Brillan por su ausencia: Latinos as the missing outsiders of mainstream art museums

THESIS

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Verónica Elena Betancourt

Graduate Program in Art Education

The Ohio State University

2012

Master's Examination Committee:

Karen Hutzel, Advisor

James Harry Sanders III
Abstract

This thesis articulates the importance of studying the experiences, identities, and perceptions of Latino visitors to mainstream art museums. Art museums visitorships are predominantly white, non-Latino, affluent and middle-class, and not even close to representative of the American populace. With the shifting demographics of the country and the static demographics of museum visitors, art museums find themselves in dire need of attracting new and more diverse publics. The Latino population is the fastest growing demographic in the United States, and one that has been grossly underexamined within museum scholarship. Given the paucity of research in this area, I drew primarily from work published by academics, industry researchers, museum evaluators, as well as from the exhibition histories and programming of varied art institutions across the United States, to develop an initial picture of how art museums have considered and engaged Latino audiences. I examine the usefulness the theoretical work of Carol Duncan and Gloria Anzaldúa in framing a study of Latino visitors to art museums, and conclude with recommendations for how art museums, researchers, and other interested scholars can work to build the field of Latino visitor studies.
Acknowledgments

Though I wrote this thesis, I consider it a project born of the assistance and encouragement of many. I would like to acknowledge my advisor, Dr. Karen Hutzel, for her equanimity and sage counsel in guiding my thesis toward a focused form. Likewise, the critical theoretical lens of Dr. James H. Sanders helped to shape my understanding of museum history and study. Cecilia Garibay and Joe E. Heimlich were invaluable guides in my first foray into audience research and visitor studies and they are models of intellectual magnanimity and mentorship. I would also like to acknowledge the generosity of the American Association of Museums for awarding me a fellowship to travel to the 2011 annual meeting in Houston—a trip that provided for tremendous intellectual and professional growth and resulted in a stronger thesis.

The writing process was not strictly an academic pursuit: I should also extend my thanks to the friends and classmates who nourished and encourage me throughout this project. My final thanks goes to Francesca McLin, without whom my graduate study and life in Columbus would not be possible and certainly not anywhere near as good. I am forever indebted to her for her support and cheer throughout this undertaking.
Vita

2002.................................................. Richard Montgomery High School, International Baccalaureate Diploma

2006.................................................. B.A. Art History, Swarthmore College

2006 to 2007 ................................. Philanthropy Coordinator, American Chemical Society

2007 to 2010 .................................. Curatorial Assistant, National Gallery of Art

2010 to 2011 ................................. Graduate Enrichment Fellowship, The Ohio State University

2011 to present .............................. Graduate Teaching Associate, Art Education Department, The Ohio State University

2011 to present .............................. Assistant Coordinator, Writing Associates Program, Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing, The Ohio State University

Fields of Study

Major Field: Art Education
Graduate Specialization in Museum Education and Management
Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii

Acknowledgements .......................................................................................................... iii

Vita ....................................................................................................................................... iv

Chapter 1: Introduction ...................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 2: Making the Case for Latino Visitor Studies .................................................... 5
  Latino engagement is a demographic imperative .......................................................... 6
  Art museums in service to the public ............................................................................ 9
  The importance of a cultural lens in studying Latino visitor engagement .................. 15
    Who is Latino: A note on terminology ....................................................................... 23
    My position as a researcher ....................................................................................... 25

Chapter 3: Museum as Borderland .................................................................................. 27
  The museum tells you: Reading the American art museum as ritual space ............. 31
  Speaking to the museum: Using Anzaldúa to inscribe the person ............................. 36
  Those who have spoken before me ......................................................................... 40

Chapter 4: Situating Latinos within Art Museums .......................................................... 44
  The Latino visitor as demographic ............................................................................. 45
  Latinos missing from museum personnel ................................................................. 50
  From national data to specific institutions .................................................................. 56
    A brief history of El Día de los Muertos, the Day of the Dead, in the U.S. ......... 58
    Latin flavor: Consuming Latinidad ...................................................................... 60
Latinas as consultants .......................................................................................................................... 61
Latinos and Latinidad for consumption .............................................................................................. 63
Latinos as desirable community partners .......................................................................................... 71
Museums co-curating and organizing with community ................................................................. 72
Artists working with Latinos, on behalf of museums ........................................................................ 76
Latinos as a target for outreach ........................................................................................................ 80

Aquí hablamos español: Establishing bilingual appeal .................................................................... 82
Moving the museum off-site ................................................................................................................. 84
Online outreach .................................................................................................................................... 86
Removing structural obstacles to visitation ....................................................................................... 87
Looking beyond the numbers: Listening to Latino voices .............................................................. 88

Chapter 5: Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 91

References ............................................................................................................................................... 95
Chapter 1: Introduction

I came to the topic of Latino visitor studies in art museums not out of an academic interest, but from a moment of personal confusion. Toward the end of my three years working at the National Gallery of Art, in Washington, D.C., I realized a peculiar set of facts about myself and my time there: I loved the museum; I loved its collections; I loved my experience as a staff member; and I loved my experiences as a visitor. I did not love my experience as a Latina visitor. Rarely could I feel Latina and feel engaged by the museum. That I could separate this part of myself from my interaction with the artworks I admired, artworks that I had helped to research and install, was disconcerting. Why would my sense of self fracture in this space that was so familiar and that I so loved?

My question became academic when I turned to the published literature in art education, art history, sociology and anthropology, museum studies and visitor studies and found precious little that addressed me, the Latina art museum visitor, or my questions about the identity negotiation process I undertook at the Gallery. With the exception of Cecilia Garibay, there are few scholars who publish extensively on Latino visitors to museums, much less art museums. When I could not make sense of my own experience through the established literature, I decided to make a small inroad into the development of a literature on Latino visitors to comprehensive, encyclopedic or mainstream art museums, such as the National Gallery. In my focus on such institutions, I have used research regarding Latino visitor experience to museums that collect and
exhibit Latino art and culture to provide insight into Latino visitors, but have concentrated my efforts on the review and research of comprehensive art museums.

This foray is preliminary, and should be taken as an initial salvo in the articulation of a field of Latino visitor studies. My intent is to provoke questions for museum professionals developing outreach programs, raise awareness of the existing publications and programs that address Latino visitors, and demonstrate the need for systematic research on the experiences of Latino visitors to art museums. If reading this thesis moves you to develop your own study involving the identities and experiences of Latino visitors to art museums, I will have succeeded.

In this incipient formation of a field, I have tackled three questions:

1. Why should art museums engage in Latino visitor study?
2. How might art museums begin to theorize and understand the cultural complexity of Latino visitors, so as to develop culturally responsive research?
3. What information about Latino art museum visitors and the means art museums have taken to engage them exists to date?

Each question guides the line of inquiry for a chapter of my thesis (chapters 2, 3, and 4, respectively). Chapter 2 introduces the extant national survey data on Latino rates of arts participation, as well as representation on museum staffs, and argues the need for qualitative study of the experiences of Latino visitors to art museums. Chapter 3 suggests a theoretical framework for the conceptualization of such qualitative research, based on my personal experience as a Latina visitor. In order to ground the museum experience as a sociocultural one, one in which the visit to the museum is mediated by dominant codes of visitor behavior, I draw from Carol Duncan’s identification of the art museum as ritual space. I then pair Gloria Anzaldúa’s concepts of the new mestiza consciousness and of
the borderland with Duncan’s theorization to elucidate how to incorporate a Latino identity within an engagement of the museum. Chapter 4 represents a hybridized literature review: just as much as I have drawn from publications regarding Latino visitors to art museums, I have also made significant use of publications on museum programs that address Latino cultures or visitors. As there is a distinct lack of published material regarding the experiences of Latino visitors to art museums, this chapter takes a multifaceted, multimodal approach to composing some idea of how art museums are engaging with Latinos.

As with any study, there are significant elements missing from this thesis. Namely, I have not taken up the specific complexities of the identities of Latino art museum visitors. Because this study focuses on extant publications and programming, I did not wish to presume or impose analysis regarding Latino visitor identities and identity-negotiation processes in art museums, when I had not formally spoken with such visitors. I anticipate that when I do conduct qualitative research involving museum visitors, that their thought and conversation will spark new areas for inquiry. For example, the specific effect of racial identification, socioeconomic status, linguistic background, nationality, migration history, and citizenship status upon the museum visit experience is something that I believe needs to be elicited and drawn out of the visitors themselves. I anticipate that exploration of these facets of visitor identity will hinge on a discussion of identity-negotiation, and the literature in social psychology and education surrounding how ethnic identity is performed and negotiated. Likewise, questions surrounding what impact museum-going experiences in countries throughout Latin
America have had on Latino visitors in the United States are quite interesting, given the implications for discussing globalization and postcolonial theory at work in international art museum practice, but unattended in this thesis. I acknowledge that this study does not broach these topics, but I do intend to address them in future research.

Though I have left these questions open for future research, I do want to articulate them so that museum scholars may consider them when developing Latino visitor studies. I look forward to taking on these issues, especially once I have begun to conduct Latino visitor studies of my own. For now, I have synthesized the most complete report I can of the current state of museum knowledge regarding how to engage Latino art museum visitors and how Latino art museum visitors are engaged. This thesis is a starting point for the publication and dissemination of Latino-specific visitor studies, and I hope it will be the first of many studies.
Chapter 2: Making the Case for Latino Visitor Studies

As is abundantly clear in the quantity and tone of mainstream domestic media coverage of topics like immigration, bilingual education, the DREAM Act, and access to healthcare for undocumented workers, Latinos and Latino issues are primetime news (Dávila, 2001, 2008; Santa Ana, 2002). However, for all this coverage and recognition of our growing presence as a population within the United States, Latinos and their engagement with art museums remains woefully undertheorized. Though other sections of this thesis will address how and why Latinos have been underrepresented in museum literature and studies, in this section I would like to discuss why it is so vital that we be consulted and included by mainstream art museums.

Examining the history and current situation of how Latinos engage with art museums serves a few aims: to provide art museums with an understanding of the state of their field with regard to a Latino audience, to validate the importance of Latino visitors within art museums, and to lay an academic foundation upon which to build a documented field of Latino visitor studies. While Latino identities, experiences, and values are tremendously heterogeneous and it would be grossly simplistic to suggest that this thesis will encompass the entirety of Latino visitor engagement with art museums, I will do my best to outline a history and to articulate a need and possible path for further inquiry.
Latino engagement is a demographic imperative

Art museums, and other museums, hope to expand their audience—perhaps in a bid to be a truly inclusive social institution, perhaps as a means of increasing visitation numbers and spending in the gift shop—and this expansion hinges on a demographic shift. Museums today have an antiquated visitor demographic that represents the racial and ethnic diversity of the U.S. in the ‘60s—their visitors are predominantly white, non-Hispanic, college-educated, and more affluent than the average American. These facts were trumpeted by the Center for the Future of Museums, as a call for museums to diversify their visitor populations, lest these institutions become culturally irrelevant to an increasingly racially and ethnically heterogeneous American populace (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010).

