dress, similar to the performers of Amor and Heritage (Image 7). The music of Puerto Rican Merengue, Bachata, and Salsa played in the Museum as children engaged in the hands-on activities (Image 8). Cultural items were on display for families to observe such as dominos, a straw hat known as a pava, and a toy coqui frog (Image 9). MarCe also provided a discussion about the historic artifacts and shared details of Puerto Rican history (Image 10). Most importantly she explained to families how the Puerto Rican community has shaped Western New York.
V. CASE STUDIES

Institutions around the world are using the perspectives of underserved ethnic populations as the catalyst of innovative museum practices. Explore & More Children's Museum, The Buffalo History Museum, Tucson Museum of Art, and the Minnesota History Center are American museums that offer programming, tours, and exhibits for the greater community of their regions. Inviting underserved ethnic groups into a museum widens its audience, builds connections from past to contemporary histories, and has the ability to change the perceptions of the greater community. Developing interpretive action plans through educational programming, exhibits, and artifact collections rooted in twenty-first century histories allows a community to access information about new cultures. It can fulfill the museum's mission and extend open arms to those who have left behind all that they are familiar with. On April 30, 2012 staff from The Buffalo History Museum, Tucson Museum of Art, and the Minnesota History Center came together for a panel, "Museum as Sanctuary: Expanding Museum Communities for Programming for Refugees," at the American Alliance of Museums Annual Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This author represented her work of the Buffalo History Museum; each staff member discussed its unique educational programs designed for international refugees.  

The Buffalo History Museum

As the former Program Manager and Museum Educator at The Buffalo History Museum the author created the Museum Introduction Program in 2009 for underserved
ethnic populations such as immigrants, refugees, and migrant citizens (Appendix I).

Participants experience guided exhibit tours that are English as Second Language (ESL) based. The objectives of the program are to utilize the Museum's artifact collections to help new community members learn about the history, art, and culture of Buffalo, New York. The program defines key terms such as museum, artifact, and exhibit. It also discusses the general functions of a museum and describes the various types of cultural institutions in the Western New York community. Museum staff, docents, and volunteers explain "how" to visit the History Museum by exploring the interpretive exhibits and observing artifacts on display. Because many underserved visitors may have limited or no experience in a museum environment, the Introduction Program identifies the etiquette of museum guests; such as not touching artifacts and keeping all foods and beverages out of the exhibit areas. The author created pre-visit materials for educators to share with ESL students, both youth and adults, before the scheduled trip to the History Museum (Appendix II). Many teachers use the museum experience as an extension of the English language instruction and include the terms shared in the program as vocabulary words.

Free admission was offered to tour groups that schedule the ESL Museum Introduction program. Many community agencies and resettlement organizations have limited funding and resources for field trips. Allowing underserved ethnic populations to visit at no cost eliminates any economic burden. Traveling to the Museum is also connected to the ESL classroom curriculum as both youth and adult students must learn how to use public transit in Buffalo. The central location of the History Museum allows ESL teachers to create a lesson about using the public bus system when planning a visit.
Video, audio, and images are used to communicate non-verbally with immigrant and refugee visitors. Developing a strong, meaningful relationship with the resettlement agencies, community leaders, and ESL Buffalo Public School teachers proved to be vital to the success of the program. Visiting the History Museum allowed twenty-first century new arrivals to have a unique experience in a safe learning environment. It is also an opportunity for them to become more accustomed to their new community (Image 11). Neplai, Bhutanese, and Burmese visitors made personal connections with artifacts in the Museum's Pioneer Gallery. The Gallery displays authentic artifacts from nineteenth century Buffalo, New York and interprets life on the Western New York frontier (Image 12). One area of the exhibit includes a loom and spinning wheel. Refugee visitors from Nepal, Burma, and Bhutan make automatic and deep connections with Buffalo’s pre-industrial beginnings, especially the loom and spinning wheel artifacts because weaving is a large part of these cultures (Image 13). Ceremonial garments and secular clothes are made in these countries from machines that are considered old technology in the United States.

The philosophy behind this author’s work at the Buffalo History Museum was to empower members of underserved ethnic communities. In 2011 the author curated and installed the temporary photography exhibition, Buffalo: Through Their Eyes (Image 14). This was a collaborative project with Journey’s End Refugee Services and CEPA Gallery in Buffalo, New York. The exhibit included photos taken by newly arrived refugee artists from countries including Burma, The Democratic Republic of Congo, and Bhutan (Image 15). Journey’s End encouraged their clients and families to participate in the project. CEPA Gallery provided disposable cameras and basic photography instruction classes.
The refugees were asked to take photos of anything around them including their new homes, neighborhoods, families, and places of employment. Several hundred photos were developed in the Spring of 2011 and The Buffalo History Museum exhibited select works in the Community Gallery (Image 16).