While the most recent alarm, it was hardly the first—the museum community has been lamenting the lack of racial and ethnic diversity among its visitors for decades (AAM, 1984; Schuster, 1991; DiMaggio, 1992; Reach Advisors, 2008). In fact, the inaugural report issued by the Center for the Future of Museums—a group dedicated to futurism and forecasting for the American museum community—began with a demographic focus, due to the major shifts that will occur in the country’s racial, ethnic, and age composition in the coming years (Reach Advisors, 2008.) A graphic analysis of the disparity between the respectively robust and stagnant white and minority visitation rates threw the issue of museum visitor demographics into stark relief. The 2008 report, and that specific chart, “went viral,” in part prompting the authoring of the 2010 report.
for the Center of the Future of Museums, this one focusing on demographic
transformation (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010, 5).

In the 2010 report, the Center for the Future of Museums challenged these
institutions to diversify their visitorship in order to make ready for the major
demographic shifts anticipated in the United States (Farrell & Medvedeva). The report
asserted that historically, non-Hispanic whites have constituted the core visitor
population of museums; and by 2050, this population will no longer be the majority
demographic group in America. However, it is not anticipated that this shift to a
‘minority-majority’ situation will be mirrored in museum visitor statistics. Without
outreach efforts, museums may keep their current visitation rate of having only nine
percent of visitors coming from a minority group. As the proportion of the public that
frequents art museums and its racial/ethnic diversity relative to the general American
population decreases, so will the cultural relevance of these institutions (Farrell &
Medvedeva, 2010).

Though the report was not specific in advocating Latino outreach, its statistics
make clear that it is particularly important to target Latinos, as they are the fastest
growing minority group and the youngest. One in four children is Latino, and these
children, if welcomed and encouraged, could constitute a large proportion of new visitors
for museums (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). Given the furor that surrounds attracting
younger audiences to art museums, and the interest in developing new audiences for art
museums, it is peculiar that Latinos, a young and ever-growing population that is now
quite likely to speak English fluently, have not been targeted as a resource for art
museums seeking to expand their popularity (Pew Hispanic Center, 2004). Furthermore, art museums should note that the Latino population in the U.S. is growing primarily due to second-generation births, and not due to migration from other countries of the Americas (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010). While this demographic shift will play out across national institutions and is already noted within K-12 education, it could have a major impact on museum visitation, as children who are raised to attend museums often become museumgoers (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010).

Such sustained attention to demographics, and specifically to the striking disparity between white and minority museum visitation rates, indicates the interest that museums have in remaining relevant to the American population. Despite this desire to attract more diverse visitors, there has been scant systematic, published research on how the racial and ethnic minority visitors who do frequent museums experience their visits. Instead, the research that art museums have regarding Latino participation as museum visitors exists at a national level, as part of the National Endowment for the Arts Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA). This instrument compares arts participation across venues, such as concerts, dance performances, art galleries, and museums, but it has not specifically addressed Latino participation as a category distinct from white or black participation until its most recent 2008 iteration (NEA, 2008). Farrell and Medvedeva recognized the limitations of this study, not only in the broad information it provides about all Latinos, but also in the relative newness of this information (2010). With these limitations in mind, art museums must realize that demographic information from the NEA or the Census is only a starting point: these numbers do not translate into the human
experience of their Latino visitors, or potential Latino visitors. In order to begin to know these visitors, art museums must engage in ongoing qualitative research that values the opinions, experiences, and identities of their Latino visitors. Though the need to consider Latino visitors and encourage their visitation springs from the demographic, art museums must quickly transcend the demographic so that they may engage with the Latinos in their community, as members of that community. To solicit the perspectives and values of Latino visitors now is to not only enrich their current experiences, but also to invest in the growth of Latino visitation and, possibly, the visitation to the art museum. For art museums, engaging new audiences, and specifically Latinos, may be a matter of survival.

**Art museums in service to the public**

Beyond the self-serving motivation of their continued existence and relevance, art museums, as public institutions, have a duty to serve their public. This duty has been early, and often, articulated as a responsibility to educate the public. John Cotton Dana elaborated the social aims of an art museum within the framework of a constructivist education experience, and this tradition of engaging visitors to consider, learn, and construct their own narratives and understandings of objects has been integrated throughout many museums. Such a museum philosophy values the diversity of visitors and seeks to foster their distinct, culturally situated experiences instead of delivering cultural values without regard for visitor identity. More recently, Stephen Weil has articulated the museum’s role as one of service to the public in which one of its ‘organizational outputs’ is the education of a broad visitor population (Yocco et al.,
2009). Weil, a scholar of museum leadership and the role of these institutions as organizations within a larger cultural ecosystem captured a broad sentiment within the museum community that museums should seek to educate the public and make outreach central to their missions (AAM, 1992).

However, the constructivist tradition of museums as places that educate with the visitor’s identity and unique experience in mind has been met with some resistance, particularly within the art museum community. Richard Sandell characterized this ‘art for art’s sake’ approach as one that ignored the moral, or political, work of the museum to be a socially inclusive institution reflective of the make-up of its society in favor of an elite, enlightened role as an arbiter of taste. Sandell exemplified the concerns of an institution interested in aesthetic remove through the comments of conservative scholar, Mark Ryan:

When the new elite says we must tackle ‘social exclusion,’ such a statement could mean a lot of different things…The museum or gallery that is not prepared to turn its collection into a children’s playground is being exclusive…Although the precise meaning is unclear, there is never a doubt as to what the new language intends. The artistic director who is concerned only with the merit of his work, when he hears that he must tackle social exclusion, knows that he is being warned. Perhaps he is thinking too much about art and not enough about The People.

(Sandell, 2002, p. 20)
Admittedly, Ryan was responding to the particular politics of the United Kingdom and a government mandate to promote social inclusion as one of the museum’s goals, but his remarks convey some of the aesthetic tradition’s resistance to the perceived risk of populism, or even popularity, diluting the authority and quality of a contemplative, canonical museum experience. Though admitting the merits of an educational approach, or political approach, to developing museum exhibitions and programs does shift focus to the visitor and her experience, this shift does not require that the experience of art be depreciated.

Benjamin Ives Gilman was an early advocate of the aesthetic, contemplative, elitist tradition of art viewing and appreciation that Ryan defended, but he was also concerned with how visitors engaged with not only art, but also the museum experience. Beyond his recommendations regarding coatrooms, study areas, and hanging practices, Gilman prompted the museum profession to consider a museum’s duty to the surrounding community. His exhortation that an art museum should collect and foster the involvement of its local art community implies a certain democratic function—that the art museum should acknowledge its status as a participating member of an arts community, not a removed arbiter of taste and culture (Gilman, 2004). I find it especially significant that Gilman couched this suggestion as one related to art quality within a discussion of the aims and principles of an art museum. ‘Quality,’ and perceived lack thereof, has often served as a Eurocentric shield deployed by curators and other museum professionals to justify the lack of representation of minority artists within collections (Lippard, 2000). To see Gilman, one of the early proponents of an aestheticized, spare, quality-driven art
museum experience state unequivocally that art museums have a duty to local art to “not only preserve but in a measure to make [its reputation]” and should consider themselves “not only the guardian but the advocate of indigenous art,” suggests that this imperative to collect and represent local and community artwork has been forgotten by some art museums intent on quality of art and aesthetic experience (2004, p. 423). Though Gilman’s recommendation focused on curatorial practice, I believe that there is a greater message of a duty to representation of an artistic community and to the artists and aficionados involved in that community. He acknowledged the power involved in art museums’ ability to select exalted culture and cautioned museum professionals to use that power to expand the representation of the local and not just tell the well-known narratives of art history. His admonition may not have been one intent on expanding the accessibility of art museum displays to a non-elite audience, but it does remind the museum community that we have a duty beyond our individual institutions to develop the vibrancy of the arts community as a whole. Sandell reprised and renewed the significance of this view a century later, by defining that the work of the socially inclusive museum is “not to become government tools for social engineering and control,” as Ryan feared, but to “consider [its] impact on society and seek to shape that impact through practice that is based on contemporary values and a commitment to social equality” (2002, p. 21).

Furthermore, art museums have the power and authority to validate culture and, subsequently, the individuals who belong to those cultures (Duncan, 2004). Duncan highlighted the political ritual function of survey museums in telling a particular story, a story of a nation and its glories, and in doing so also indicated that citizenship could be
constituted through the museum’s collection and exhibition program (Duncan, 2004).

Manifestations of this cultural authority range from the nationalistic architectural programs detailed by Duncan, to the display of collections. Museum scholar Eileen Hooper-Greenhill joined Duncan in noting the impact of museums as exhibitionary programs constitutive of culture,

Culture is frequently conceived as reflective. However, this is less accurate than the idea of culture as constitutive. Cultural symbols have the power to shape cultural identities at both individual and social levels; to mobilise emotions, perceptions and values; to influence the way we feel and think. In this sense, culture is generative, constructivist.

(Sandell, 2002, p. 9)

When art museums have the historical ability and authority to exalt particular cultural and political narratives in the service of a national identity, it is imperative to ensure the accuracy of the history presented. Though every curatorial project involves selection—whether of concepts introduced to the public or art collected and exhibited—this selection should not function as a de facto exclusion of histories and artists who fall outside the mainstream, Eurocentric, Western understanding of art history. What the art museum chooses to say and whose history it decides to represent has a significant impact on its visitors. This impact has been explored most thoroughly in the discussion of ethnographic display versus art display within institutions such as museums of natural history, anthropology, or art (Karp & Lavine, 1991). The visitor reception of Latino and Latin American art, as well as the exhibition practices of art museums concerning this art, are
topics that extend beyond the scope of this inquiry, but may be worth considering for the
museum researcher (Goldman, 1994; Davalos, 2001; Ramirez, 1992; Gaspar de Alba,
1998; Ramirez, 2003).

In 1999, Elizabeth Broun, the director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum,
reflected on the role of American art museums in an age when American art had been
widely validated by the global art community, “…finally the battle for recognition of
American art seems won, in the half-century since abstract expressionism, and the
quarter-century since the Bicentennial. What, then, is the legitimate new purpose for
American art museums?” (2004, p. 298). More than millennial angst, her question belied
the significance of being American within an international museum field and suggested
that American art museums might seek to judge and present themselves not according to
European standards, in an also-ran competition between Old World and New, but instead
according to an American perspective. In defining this less-Eurocentric position,
American art museums could emphasize the myriad cultural histories within the United
States. Broun reimagined the narrative of American art history to include, “the Hispanic
colonial art of the Southwest and the Caribbean, along with the British colonies on the
Atlantic coast. And let’s not suggest that African Americans had no art before
Emancipation…” (2004, p. 299). Her emphasis on a colonial, post-contact history may be
problematic given its implication that American history began with European arrival,
but I believe her larger point is that the history of the United States has been one of
multiple cultures in contact and conflict with each other, and that the American art
museum should observe that plurality and include the work of American artists who do
not fit within the dominant Eurocentric art history paradigm. Her admonition to art museums is, in essence, to look beyond the simple, commonly told histories and work to exhibit diverse artists and work: “There are so many untold chapters, so many artists left out—not because the work is poor but because we have streamlined the story” (Broun, 2004, p. 299). One way to disrupt the dominant narrative is to include alternate perspectives and ensure that a diversity of identities are confirmed and valued by the art museum. Engaging in a qualitative study of the opinions and experiences of Latino art museum visitors may provide an opportunity to reframe the dominant Eurocentric art history narrative to better question how this history is challenged by visitors. Likewise, soliciting the experiences and knowledge of Latino visitors will continue to undo some of the hegemonic power structures of the museum, in which white, well-educated, middle-class museum professionals, museum funders, and museum critics work in tandem to reproduce the organizational mores that have valorized their culture and lived experiences at the expense of marginalized minority groups (Fleming, 2002).

**The importance of a cultural lens in studying Latino visitor engagement**

Recent visitor studies scholarship has valued one of two approaches to exploring the questions of how visitors engage with art museums: visitor identity and motivation are defined by psychographic traits, wherein race, ethnicity, and culture are lesser concerns for museums seeking to understand the visitor experience; or visitor demographic traits impact the experience of a visitor while in a museum and, to a lesser extent, may affect his or her desire to engage with a particular institution. These
approaches may seem to be in conflict throughout the literature, but I believe this to be a false conflict, as the two ask and answer distinct questions. The psychographic approach dismisses, or does not prioritize, demographic traits in its analysis because these inquiries are often interested in identifying the motivations for why a person chooses to visit a museum and how these motivations affect the visitor experience once there. John H. Falk’s recent book, *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience*, is an excellent example of such an analytical approach (2009). By contrast, a demographic approach often seeks to understand why certain groups (often racial or ethnic minorities) are not visiting museums and, when they do, how their cultural background impacts their experience. Within the field of visitor studies, Cecilia Garibay’s research on Latino visits to history, science, and technology museums, as well as other informal learning environments, represents an approach concerned with the cultural specificities of a visitor’s experience and may serve as a guide when embarking on culturally responsive study of Latino art museum visitors (Garibay, 2011; Garibay, 2006; Garibay, 2004).

Both approaches to visitor studies serve worthwhile purposes, but in the case of researching how to engage Latino visitors to art museums and how these visitors conceive of themselves and their experiences within art museums, a demographic analysis that accounts for psychographic traits is more appropriate. Falk, Dierking, and other scholars may emphasize the motivations that encourage visitors to attend art, and other, museums, as well as how these motivations guide the visitor’s experience once within the walls of the institution, but these analyses elide the identity of the visitor. Such models may be convenient for museum education, curatorial, and exhibition planning
staff that seek to engage visitors across different modes of learning, but they do little to examine who is coming to art museums. And, right now, art museums very much need to pay attention to who is attending, and to defining that information by cultural terms.

Museums may have an interest in sustaining visitor engagement and in bettering the experience of visitors, but it is undeniable that there are huge disparities among visitation rates of European Americans and all other racial/ethnic groups. When disparities emerge along racial and ethnic fault lines, it behooves art museums to initiate a cultural discourse and analysis situated within these gaps.

Though my interest lies in the experience of Latino visitors to art museums, researchers may be well served to consider the experiences and perceptions of non-visitors when analyzing the Latino engagement with (or disengagement from) their institution. Since most Latinos in the U.S. are not art museum visitors, a look at the intersection of how race, ethnicity, museum perceptions, and visitation experiences interact in non-visitors may yield some grounding for future Latino visitor studies. Given the scarcity of Latino-specific research, I have drawn from a more expansive range of visitor study that addresses issues of visitor sociocultural identity.

John H. Falk presented two studies conducted in 1992 that suggested that members of a particular cultural group (whether the group was racially defined or not) attended museums, and those outside of that group did not (1993). According to Falk’s survey of 400 visitors, half African-American and half white, across four distinct science museums, all of the visitors presented similar profiles: they were affluent, well-educated, and had a strong interest in science. This finding indicated that the socioeconomic status
and level of education obtained by the visitor were markers of her cultural belonging within a museum space, in this case a science institution (Falk, 1993). Furthermore, these cultural traits superseded race in determining whether a person was likely to be a museum visitor.

Falk’s second study complicated the socioeconomic and educational distinctions between visitors and non-visitors (1993). In a multi-factorial examination of African-American leisure behavior, half of the 333 respondents identified that they were museum visitors. Again, factors that correlated positively with this visiting half of the respondents were that museum visitors had a high level of education and income (Falk, 1993). However, given the infrequency of museum visitation among African-Americans, Falk was quick to point out that “these variables do not reliably predict museum-going behavior, even when all are present” (1993, p.11). To further trouble the notion that socioeconomic status and educational achievement are viable sole factors in determining museum attendance, Falk introduced the element of racism to his study. Though few study participants explicitly mentioned racism as a deterrent to museum going, “there was a widespread sense that such problems still exist…at the very least, museums are not really ‘a black thing’” (1993, p. 11). This study also implied that there was little connection between the subject matter of an exhibition or its collection, and whether non-visitors decided to go to the museum (1993).

Such a disjuncture is significant because it suggests that culturally relevant content is not the only factor that influences the participation of minority museum non-visitors. Even though many non-visiting adults expressed an interest in learning more
about African history and culture, “this widespread interest in things African was not reflected in attendance at African-oriented museums or by reading and subscribing to African-American newspapers or magazines” (Falk, 1993, p. 11). Given a disconnect between stated non-visitor desire and practice, it may not be enough for art museums to develop tours and exhibitions with specific minority subject matter in order to attract a new audience. Though these explicit overtures to include the culture of those outside the typically Eurocentric focus of art museums may signal the institution’s willingness to expand its curatorial and educational scope, the perceived ‘whiteness’ of the museum’s visitor base, general collection, staff, and image amongst the non-visiting public may still deter minority non-visitors from attending. Falk’s two studies distinctly point to an insider-outsider understanding of museums (whatever the institution’s focus) among the museum audience: the visitors in the first are present because they feel they belong and are comfortably relating to the space, whereas the non-visitors in the second study sense that museums are not meant for them.

The feeling of art museum exclusion has even been documented amongst affluent, well-educated, African-American adults, who grew up participating in cultural activities and still were sophisticated cultural consumers (Hood, 1993). Despite their background, which could suggest an affinity for art museums, these survey respondents held negative beliefs about the institutions. Notably, all of the grievances revolved around the perceived lack of representation of African-American identity throughout all levels of the museum (Hood, 1993). The non-visitors criticized the museum’s Eurocentric collection, token outreach during Black History Month, lack of diversity in the docent corps, select
African-American representation on the boards (“One black person on the board doesn’t mean anything”), chilly welcome, and insincere desire to partner with the African-American community (Hood, 1993, p. 6). This critique implied a need for structural change within an art museum’s organization before the African-American community would feel like a welcome collaborator and participant in the museum.

Dierking and Falk contended that sociodemographic descriptors are not sole indicators of museum visitation and that psychographic traits are more informative for museum researchers (2000.) While their book, Learning from museums: Visitor experiences and the making of meaning, privileged the role of identity in forming connections to museums, their definition of identity expanded beyond sociodemographic markers, such as ethnic background or occupation, to include personal motivations and history (Dierking & Falk, 2000). In doing so, they suggested that personal motivations were more important in determining not only museum attendance but also the visitor’s perceived quality of the museum and her experience there (Dierking & Falk, 2000). They attributed personal motivations to factors such as an interest in the subject matter presented, a childhood history of museum visitation, and a desire to learn and engage with others in their peer group within a museum setting (Dierking & Falk, 2000).

To contradict sociodemographic expectation or predictive value, they provided an anecdotal example of a twenty-five year-old housewife who was a frequent visitor of the National Gallery of Art. Though her lower-middle class status, working-class background, and young children did not recommend her as an avid museum-goer (most art museum visitors are professional, upper-middle class, and well-educated), she
expressed a deep, personal connection to the Gallery that was an outgrowth of reading the newspaper with her father and keeping abreast of exhibitions through advertisements in the paper (Dierking & Falk, 2000, p. 70). She perceived the museum as a welcoming place to take her children, as well as a site that had a personal, emotional significance, in reminding her of her childhood and her father. Similarly, she framed Gallery visits as a lifecycle event; just as her father had read the newspaper with her and commented on cultural announcements, so she would engage her children in reviewing the newspaper advertisements and attending the National Gallery (Dierking & Falk, 2000). While this anecdote is compelling in providing an example of an art museum visitor who does not fit the typical visitor demographic profile, it is just an anecdote. The researchers did not provide more systematic survey evidence of socioeconomic or cultural diversity among art museum visitors.

How a visitor perceives the institution, what motivates her to visit, and how that visitor navigates and engages with the museum space are all useful questions for a museum to investigate with its visitors. Likewise, art museums may find it helpful to identify predictors for museum visitation, such that their marketing departments may better target existing and potential visitors. There is an abundance of research and visitor study conducted along these lines, much with the aim of understanding the learning experiences of visitors while in the museum, and understanding how the visitors’ preferred means of experiencing the museum will inform their desire to return (Luke & Adams, 2007). While these questions are all germane to the work of an art museum in terms of learning about its visitors and providing them with rich, fulfilling experiences of
art and learning, none of them answer the question of: why aren’t more Latinos art museum visitors?