The exhibit also included newly accessioned artifacts representing Buffalo's twenty-first century refugees. Traditional garments of the Karen ethnicity of Burma were on display in the Community Gallery for the first time to the public. The author was able to secure the donation of these artifacts to the Buffalo History Museum collections through contacts developed from the ESL tours. Nick Pryn of Buffalo Public Schools and Kelly Cooper of Journey's End Refugee Services supported the author's efforts to collect traditional garments from their ESL students. Anonymous donations were given to both Pryn and Kelly which were in turn given to me at The Buffalo History Museum. Hand woven cotton and silk ceremonial garments made on the Burma Thailand border were displayed along with the artists' photographs. The garments included a Ko Boe, traditional head wrap; Longi, wrap skirts; handmade Burmese made bags; as well as male and female ceremonial shirts (Image 17). The dominant colors of ceremonial garments from Burma include red, white, and blue. Buffalo horns are an iconic symbol of Burma which signify strength and courage. *Buffalo: Through Their Eyes* was also on temporary display in the E. Butler Library at SUNY Buffalo State after the deinstallation at The Buffalo History Museum.

The Karen garments were also featured in the History Museum's 150th anniversary exhibit titled *Ever After*, which highlighted significant artifacts in the collection (Image 18). *Ever After* was on display from July 2012 to the summer of 2013.
The Museum's long term plan is to eventually include the artifacts into the permanent exhibit *Neighbors*, which discusses 18th, 19th, and 20th century immigration stories of Western New York. Buffalo has always been a diverse city with culturally rich and varied ethnic communities. It is the Museum's responsibility to document, preserve, and share the stories of 21st new arrivals (Image 19 and 20).

**The Tucson Museum of Art**

The Tucson Museum of Art (TMA) has a direct relationship with the Hopi Foundation's: Owl and Panther Project. This is the organization's only non Native American program and is designed to support families that are victims of trauma. The Hopi Foundation states:

"The Hopi word for trauma, *tsawana*, means 'a state of mind that is in terror.' Like the owl and the panther we must learn the power of being able to see in this terrifying darkness and to strive towards a state of *Qa Tutsawanavu* -- a state of living, unintimidated by fear from any source. Such people, the Hopis believe, will enjoy a full life, regardless of the fear around them." 34

Participants of the Owl and Panther Project work within the TMA to create expressive art as a form of communication, and therapeutic refuge by drawing inspiration from the Museum's collection. The "Museum as Sanctuary" education program was developed in collaboration between the Owl and Panther Project and the TMA. It strives to generate new methods of healing and empowerment through the arts. Evening sessions are held in the Museum on a weekly basis throughout the academic school year. Refugee families participate in gallery tours and are engaged in art making sessions. The primary goals of the "Museum as Sanctuary" program are to initiate new relationships and understandings.

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with diverse community members, foster creativity in a safe learning environment, encourage cross-cultural collaborations, inspire and connect to new Museum audiences, and develop an understanding and appreciation for the arts within a museum setting.

The TMA and Owl & Panther Project attribute much success of the program to its multiple visit structure. Participants become increasingly comfortable with in the Museum environment because of multiple-visits. This allows for familiarity to develop among other participants in the program and Museum staff. Multi visits to the TMA encouraged conversations about works of art and the potential for stronger language acquisition.

During the first year of the program museum staff divided the refugees into two small groups including adults and high school students and a youth group. The adult and high school group explored the Museum exhibits and had more complex art projects. The youth group did not explore the galleries and focused only on creating expressive projects from observing artifacts. During the second year of the program, the TMA staff experimented with combining the adult, high school, and youth participants into one large group. All participants toured the Museum's galleries for half the session while images of art work they saw first have were shared in a PowerPoint presentation during the last half of the program. The refugees created two long term projects and worked together to create expressive art. Museum staff soon discovered that keeping one large group was more beneficial because it allowed for interaction among the participants. Sharing among each other within the group created a stronger tolerance and better understanding of themselves and others. Gallery visits also proved to be necessary but going less often allows the group remain more organized and on task. The more involved the Museum
staff is with the group, the more the participants feel more comfortable about being at the Museum. As a result, the group has become more comfortable in other museums settings as well.\textsuperscript{35}