The low Latino visitation rates at art museums that have engaged in sustained research and reflection on how visitors interact with the museum, with art, and make experiences their own within the museum, strongly suggest that museum researchers must engage in more culturally responsive visitor study. For example, the Dallas Museum of Art (DMA) has undertaken extensive study of how its visitors interact with artwork, resulting in the theorization of Framework for Engaging with Art (FEA)—models of interaction that describe the varied types of visitor engagement with art, based on psychographic traits—and used this framework to develop exhibition and programming activities for its range of visitors (Pitman & Hirzy, 2010). Though the DMA director and consulting researchers proclaim that this framework has powerfully changed and improved the way that the museum plans for its diverse visitors (Pitman & Hirzy, 2010), the adoption and use of this framework has not resulted in significant improvements in the racial and ethnic diversity of its visitors (Randi Korn & Associates, Inc., 2005; Randi Korn & Associates, Inc., 2008). The percentage of Latino museum visitors recorded at the DMA dropped from seven in a 2005 report, to six in a 2008 study, despite the institution’s efforts to attract visitors based on their varied levels of engagement with art (Korn, 2005; Korn, 2008). Even more troubling is the lack of Latinos represented among return visitors to the DMA; first-time visitors were more ethnically diverse than repeat visitors to the museum. Whereas ten percent of first-time visitors to the DMA identified as Hispanic, only five percent of repeat visitors surveyed identified as Hispanic (Korn,
2008). Why, if the museum has made such efforts to appeal to the many types of visitor engagement, are Latinos not returning or visiting the DMA in rates proportional to their presence in the Dallas area? What is the disconnect? These questions are culturally specific, and require a means of research that accounts for the cultural and ethnic identity of Latinos in the process of analysis. These questions necessitate Latino visitor studies.

*Who is Latino: A note on terminology*

A demographic analysis is predicated, in part, on the notion that a demographic category such as ‘Latino’ is even relevant and representative of a cohesive cultural group. I acknowledge that Latino, much like the term ‘visitor,’ simplifies individuals into categories of people classified for the ease of either demographic discourse or the museum’s identification of a person’s purpose and relationship vis à vis the institution. I do not believe that all Latinos may be lumped together into a coherent group based around a particular cultural, linguistic, racial, or ethnic identity. Despite the imperfection of broad labels like Latino, Americans continue to use this term as a form of self-identification and it suits art museums to use a cultural lens to interrogate the cultural terms within which Latinos experience these institutions.

For the purposes of my study, I have used Latino, instead of Latino/a or Latin@, as the descriptor for persons within the U.S. as having some Latin American heritage. This choice is not meant to marginalize Latinas, but to streamline the clarity and simplicity of expression and terms throughout the thesis. Latino, as opposed to Hispanic, may also be a more inclusive term and one that does not emphasize Spanish heritage or
Spanish language as key identifying factors in determining Latinidad, instead retaining focus on Latin America.

From a demographic perspective, the term Latino implies a monolithic group with a fairly unified culture, at least from the outside eyes of non-Latinos. However, this category begins to break down when more closely examined. As the terms Hispanic or Latino denote ethnicity and not race, the self-perception and racial identification of Latinos needs to be studied in the context of museum visitation and outreach. A 2004 report indicated that Latinos who characterized themselves as white had higher levels of education and income than those who chose ‘some other race,’ and suggested that Latinos see racial identification as a measure of inclusion or belonging within the United States (Pew Hispanic Center). As such, the Latinos who perceived themselves to be white felt more included and comfortable; could their whiteness also make them feel more at ease as a museum visitor? This identification with whiteness becomes even more complicated when age is layered over the question: seventy-six percent of Latino youth identify themselves as ‘some other race’ and only sixteen percent categorize themselves as white. By contrast, older Latinos are almost twice as likely to view themselves as white, with thirty percent having claimed this racial identity (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). These differences in age and racial identification among Latinos bear examination in an art museum setting—how might the self-perception of these generations impact their desire for art programming that speaks to their identities and confirms them within a museum setting?
In planning for the future boom in Latino youth, I believe that art museums should get to know their Latino audiences. The astounding lack of Latino visitor and non-visitor studies means that art museums must conduct their own regional and local surveys, focus groups, and interviews to identify the desires of their potential Latino audience. Likewise, though a shared body of research regarding Latino art museum visitors will provide entry points and a foundation for future museum researchers to deepen understanding of Latino art museum visitors, the specific complexities of an institution’s Latino visitors must be accounted for (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010).

**My position as a researcher**

As I have begun to define a need for Latino visitor studies, specifically within an art museum context, it only seems appropriate to make my own place known. I am a Latina researcher and museum professional (on a graduate school hiatus) who cares deeply about the future of art museums. I believe that art museums have the ability to be vibrant places that provide opportunities for wide-ranging public discourse about our values, hopes, cultures, and identities. If art museums were to operate as truly public institutions—ones that served a public representative of their surrounding communities—they could function as town square, a space for enacting the greater civic ritual of democracy. I recognize that these notions sound idealistic, especially in the face of some of the greatest wealth disparity and social stratification that the U.S. has born since 1929, but they are my hopes, and they are hopes that are shared by the museum community. The Center for the Future of Museums has identified this hope as the belief that museums
may function as what sociologist Elijah Anderson termed “cosmopolitan canopies”—zones within which the diversity of the museum’s local, regional, or national public may mingle in a social exchange of culture and ideas—and reiterated this hope in its 2010 and 2011 reports (Merritt & Golden, 2011; Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010). My motivations for this research are, ultimately, somewhat self-centered: I am a Latina art lover, one who views art museums as critical storytelling institutions and places that provide unparalleled opportunities to experience art, and a young museum professional who wishes, very much, that her 19th century cultural institutions continue to thrive into the 21st. I argue that this sustained vibrancy depends, in part, on art museums taking on an expanded role as open, accessible, and inclusive cultural institutions that welcome visitors from all cultures.
Chapter 3: Museum as Borderland

“Who speaks to the museum? No one tells the museum; the museum tells you.”
Dr. James H. Sanders III

I begin with this aphorism because it sounded so true: in an instant I realized that I had come to The Ohio State University because I loved the museum, and I was tired of it telling me what to do and think. It was time for me to talk back.

For the three years prior to undertaking my master’s, I worked at the National Gallery of Art, in the modern and contemporary department. It was, and is, a rarified position and one that has granted me tremendous experience and perspective. However, this perspective has often been one from the top of the art museum pyramid. As a well-funded, internationally recognized institution that enjoys relatively consistent federal support, a prime location on the National Mall, and the benefit of proximity to the Smithsonian campus without the Smithsonian politics, the Gallery (as its employees refer to it) serves and is practically guaranteed near five million annual visitors and a robust national presence and regard. Beyond being my former employer, the Gallery has been a formative part of my childhood as a Washingtonian. My mother marked my first outing as a three-week old infant to the Gallery with a sticker in the baby book and the note, “She loved the Calder mobile.” Whether a three-week old baby can espouse preferences regarding modern art is a subject of a child development or neuroscience paper, but in this case, that sticker marks my initiation into being an art museum lover. I was raised to enjoy and feel at home in Neoclassical and Beaux-Arts buildings, to not run, not touch,
and not talk too loudly, so that I could engage in sketching of art and contemplation of
the pictures and sculptures. My favorite shop in the D.C. area was the Gallery bookstore
in the East Wing, where I could expand my collection of famous artist biographies
penned and inked (with comics) by Mike Venezia. I remember large traveling
exhibitions, such as *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*, a show about the arrival
of Columbus and other Europeans in the Americas and the cultural products and world of
that time. Once in high school, I became a Mall rat–frequenting the Gallery, as well as
the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, and the National Museum of Women in
the Arts on weekends with my similarly bookish friends.

After attending college and majoring in Art History, I returned to the D.C. area
and found work at the museum that was the site of my first outing. I was fortunate and
am grateful that the National Gallery formed the start and the backdrop for a lifetime of
art museum visits and was thrilled at the chance to ‘come home’ in a sense to work at the
museum where my engagement with art had started. But, there are difficulties to going
home.

Though I admire and respect my colleagues at the Gallery, I became disillusioned
with the role of the museum as a member of the D.C. community. As Dr. Sanders noted,
the art museum was a place that spoke to people and not a place that listened. Within the
walls of the nation’s gallery, I heard very few conversations between museum leadership
and the nation’s people. Instead, the museum presented a ‘comprehensive’ view of
Western art, with the occasional pre-Columbian, near Eastern, or Asian traveling
exhibition punctuating a story of the great achievements of predominantly white, male
artists. Should a visitor wish to interject, comment cards were provided at the visitor services desk, so that he or she might write a note to be routed through external affairs to the relevant department. As a curatorial assistant, I received many of these comments and responded to inquiries and thoughts on National Gallery letterhead. Though far from its most authoritative or public voice, I had became one of the museum professionals telling the public.

This personal narrative situates me: I am a museum insider who was raised to relish the stories told by these institutions. I was trained in art history and am comfortable within the strictures of movements and formal innovations, just as I embrace counternarratives and art histories that decenter the Western narrative and complicate theories of modernism and postmodernism. But in becoming a museum insider, I realized what I had been missing from my position on the outside. The art museum I so loved, and still love, only loved me in certain ways. The Gallery did not confirm my identity as a Latina. When I visited the galleries with my family and family friends, we were often the only visitors speaking Spanish. Had I wanted to take a Spanish-language tour, only one docent out of a corps of more than fifty could have guided me. As a curatorial assistant, I realized the sparse representation of Latino and Latin American artists in the collection and, more than that, I noticed that few people ever asked how many such artists were represented in the collection (unlike the yearly, depressing, count of African American artists undertaken for Black History Month.) Despite the modern and contemporary curators’ efforts to collect and commission work from a broad range of artists of diverse backgrounds—and I must say that Harry Cooper and Molly Donovan have made
significant and commendable inroads in diversifying the modern and contemporary painting and sculpture collection since 2007--there existed limited executive support for lesser-known, and often racial and ethnic minority artists, whose work was perceived to be untested or controversial. For one of the first times, I realized that I was one of the only Latinas around the museum. And then I couldn’t stop noticing.

Recognizing my difference and belonging was a process, and one that I have begun to explore in this thesis. What I know now is from my own experience, which I value as an example of a particular Latina’s navigation of the comprehensive art museum, and from research regarding the theoretical framework of Western art museums and the histories of these institutions. One of my aims in this chapter is to discuss how the experience of the personal, at the level of the museum visitor, may be joined to the understanding of the institutional structure of the art museum in an initial exploration of how a Latino or Latina visitor, such as myself, negotiates a personal identity within a public cultural space. I use Carol Duncan’s conception of the American art museum as a ritual performance and space to address the processes of cultural validation and valorization underway within these institutions, then pair Gloria Anzaldúa’s theorization of the personal and psychological borderland to posit how a Latino visitor may negotiate his visit to a mainstream art museum as a cultural encounter. Just as my chapter has begun, I hope to assert a personal Latina voice into the discourse of the public art museum experience. I would like to speak to the museum.
Carol Duncan and Allan Wallach explored the historical, and corresponding architectural, constitution of the universal survey museum as the conversion of private, monarchical art collections to public holdings of the spoils of economic power (whether individually or nationally won) and military domination. Using a Foucauldian lens, they investigated how the universal survey museum space not only disciplines visitor bodies but also constitutes state power, through the visitor’s performance of “a ritual that equates state authority with the idea of civilization” (Duncan & Wallach, 2004, p. 53). This ritual is enacted by the visitor through the experience of the universal survey museum’s iconographic program, as developed in the art displayed, the decoration of the galleries, and the architecture that frames the artwork. Furthermore, Duncan and Wallach argued that the conceptual and economic shift from private, princely collection to public, state-owned art museum necessitated the development of new architectural models to proclaim the power of the state. Through an architectural analysis of iconic universal survey museums—most notably the Louvre and the National Gallery of Art, in Washington—the authors developed the idea that survey museums serve as sites where citizens might gain access to the highest accomplishments of culture, as owned and presented by the host state. However, this access is granted conditionally, as the visitor can only partake in this “spiritual wealth” of the state within the museum walls, “Hence the museum’s hegemonic function, the crucial role it can play in the experience of citizenship” (Duncan & Wallach, 2004, p. 59). Ultimately, the building of the survey museum becomes the very symbol of
state power and civilization, as in the National Gallery, whose Neoclassical architecture manifests the values and germinal appeal of Greco-Roman civilization, but whose walls hold no items from these cultures in its collection. These architectural references, when combined with an art historical program that features the highlights of the Western canon “certif[y] the claim to civilization and universality” (Duncan & Wallach, 2004, p. 67).

Despite the feigned universality of the Western survey museum, the growth and vigor of American ethnic art museums in the late 1960s and 1970s implicate that this universality was not fully recognized by all Americans. While it would be naïve and overreaching to imply that ethnic museum founders of the ‘60s and ‘70s viewed their nascent institutions as responses to Duncan’s theorization of the survey museum as a hegemonic space, I do believe that the creation of these museums occurred in opposition to a dominant museum paradigm that was perceived to be exclusive (Severin, 2011; Davalos, 1998). Duncan was only beginning to articulate her conception of the universal survey museum as a totalizing space that glorified the preferred historical and cultural narrative of the bourgeois nation-state in the 1970s, but she was not alone in recognizing that survey art museums spoke for a select few (Duncan, 1995).

Duncan made compelling arguments about the role of survey museums in not only representing culture, but also in constituting citizens of a state in her 1978 essay with Wallach. She elaborated on this exploration in Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums, a book that investigated the public art museum (whether a comprehensive survey museum such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art or a more select survey of history, such as the Museum of Modern Art) as a ritual enacted by visitors to these
particular institutional spaces (Duncan, 1995). Her geographic focus shifted from the conversion of princely European collections to public galleries for the nation’s citizens, to an analysis of how these political processes and traditions manifested themselves in the United States. She articulated the art museum not as solely an architectural space or a collection of art objects, but instead sited her analysis within the social and political dimensions of the art museum. According to Duncan, the institutional form of art museums produces ideology about “social, sexual, and political identity” and transmits these values to the museum visitor (1995, p. 2). In essence, the survey museum may purportedly welcome all visitors, but it encourages through its institutional culture, exhibitionary and architectural program, and displayed collection the performance of visitor identities as citizen-stakeholders of the arts within a bourgeois space. How might a Latina visitor challenge the art museum or conform to its ritual in her visit? Will she present her full self, or perform the aspects elicited by the museum?

Underlying these questions is the assumption that art museums are culturally coded spaces that can evoke the negotiation of particular cultural identities. Carol Duncan’s characterization of art museums as ritual spaces provides a conceptual framework for understanding how Latino visitors may perceive these institutions and negotiate their racial and ethnic identities within these spaces (1995). She asserted that art museums have a ritualized set of behaviors and expectations for visitor conduct, as well as an exhibition design that fosters moments of personal transcendence, which can be alienating for those visitors who do not conform to the behavioral code, or experience the proposed aesthetic rapture (Duncan, 1995). I have experienced this alienation when I
stepped outside of the artwork and realized that I was the only Latina in the galleries—at that juncture, my performance of the art museum ritual as one of overcoming self-consciousness in favor the aesthetic rapture was broken.

Furthermore, these institutions have the power to value and devalue particular aspects of a community’s aesthetic production, and assign worth to different artists, cultures, and modes of presentation (Lippard, 2000). Duncan elaborated the art museum’s power within the sociocultural sphere:

To control a museum means precisely to control the representation of community and its highest values and truths. It is also the power to define the relative standing of individuals within that community. Those who are best prepared to perform its ritual—those who are most able to respond to its various cues—are also those whose identities (social, sexual, racial, etc.) the museum ritual most fully confirms. (1995, p. 8)

In addition to these positions of authority in tastemaking and determining the cultural canon, art museums have the ability to endorse a particular individual’s identity in relation to how she perceives the museum and performs its ritual. Duncan’s theory that the art museum values a particular performance from the individual opens the field of analysis to whether visitors perform select aspects of their identities in response to the museum space and its expectations. Despite this opening, Duncan limited her investigation of the effect of the museum ritual on ideological production to an idealized visitor; furthermore, an idealized white, bourgeois visitor, as preferred by the art museum (1995, p. 3).
Ethnic and racial minority visitors within the U.S. and Europe have expressed feeling discomfort within art museums and cited this discomfort as a deterrent to visiting (Jermyn, Desai & Arts Council of England, 2000; Hood, 1993; Falk, 1993) as have non-visitors and infrequent visitors (Stylianou-Lambert, 2009). This discomfort has been largely dismissed within the scope of factors affecting visitor motivation to attend art museums, but I suspect that ignoring this discomfort deprives us of understanding how the background of racial and ethnic minority visitors may influence their experience of these institutions. Though it has not been widely researched through qualitative study, the gap in arts participation and art museum attendance between whites and racial/ethnic minorities is well-documented at the national level (NEA, 2008; DiMaggio & Ostrower, 1995) and somewhat explored by smaller studies (Hood, 1993; Falk, 1993). When it seems that racial/ethnic minority visitors and lower-middle class visitors refer to discomfort within the museum space, as well as an increased desire to visit when exhibitions or collections that are pertinent to their culture and life experience are displayed, I suggest that the art museum is functioning as a space of cultural encounter. Much as Duncan has articulated, the art museum is a ritual space and one that confirms certain identities over others. By applying Duncan’s theory, we might reach and elicit understandings of how minority visitors negotiate their own cultures within the performance of the museum’s cultural code, thus joining the visitor studies conducted on racial/ethnic minority visitors to a reckoning of the ideological workings of the survey art museum.
Speaking to the museum Using Anzaldúa to inscribe the person

“This is my home/ this thin edge of/ barbwire” Anzaldúa announced her home, her center as an impossible space, a borderland built on the fence erected along the U.S.-Mexico border—a political division that manifested the desires of the empowered to retain dominance over the displaced or dispossessed (2007, p. 25). Built around a psychologizing of a material condition, as there are many who live on the actual U.S.-Mexico border, this framework is one that expresses the inherent contradiction and shiftlessness of an identity made between two places/paradigms. When standing on ‘this thin edge of/ barbwire’ the Chicana is, physically, emotionally, and politically inhabiting a space that cannot be conventionally occupied and must create her own means of claiming this territory. Anzaldúa theorized this occupation as one of creating a psychological zone of movement—movement between cultures, locales, histories, and identities. In this way, the borderland becomes the organizing spatial metaphor for the new mestiza consciousness and a means of understanding zones of contact between two cultures, such as the contact between Latino visitors and the dominant culture of the survey art museum.

Because the borderland is internalized and moveable, it may be useful for museum researchers to see how, or whether, this borderland manifests itself in the distinction between institution and Latino visitor. Anzaldúa defined the borderland as a place of categorization and the imposition of a racialized economic and political power:

“What Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them…. A borderland is a vague and undetermined
place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants….The only ‘legitimate’ inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites.” (2007, pp. 25-6)

In my own experience, the borderland has appeared when I distinguish between myself as a museum professional and as a Latina and as a museum visitor. These identities all exist in a connected but distinct way, wherein it is only as a result of having become a museum professional that I realized I suppressed the Latina aspects of my identity in order to enjoy the National Gallery as a visitor. Though I was intimately familiar with the expected visitor performance in the ritual space of the museum, this performance did not confirm the fullness and complexity of my identity, leaving me in the borderlands (Duncan, 1995). Personally, I need to have more than two subject positions available to me, and I would prefer not to conceive of my relationship and negotiation of identity within art museums in dualistic terms. Were I to adopt these binaries, I would retrench myself in a conflict that is not entirely my own: I stand on many sides of the visitor experience.

Anzaldúa recognized the importance of mutability and transition as integral parts of an identity negotiation process. Instead of maintaining that Chicanas are bound to uphold either European or indigenous means of thinking and being, she articulated a position that allowed for movement between the two. The Coatlicue state resembles Deleuze’s notion of becoming, wherein an identity or concept is not firmly identified, named, and understood as a static entity, but instead recognized as in process. Through
her articulation of the Coatlicue state as a passing of mestiza consciousness from the real, grounded in a lived experience of the border, to the historical/spiritual imaginary of Nahua myth and an acceptance of the indigenous serpent, Anzaldúa began to undo the stasis of being (2007, pp. 64-65).