\textbf{The Minnesota History Center}

The Minnesota History Center (MHC) offers state of the art educational resources for underserved ethnic populations. The MHC is located in downtown Saint Paul, Minnesota. It is a museum and research library that serves as an extension of the Minnesota Historical Society. Minneapolis is home to a large Somali and Hmong population. The Hmong are an ethnic group from the mountainous areas of China, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. \textit{Rebuilding Shattered Lives} is an interactive educational program design for students in grades 4 through 12.\textsuperscript{36} It explores the refugee and immigrant experiences in Minnesota over time. It allows students to work with oral histories, museum artifacts, and hands-on activities. The program is museum focused, inquiry based, and is rooted in hands-on learning that is story driven. It is designed to illustrate the similarities and differences among Jewish, Hmong, and Somali experiences in Minneapolis. Students receive an image-based workbook which allows them to explore

\textsuperscript{35} Marianna Pegno, "Museum as Sanctuary: Expanding Museum Communities with Programming for Refugees" (lecture presented at the annual meeting of American Alliance of Museum, Minneapolis, MN, April 30, 2012).

exhibits by choosing artifacts to draw conclusions from. MHC staff have found that this program creates a wide range of awareness for students and encourages empathy.

The Minnesota History Center created an interactive web site dedicated to the history of newly arrived refugees and immigrants. The site Becoming a Minnesotan: Stories of Recent Immigrants and Refugees was created in 2009 with funding from the Institute of Museum of Library Services (IMLS). It allows the Museum to digitize existing records of oral histories and collections that represent the recent immigrants and refugees of Minnesota. The objective of this project is to "extend the reach of these materials to a broader audience, to support community building, and to help sustain cultural identity." Oral histories form a unique collection of contemporary history and illustrate the experiences and perspectives of new arrivals. Most importantly the stories of underserved ethnic populations are told in their own words. Every story is unique.

The site also provides information about specific refugee and immigrant communities including Asian, Indian, Filipino, Hmong, Khmer, Latino, Somali, and Tibetan. Student activities and teacher resources are available on-line for free including worksheets, an immigration timeline, maps, interviews, and oral history guides. There is also a section dedicated to the history, key dates, web resources, and recommended readings about United States Immigration Policies.

VI. SUMMARY

Conclusion

The work accomplished by this author with underserved populations in western New York demonstrates that museums can deeply benefit from developing long-lasting, meaningful relationships with immigrants, refugees, and migrant citizens. The case studies in this paper illustrate successful attempts at community engagement. By respectfully representing 21st century new arrivals in exhibitions, collections, and programs, and by including their creative work within museum galleries, museums can inspire their visitors to become more curious and involved individuals. Community members are also given an opportunity to learn more about their new neighbors and how international issues such as war, poverty, hunger, and discrimination can affect their everyday lives. There are also opportunities for new arrivals to connect with the region’s past. The purpose of this master's thesis project was to create a community based educational program about the cultural traditions and heritage of the Puerto Rican community in Western New York. Culture Day: Puerto Rico at Explore and More Children's Museum taught families about how this unique ethnic community that has shaped the City of Buffalo's history. Museums around the world helped to recognize the changing demographics of their communities and are engaging with underserved ethnic populations to help tell and preserve their stories. Activities, programs, and exhibits that engage underserved ethnic populations need to be part of every museum’s mission, as these institutions are increasingly embracing the responsibility of serving as a stage for community dialog and social awareness.
Bibliography


VII. IMAGES AND APPENDICES
Image 3

*Amore and Heritage Dancers*, 2015, East Aurora, New York. Photo Credit: Tara L. Lyons.
Amore and Heritage Dancers in Action, 2015, East Aurora, New York. Photo Credit: Tara L. Lyons.
**Image 5**

Pastelillos from Niagara Cafe, 2015, East Aurora, New York. Photo Credit: Tara L. Lyons.
Image 7

Image 8

Image 9

*Coqui Frog Learning Area*, 2015, East Aurora, New York. Photo Credit: Tara L. Lyons.
Photo Credit: Tara L. Lyons.
Image 12

Image 13

Image 15

Image 17

Image 19

ESL Visitors at The Buffalo History Museum II, 2011, Buffalo, New York. Photo Credit: Tara L. Lyons
Appendix I

Immigration History in Western New York
Tour Package
Program Proposal

Program Name: Immigration History in Western New York
Program Length: 2 hours
Capacity: 40 students
Museum Areas Used: Neighbors / Native American Gallery/ Auditorium / State Court Room

Objective: SWBAT to compare the similarities and differences in the various ethnic groups that migrated to Buffalo New York by attending a walking tour of the Neighbors exhibit and participating in an open discussion.