Arising out of the Coatlicue state, Anzaldúa described the Chicana subject recognizing a new mestiza consciousness. This consciousness was one born not out of the dialectical understanding that Spanish contact with the indigenous Mexican world led to mestizaje, but of mestizaje as an ongoing process that recurred through history, with the interactions of Europeans, indigenous peoples, Africans, and Asians in Mexico. Emerging from this syncretic, innovative relationship, “The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended” (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 102). Anzaldúa aligned duality with oppression and violence and suggested that the dismantling of dualistic thinking would augur a new world order, one free of “rape…violence…and war” (2007, p. 102). Though the political import of dualistic thinking falls outside of the scope of my project, I would like to highlight the strength of Anzaldúa’s conviction in favor of the complexity of the new mestiza consciousness. Where political and physical divisions had maintained a system of oppression, the us and them, through the mestiza consciousness, the Chicana is able to transgress those boundaries and recognize their interdependence in shaping her and her environment, both material and psychological. Anzaldúa declared of herself: “Soy un amasamiento, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced
both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings” (2007, p. 103). The mestiza consciousness is an expression of self-determination and autonomy, within a situation of both cultural rootedness and displacement, and this personal outlook encourages reflection on and analysis of the cultural influences on the development of the person.

The mestiza consciousness is an invitation to question and to dream, all while acknowledging the value of personal experience and complexity.

Anzaldúa’s focus on the personal, lived experience and her insertion of her own voice as a Chicana lesbian feminist into the theorization of the new mestiza consciousness affirms the importance of allowing the personal to inform the conceptualization of identity. Her forcefulness in asserting a theoretical understanding of this position is born of a need to carve a space for Chicanas to be both politicized Mexican Americans and women within a patriarchal and male-dominated Chicano nationalist discourse that marginalized the voices of women in favor of pursuing activism that supported the interests of male-led families (Davalos, 2001). In a way, *Borderlands/La Frontera* was a text written in defiance of the male, heterosexual dominance of the Chicano movement and Anzaldúa’s specificity in theorizing Chicana lesbian experience along with heterosexual Chicana experience should be understood in that light. However, her insistence on rooting this theoretical work within the boundaries of her own experience and addressing the experiences of men as distinct from women may be seen as divisive and limiting (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 105). Likewise, Latina women who are not queer or Chicana may feel themselves to be excluded from this articulation
of the new mestiza consciousness. Though Anzaldúa locates mestizaje and the mestiza consciousness within the geographic, economic, political, and historic terrain between Mexico and the U.S. and draws from Aztec mythology to inform this concept of identity and experience, the idea of the mestiza consciousness may be more broadly applied.

**Those who have spoken before me**

Karen Mary Davalos employed the idea of the mestiza consciousness in just such an expansive way: to analyze the experiences of Chicano and Mexican American visitors to art museums that represent their history and position. Davalos is one of the few scholars to have published research regarding the figuration of Chicanos and Mexican Americans as both museum subjects and the subjects of museum exhibition. Her critique was multidisciplinary and sought to make sense of the institution of the American museum; the history of racial, economic, and cultural politics in the U.S. and Mexico and the border in between; and how these elements impacted the Chicano visitor experience to a museum that represented his culture and cultural production (Davalos, 2001). This study comes to a focus in the National Museum of Mexican Art, an institution located in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago, which Davalos researched extensively as a means to understand some of the experiences and identification processes at work in a Chicano visitor’s trip to the museum.

In order to historically and theoretically situate the National Museum of Mexican Art, Davalos compared its cultural power operations to those of a Eurocentric art museum. Building from a Foucauldian framework, Davalos elaborated the idea that the
art museum establishes systems of classification and hierarchy as a means to contain culture and establish the supremacy of one heritage or history over another, specifically an Anglo-American history (2001). Furthermore, the systems of classification, established by art history and the norms of linear progression and evolution through time, function to validate the expertise of the museum and ensure that the objects displayed are not “a mirror of the real world, but a fable about the world, reflecting the biases and beliefs of those who contribute to its boundaries” (Davalos, 2001, p. 51). Duncan supported this idea in her identification of the art museum as a space dedicated to the promotion of a particular cultural ideology; within the art museum these borders are upheld between the guardians of the art and those who make pilgrimage to see the works and have the cultural heritage interpreted for them (1995).

By contrast, Davalos contended that the National Museum of Mexican Art supports an environment where Chicanos and Mexican-Americans are recognized and valued as worthy visitors whose cultural heritage is exhibited for interpretation by these visitors (2001). In this moment of interpretation, “Mexican visitors are moved from spectator to doer, participating in the negotiation of culture, community, and memory,” through their ability to see themselves represented in the exhibition, instead of marginalized from the museum collections (Davalos, 2001, p. 186). Anzaldúa’s idea of the new mestiza consciousness, with its embodied knowledge and recognition of multiple identities and subject positions, manifested itself in Davalos’s framing of the moment wherein Mexican visitors become doers. She argued that this validation of embodied knowledge and a cultural history carried within the person extended to the simplest of
exhibition elements: the visitor’s log. Likening the signing-in to the authorial claiming of urban spaces by graffiti artists and muralists, Davalos noted that the museum, by making a space for Latino visitors to insert their presence and representing them in its exhibition, “offers Mexican visitor the image of a mestizo/a body and confirms for them that the body they inhabit is real, flesh and blood, knowledge” (2001, p. 189).

There is power in the moment of recognition—the moment where a museum acknowledges the specific worth of its Latino visitor and of diversity of the Latino experience and Latino cultures in the U.S. and Latin America. I have yet to personally experience such a moment of recognition at a mainstream art museum. My closest example of feeling fully acknowledged as a Latina visitor came in New York, at a Francis Alÿs exhibition at Hispanic Society of America. There, in the Spanish Colonial gallery paneled entirely in age-darkened wood, among the many collected Saint Fabiola portraits, I found wall text in Spanish alongside wall text in English. Even though I didn’t need the Spanish to understand the exhibition, it was affirming and validating to know that it was there. However, this gallery space has a specifically Latin American curatorial and programmatic focus, and its location in Washington Heights, a predominantly Latino neighborhood, make it all the more sensible for the institution to consider Latinos and Latin Americans a vital part of its visitorship. I have yet to experience a similar moment of inclusion in an art museum without this cultural focus.

Ultimately, Anzaldúa’s conception of the borderland and the new mestiza consciousness may provide a language with which to speak of personal Latino experience of the art museum. Within the cultural system of art museum ritual, a mestizo
consciousness allows the opportunity to embrace, question, and negotiate the experiences offered and denied by the museum. Scholars have deployed this theory to explore the Latino visitor experience as a means of addressing the complexities of Latino identity within the museum space (Avila, 2002; Davalos, 2001). Though I cannot know with any certainty whether Latino visitors will bear out this particular theorization of the art museum visit experience, it has held true for me in its acknowledgment of shifting identity and the culturally loaded politics of visitor engagement. Just as museums are cultural institutions, not only exhibiting elements of culture but also defined by their own cultural history, so must the cultural background of Latino visitors be recognized in an attempt to understand their experiences within the museum.
Chapter 4: Situating Latinos within Art Museums

I am one of the only Latina art museum visitors I know. The other Latinos I can count on my family tree, or on my hands for the passel of Latina friends I have who also enjoy art and visiting museums. This dearth of knowledge seemed surprising to me, until I considered the field of Latino art museum visitor studies around me and realized: there was none. In the project to begin to articulate a field, I have conducted a review of the literature pertaining to Latinos as art museum visitors. My inquiry is preliminary and primarily serves to collect and critique some of the published research on how Latinos interact with art museums as visitors. I hope to identify major gaps that need to be filled and suggest some of the systemic reasons for why the many calls issued to diversify visitorship and staff have been incompletely or ineffectually answered by art museums. Most of all, I hope to begin to shift the role of the Latino art museum visitor from absence to presence, as I review the extant, published research on this underexamined group.

This chapter will outline the ways in which art museums have directly engaged with or conceived of Latinos, and explore how these relationships have been documented throughout museum literature. The museum community seems to have a set variety of roles for Latinos to play: absent demographic from the visitor rolls; miniscule minority of art museum professional staff and leadership; consumer subject of a performance/representation of Latinidad; desirable community partner, under Latino-
specific cultural circumstances; and outsider population deserving of outreach. Within most of these roles, Latinos, whether routine art museum visitors or not, are circumscribed to the margins. Art museums often view Latinos as a population outside the cultural sphere of the institution, and as a population that can be strategically accessed on the museum’s terms. Likewise, the museum literature does not focus on Latino visitors as agents within the constitution of the art museum experience, but instead represents Latinos as a quantifiable demographic, whether visitors or museum professionals. Given this bias, my chapter will begin with the first two roles for Latinos in art museums—visitor statistic or underrepresented museum professional.

**The Latino visitor as demographic**

One of the themes that emerges is the lack of knowledge regarding how and whether art museums are targeting Latino visitors, despite the many, and public, cries for augmenting visitor diversity. But, beyond this knowledge of whether and when art museums are reaching out to Latino visitors, there exists another gap regarding whether or not Latinos are actually attending art museums. I assume that individual museums may keep records of this sort, but little exists in the public domain. The primary information available to researchers and museum professionals comes from the National Endowment for the Arts Surveys of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA), an addendum to surveys administered by the Census.

Historically, the SPPA has provided scant, and incomplete information, on Latino participation in the arts nationwide. The 1982 and 1985 SPPAs were not set up to
accurately measure Latino identity/identification, which limits the utility of the research on participation. The SPPA race and ethnicity data was gathered through the self-identification of the respondents to the ethnicity question on the Census. Since the Census only provided the category of Hispanic to Latinos, respondents could not further parse their identities according to race. As a result, the complexity of Latino identity was poorly represented (DiMaggio & Ostrower, 1992). This simplification of racial identity within the Latino community may be quite significant; since levels of acculturation or belonging differ between white and non-white Latinos (Pew Hispanic Center, 2004) arts participation may vary between these two groups, as whites have been shown to visit art museums at higher rates than racial and ethnic minority respondents (DiMaggio & Ostrower, 1992). A later NEA study on the audiences of American art museums did not even bother to go beyond the black-white binary inherent in the SPPA, and claimed that arts participation among “Other” ethnicities was on par with that of whites (Schuster, 1991). The most recent SPPA did not disaggregate participation rates by region, which complicates efforts to analyze whether Latino participation in the arts is proportionally higher in areas with larger Latino populations (NEA, 2008).

I am interested in this question because I suspect that Latino arts participation, whether in art museums or at concerts, increases when Latino visitors see other Latinos engaging in the same activity and when there is a level of comfort and critical mass that validates the activity. Similarly, the SPPA is biased toward participation in “high culture” art events and institutions, and may discount the interest that Latinos express in cultural fairs and arts exhibitions in community centers and less formal environments.
(Rosenstein, 2005). As the SPPA does not reflect, or attempt to reflect, the complicated diversity of Latino identities across the country, it has been, and will be, quite difficult to assess arts participation nationally and the effect of art museums’ policies and programs to diversify their visitorship.

The constraints arising from the structure of the SPPA affect the studies originating from this data. For example, some scholars argue that the interaction of structural constraints (lack of time, lack of funds, lack of transportation) and personal motivations (museums are boring, stuffy, cold) is the most powerful factor in determining whether a person is a visitor or a non-visitor and in characterizing their perceptions of the art museum (Jun, Kyle & O'Leary, 2008; Dierking & Falk, 2000; Beeho et al., 1997).

But this pairing of the personal and the structural simplifies the experiences of the visitor, and often does not encourage researchers to account for the role of visitor identity in their study. In 2008, leisure study scholars analyzed data collected from the 1997 SPPA in order to identify national constraints to museum use among potential visitors (Jun et al.). This study encompassed data from the entire country, and addressed urban as well as rural areas, which have vastly different availability of museums. Their analysis revealed that structural constraints, such as ticket cost, lack of museum availability, inconvenient museum location, and lack of time were most significant in determining non-visititation (Jun et al., 2008.) The complaints least frequently voiced by respondents were interpersonal or sociocultural in nature, such as feeling uncomfortable, health concerns, or poor exhibit quality (Jun et al., 2008). A cursory reading of the article suggests that an individual’s racial or ethnic identity bears little weight in predicting whether that person
might be a museum visitor.

However, this data was rarely segmented according to rural or urban respondents, with the exception of noting that higher incomes were statistically significant in removing structural constraints for urban respondents (Jun et al., 2008). In not disaggregating responses by region, or addressing the geographic specificity or distribution of perceptions of structural constraints, the researchers may have inadvertently privileged the constraints of rural respondents in their reporting. As these rural respondents likely vary demographically from urban populations (they may be significantly less racially or ethnically diverse), their widely cited lack of available museums and lack of transportation/access as constraints may not reflect issues of cultural disruption or sociocultural exclusion. Jun, Kyle, and O’Leary recognized some of the limitations of the generic SPPA scale in not measuring perceptions specific to the art museum context and recommended that further research should acknowledge personal responses to museums (2008).

The Association of American Museums acknowledges the proportionately low visitation rates of racial and ethnic minorities. The association has been sounding the call for increasing diversity in the country’s museums since its 1984 report, Museums for the Next Century, which framed diversity as a vital consideration for museums in light of the increasingly pluralistic nature of the country (AAM). This report was the first notice the professional membership organization gave to its national network of museums of the importance of demographic change. Embedded within this attention to shifting population statistics was the implication that museums could no longer wait for visitors to
assimilate and accept them on their institutional terms; by specifically indicating the pluralism of the nation, the AAM authors alluded to the disappearance of the melting pot, and with it the expectation that eventually the nation’s public would become the museum’s public. Though this warning could have been viewed as a threat by the country’s museums, it does not appear to have yielded much effect as museums have yet to resolve or make significant progress in answering the diversity question.

In 2010, the Center for the Future of Museums published a report that—again—challenged museums to diversify their visitorship in order to make ready for the major demographic shifts anticipated in the United States (Farrell & Medvedeva). The report asserted that historically, non-Hispanic whites have constituted the core visitor population of museums but that by 2050, this population will no longer be the majority demographic group in America. However, the authors did not anticipate that this shift to a ‘minority-majority’ situation would be mirrored in museum visitor statistics. Without outreach efforts, museums may keep their current visitation rate of having only nine percent of visitors belonging to a minority group. As the proportion of the public that frequents art museums and its racial/ethnic diversity relative to the general American population decreases, so will the cultural relevance of these institutions (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010). Though the report advocated that museums move to a more engaging, participatory model to attract audiences, it was not specific in advocating Latino outreach. However, its statistics make clear that it is particularly important to target Latinos, as they are the fastest growing minority group and the youngest. One in four children is Latino, and these children, if welcomed and encouraged, could constitute
a large proportion of new visitors for museums (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). Given the furor that surrounds attracting young professionals to art museums, and the interest in developing new audiences for art museums, it is peculiar that Latinos, a young and ever-growing population that is now quite likely to speak English fluently, have not been targeted as a resource for art museums seeking to expand their popularity (Pew Hispanic Center, 2004).

**Latinos missing from museum personnel**

It is striking that despite nearly forty years of research and reports issued by the foremost professional association in the museum field, the imperative to diversify its staff in the hopes of diversifying its visitation has gone largely unheeded within the art museum community. One possible explanation for this inattention emerges from my personal experience working at the National Gallery and is echoed by other museum professionals: there is almost no diversity in professional museum staffs—whether at the top in the director’s office; in the middle with curators and senior educators; or toward the bottom, in the assistant and instructor corps that would, at the very least, provide visibility for people of color within the art museum. Without Latinos and other ethnic and racial minorities to solicit the attention and opinions of visitors like themselves, how are museum staffs to recognize the limitations of their rather monochrome public?

Ríos-Bustamante set out to document the presence (or significant absence) of Latino staff among art and historical museums in 1991 and 1992 (Ríos-Bustamante, 1998). He sent out surveys to the top 1,000 art museums in the U.S., based on their
budget and funding levels, as well as to museums that collected predominantly Latino art or were located in predominantly Latino communities. Of these surveys, 108 art museums responded, indicating that only fifty-one out of 1,732 professional art museum staff members were Latino (Ríos-Bustamante, 1998, p. 133). That barely .03% of the reported art museum staff in 1991-1992 were Latino is shocking. More disheartening is that this percentage has not, to my knowledge, been updated with another survey of art museum personnel and their specific ethnicity. Without any systematic documentation, how are art museums to know whether they are improving their diversity, and by how much?

AAM’S 1992 report *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums* has been lauded as the moment when museum education stepped to the fore of the museum’s mission and when American museums reoriented themselves toward public service and a visitor focus. This report strongly recommended that museums consider not only the diversity of their publics, but also how to diversify their staffs so as to better exemplify the demographics of their area and attract new segments of their community to their institutions (AAM, 1992). In recognizing the dual challenge of public and personnel diversity, the publication did make a step toward ameliorating the demographic divide between museums and society. Yet voicing the problem does not seem to have solved it, as we still find museum professionals calling for greater diversity within the field (Bunch, 2000; Tortolero, 2000; Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010). Despite its stern admonitions to museums to serve the diversity of the national community, and view this diversity as a resource to be drawn into the museum complex, there were few metrics
set for how museums might measure their own success. Museum professionals continue
struggle with how to assess diversity—whether as the enumeration and naming of
racial/ethnic minority staff; and/or the participation, membership, and visitation rates of
racial/ethnic minority visitors—and the subject frequently arises at professional
conferences and in online discussions. Perhaps this lack of assessment or a common
definition of what constitutes diversity may account for the uncertain efforts of museums
to diversify in the intervening years.

In 2000, the deputy director of the National Museum of American History, a part of
the Smithsonian Institution, recounted his feelings of loneliness and disorientation when
encountered with predominantly white museum professional functions (Bunch). He
likened the experience of being one of the sole black faces to that of being a ‘fly in the
buttermilk’ (the titular phrase of his article,) implying the stark physical contrast between
himself and his white colleagues. This under-representation of minority museum
professionals was disheartening to him at the start of his career in the 1970s, but even
more disheartening to him at the start of the new millennium, when the generations of
minority students who had benefited from affirmative action and museum diversity
internships, fellowships, and other recruitment efforts were still not present in any
significant numbers at AAM or AAMD (Bunch, 2000). He framed the article as an
exhortation to the museum community to continue recruiting and developing minority
talent within its professional ranks, as the status quo was not satisfactory. Most recently,
Farrell and Medvedeva found that only 20% of American museum staff belonged to a
racial or ethnic minority, and suggested that this dearth of representation posed a
challenge to the diversification of museum audiences (2010). Of this small percentage, we do not know how many identify as Latino.

Within the metaphor of flies in the buttermilk, Bunch did not examine the unwantedness of the flies. Carlos Tortolero, the director of the National Museum of Mexican Art, responded to Bunch’s article with the assertion that museums, particularly art museums, remain predominantly white because of racist hiring practices (2000). He dismissed the claim that museums couldn’t hire more diverse staff due to a lack of applicants, given that he had been deluged by the applications of qualified and worthy candidates for curatorial, educational, and other professional positions within his institution (Tortolero, 2000). Though this information is anecdotal, as it only pertains to one art museum, it does suggest that art museums could do more to recruit—and hire—diverse applicants for its professional staff. Tortolero argued that without diversity throughout the staff, the museum would not be able to foster inclusiveness and diversity throughout its visitors (2000). Tortolero’s political position as a museum director may be somewhat rare: instead of serving as a curator before assuming directorship of a museum, Tortolero co-founded the National Museum of Mexican Art as an educator, with the assistance of a fellow educator, Helen Valdez (Davalos, 2001). His grounding in education may explain his interest in the concerns of the people and the public (whether in the form of museum staffing or in establishing a space in which to exhibit Mexican and Mexican-American art) instead of a singular dedication to the glory of the artwork.

The problem of a lack of diversity within art museum personnel is magnified in the concerns of its directorate. A search of the reports published by the Association of Art
Museum Directors yields only one report, from 2007, that addresses concerns of diversity within museum staff or visitors (AAMD, 2011). This document is actually a statement that was issued to the U.S. Congress in defense of the tax-deductible status of donations made to art institutions. The mention of diversity is only a political gambit to appeal to the legislators’ dedication to the service of the public good. After all, the art museums directors did not provide hard statistics on just how many visitors of particular backgrounds visited their institutions annually, instead conflating diversity with “school visits” and building an image of incredible public service with the rhetorical abuttal of “the parlous state of art education in the public schools, especially in inner-city schools” and the claim that “art museums are the sole source of exposure to visual art for many at-risk children and youth” (AAMD, 2007, p. 1). The report’s authors even had the audacity to cite the 1992 AAM report, *Excellence and Equity*, commitment to “…reflect the diversity of our society by establishing and maintaining the broadest public dimension for the museum” as a principle that was “now universally accepted in [the museum] field,” despite never providing more than anecdotal evidence of how this was the case (AAMD, 2007, p. 2). Such lip service exposes the minor gains that have been made in moving Latino museum professionals, and other racial and ethnic minorities, up the staffing ladder to executive positions.