NYS Social Studies Standards: 1,2,3
NYS Curriculum: Unit Seven: An Industrial Society
   II. Changes in the Social Structure Altered the American Scene
      A. The immigration experience
      B. Case Studies of the immigrant experiences in New York State

Program Components:
- Pre visit classroom lesson
- Museum Introduction (in auditorium)- 20 minutes
- Neighbors exhibit tour- 20 minutes
- Native American exhibit tour- - 20 minutes
- Visual Presentation using artifact photos - 20 minutes
- Skill building activity (craft in State Court Room)- 20 minutes
- Post assignment for classroom

Abstract:
This program will focus on immigration history in Western New York utilizing two museum exhibits, primary sources from the artifact collection, and a student skill building activity. A guided tour of the Native American exhibit will discuss the first people to occupy North America more than 20,000 years ago and how early humans migrated to New York State and the Niagara Frontier. The tour will also focus on the first European contact with French explorers in the 16th century followed by the colonization of North America by the English and Dutch. The tour will highlight how European powers gained control of Native American lands in Western New York.

Students will then tour the Neighbors exhibit which discusses two distinct waves of new arrivals into the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries. The exhibit highlights local resettlement patterns in the Buffalo community, immigrant occupational experiences, cultural patterns such as religion and cuisine, political experiences, leisure experiences, citizenship, the development of an American identity, and clashes with other cultural groups. Students will discuss the similarities and differences between various ethnic groups over the two centuries.
Appendix II

Museum Introduction Program for Refugee Students

Objective: To introduce refugee-immigrant students to the History Museum using engaging, hands-on activities. Students will be encouraged to explore the museum and discover its unique artifacts and exhibits. This program will:

- Explain how this museum might help them learn about their (new) home.
- Define what a museum is, What do museums do?
- Define key terms such as artifact, and exhibit
- Explain and discuss “how” to visit a museum.
- Identify the “rules” of museum behavior, what visitors can and cannot do while visiting a museum.
- Identify different types of museums in Buffalo, NY.
- Highlight and discuss important artifacts on display using an image-based museum scavenger hunt.

Program:

I.) Arrival:
- Students arrive and will be brought into the auditorium for an introduction to the History Museum.
- I will introduce myself and begin an opening discussion using a power point presentation. I have included video, music, photos, and engaging images to make the presentation interesting and interactive.

II.) Introduction Power point Presentation:
- The opening discussion will welcome students and begin by simply defining what a museum is. What is this place? What do we do here? Why have they come to this place? How is it a special place in the community?
- The power point will also define key terms such as artifact and exhibit.
- I may ask who has ever been to any kind of museum before, in any part of the world. Many students may be surprised to know they have visited a museum, which includes zoos, aquariums, and botanical gardens.
- Photographs of our exhibit space will then describe what the students will see while exploring the museum.
- I always try to talk about what other kinds of museums are in Buffalo and how they are different from the History Museum.
III.) Visiting the Museum:
- The next phase of the program will talk about “how” to visit a museum. Video clips with music will show the students how the main character Zoe, a child who has never been to a museum before:
  - Buys a ticket at the Admissions Desk
  - Obtains and uses a museum map.
  - Finds the exhibits on the map and how to explore the exhibits.
  - Using the exhibit labels and how to read them to learn about an artifact.

IV.) Rules and Museum Behavior:
- A museum is a fun and exciting place to learn many new things. However, care needs to be taken of the many important and fragile objects that are on display. I would like to talk about the “rules” of a museum and the behavior of a good museum visitor:

1. You must always WALK in the museum. Do not run, or push any one.
   (Museum artifacts are very important and can break easily. They are very valuable and often can not be replaced).
2. Take turns when looking at an artifact or doing a museum activity.
3. Use only your eyes to examine an artifact. You can only touch something in an exhibit if you have permission.
4. Always use soft voices in a museum. Do not yell or scream. Other people are trying to visit the museum around you.
5. Raise your hand if you have a question. Do not talk while others are talking.
6. Explore new objects...Always ask questions...HAVE FUN!

V.) Scavenger Hunt:
- An image based scavenger hunt will allow the students to explore the museum in a fun and intriguing way. I will tell the students what exhibit to search and they will have to locate the artifact using the photograph included in the scavenger hunt. They will then fill in blank spaces identifying the name of the artifact. (See attached document for an example of a museum scavenger hunt).

VI) Conclusion:
- After all the students have completed their scavenger hunt, we will meet in the auditorium to recap the visit. Than we will say goodbye, thank them for visiting, and welcome them back with families. FREE PASSES FOR EVERYONE!!!