Beyond the walls of the museum, racial and ethnic minority visitors, and non-visitors, have expressed that the lack of staff that represents their communities is a deterrent to visitation. The feeling of art museum exclusion has been documented amongst affluent, well-educated, African-American adults, who grew up participating in
cultural activities and were sophisticated cultural consumers. Despite their background, which could suggest an affinity for art museums, these survey respondents held negative beliefs about the institutions. Notably, all of the grievances revolved around the perceived lack of representation of African-American identity throughout all levels of the museum (Hood, 1993). The non-visitors criticized the museum’s Eurocentric collection, token outreach during Black History Month, lack of diversity in the docent corps, select African-American representation on the boards (“One black person on the board doesn’t mean anything”), chilly welcome, and insincere desire to partner with the African-American community (Hood, 1993, p. 6). The most scathing indictment came from respondents who objected to art museums’ unequal approach to partnering; one man said: “…institutions often give lip service by saying they want the organization to be inclusive of all groups, but when they make decisions, they’re restrictive on who’s involved….Being really serious means sharing power (Hood, 1993, p. 7).” This critique implied a need for structural change within an art museum’s organization before the African-American community would feel like a welcome collaborator and participant in the museum.

If Latinos reflect the negative views of the African-American professionals (and non-visitors) interviewed by Marilyn Hood, then there would seem to be little hope of expanding Latino visitorship (1993). Should Latinos be interested in the ‘power-sharing’ cited as necessary for art museums by African-American non-visitors, then art museums are faced with a more daunting prospect than just targeting their educational programs and curatorial efforts to minority communities: they will need to incorporate Latino
representation within their power structure (Hood, 1993). Such change is systemic, and would likely necessitate that more minority students enter the museum professions in order to assume positions of influence within the curatorial, educational, design, and administrative aspects of museums, collections, and exhibitions—a complicated endeavor and one that may take significant time.

**From national data to specific institutions**

If national survey data on Latino engagement with art museums is neat, but incomplete, then the information surrounding how individual institutions collaborate with or conceive of their Latino visitors is sprawling and unsystematic. The lack of published Latino visitor studies forced me to adopt alternate approaches and points of entry for making sense of the relationships between Latino visitors and art institutions. The first was to use of the Day of the Dead as an organizing analytic by which to characterize distinct institutions’ engagement with Latinos. Since little has been written specifically about how art museums engage with Latinos, observing how one of the more high-profile Chicano/Mexican/Latino holidays is framed by art museums may offer insight into how Latino publics are perceived. A range of publications, from exhibition catalogues that focus on the artwork displayed to critical analyses of the Chicano v. Mexican celebration of the holiday, exist, thus allowing for multiple vantages from which to examine the Day of the Dead in the United States and its presentation at art museums.

The second was to approach the question of Latino visitor engagement geographically, by focusing on major U.S. cities that have, and have historically had,
significant Latino population. Within these cities, I reviewed the efforts of distinct mainstream museums to produce exhibitions, programming, and publications that would appeal to a Latino visitor population. My hope was that this geographic approach would yield institutions that had both the need and the opportunity to engage with Latino visitors, resulting in a gamut of programs, exhibitions. With these parameters in mind, I focused my study of Latino visitor engagement on a number of geographic centers: New York City; Chicago, Illinois; Houston and Dallas, Texas; Denver, Colorado; Los Angeles, California; and the Bay Area, comprising Oakland and San Francisco, California.

My most sustained, and personal, museum experience was at the National Gallery in D.C. Having grown up with this institution and worked there for three years prompted me to take an interest in art museums that presented ‘encyclopedic’ or ‘comprehensive’ collections and were located in major metropolitan areas with significant Latino populations. In selecting for this criterion, I anticipated that the museums would have had the time to not only recognize the need to serve their area’s Latino population, but also develop means to address their interests within the museum. Within the metropolitan areas I identified, I researched the Latino visitor engagement undertaken by the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC); the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH); the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA); the Queens Museum of Art, in New York City (QMA); the Denver Art Museum (DAM); and the Dallas Museum of Art (DMA).

In attempting to capture an outline of how art museums across the country have engaged with Latino visitors, I interweave the information gleaned through both a
geographic focus and the exploration of the Day of the Dead observation. This mingling of approach provides a somewhat telescopic view of the geographic areas and the specific programs, alternating between the details of a particular event, and the more general exposition of Latino outreach and engagement tactics at varied institutions. Ultimately, this collaged writing reinforces the absence of a single vantage point from which to study Latino visitor engagement at American art museums.

_A brief history of El Día de los Muertos, the Day of the Dead, in the U.S._

The celebration of _El Día de los Muertos_ in the United States is inextricably tied with the Chicano rights movement of the 1960s and ‘70s and the activist fervor that energized Chicano communities across the country. For Chicano immigrants and migrants, the holiday was a symbol of a cultural tie to Mexico, and became a means of asserting a public identity that honored their indigenous background. This indigenous connection was especially significant, given that the traditions assumed by the new Chicano celebrants were not consonant with those of their native regions of northern and northwestern Mexico; instead, Chicanos in the U.S. adopted the customs of Oaxaca, Chiapas, and other southern states. These southern states are predominantly indigenous, and large portions of their populations are monolingual speakers of an indigenous language, eschewing engagement with Spanish-influenced culture (Marchi, 2009; Mexico, 2010). For a group protesting the extension of empire—as seen in the American invasion of Vietnam, and in its unjust farm labor policies—to identify with an indigenous part of Mexico that had resisted Spanish colonial pressures was an act of resistance (Mesa-Bains, 1998). Beyond neo-indigenous reflection, Día de los Muertos offered an
opportunity to cope with the presence of death, poverty and exploitation in barrio life through a ritual that, “like acts of resistance…revealed what was true and real. In Día de los Muertos, art empowers to indict the poverty of society in the presentation of cultural memory” (Mesa-Bains, 1998, p. 7). The holiday even became, via the commemoration of the dead, a way to remember and represent Chicano history.

With this weighty political and historic charge in mind, it is revealing to see which art museums and institutions have embraced the holiday’s place as a celebration not only of the dead, but also of the living Chicano, Mexican, or Latino spirit and culture. A brief history provides insight into the ways that institutions have chosen to exhibit holidays and artwork that challenge their cultural and ideological orientation, or not, as well as the ways that they have perceived their Latino public.

The Galería de la Raza in San Francisco was instrumental in bringing Día de los Muertos art and celebration into the public sphere of art museums and galleries. In 1972, it mounted the first documented Día de los Muertos art exhibition, in collaboration with Self-Help Graphics, a print studio and workshop in Los Angeles. This exhibition and its programming was so successful, that the Galería de la Raza made the program and exhibition an annual tradition. One of their especially noteworthy exhibitions was the 1978 show, Homenaje a Frida Kahlo. This exhibition inspired and influenced feminist and Chicana artmakers such as Carmen Lomas Garza and Amalia Mesa-Bains, and left an imprint on the telling of Chicana and Mexican art history (Galería de la Raza, 2011). The National Museum of Mexican Art, formerly known as the Mexican Fine Arts Center, has also supported Día de los Muertos programming and exhibitions since 1986. These
programs initially served the needs of the surrounding neighborhood of Pilsen, which remains a predominantly Chicano Chicago area. Mesa-Bains also credits these early exhibitions at the Galería de la Raza and the National Museum of Mexican Art, with providing a space for artistic transculturation, whereby the exhibiting artists transformed *altares* from traditional, three-tiered displays in the home, to art installations that addressed contemporary social issues (1988). Both these institutions have been longstanding, and prominent celebrants of the holiday as one that emerges from the actual observation of Día de los Muertos in the neighborhoods in which they are situated.

Within this framework, visiting Latinos or Chicanos were engaged in a cultural observation that was rooted in contemporary, North American, production and not in a fantasy of what celebrating the holiday in southern Mexico would have been like.

**Latin flavor: Consuming Latinidad**

Art museums may strategically deploy, or exhibit, facets of Latino cultures and identities for a broad range of visitors and consumers through educational and curatorial programs that do not seek to develop partnerships with their Latino visitors or subjects. These interactions may bear the marks of spectacle, festival, or simplistic educational program. They may be born out of the museum’s institutional desires, and not in response to a community desire. As such, the programs’ engagement with the complexities of Latino cultures may stop at the presentation of a Latino image and not extend into the exhibition of a work created with a Latino audience. This category emerged out of my examination of El Museo del Barrio’s annual programming for El Día de los Muertos, as
well as the Renwick Gallery’s 1982 presentation of a Day of the Dead celebration. In both cases, the Latino cultures in question were treated by the museums as products: nonconfrontational subject matter for easy consumption.

_Muchas as consultants_

In 1982, the Smithsonian’s Renwick Gallery was the stage for another celebration of Día de los Muertos as a site of neo-indigenous reflection, and resistance to the emerging idea of Día de los Muertos as a uniquely Chicano affair. In the early 1980s, there were many Central American immigrants living in DC, some of whom were contacted by the Smithsonian to bring life and participatory presentations to the museums’ static exhibitions and “reinforce the concept of celebration” (Cadaval, 1985, p. 179). Olivia Cadaval, a scholar who assisted in the organization of the resulting event, described it:

The participating Latino community felt proud to display their culture in a national museum and playfully referred to the event as “La toma de la Renwick.” The formal French Empire Salon of the Renwick was “taken” by Latino Virgins and Christs, homemade paper crafts, a cemetery complete with earth-covered graves and wooden headstones, and an atmosphere pervaded by bright colors, church incense, votive candles, and festival foods.

(1985, p. 180)

There was a sense of playfulness and resistance to the decorative, cultural, and socioeconomic mores of the Renwick in this celebration. Where a salon was modeled after the elite style of a colonizing nation, the Latinas in charge of the exhibition and
program inserted their own indigenous and mestiza voices and visual culture, in a gesture evocative of Fred Wilson’s invocation of the African-American history absent from the Maryland Historical Society (Corrin, 2004). But, where Wilson acted as an artist and curator, the women who organized “la toma de la Renwick” were not recognized as occupying, or given the credence of, either of these roles. Though the Smithsonian commissioned the exhibition and program, the administration turned over the organization of it to an independent committee, in a gesture of some extent of power-sharing. It would, however, be worthwhile to problematize why the Smithsonian believed that a Latin American holiday would enliven its staid galleries, but that is an investigation I’ll have to leave for another inquiry. At the moment, my reliance on Cadaval’s account—the organizer of the event and the author of the source article—leaves me questioning how the exhibition was received, and what impact it had on visitors, especially as the visitors were primarily non-Latino (Cadaval, 1985).

This celebration is noteworthy because it reflected the cultural, religious, and economic background of the nine Latinas who primarily coordinated the program. They insisted that the graves be simple, or humildes, in Spanish, and that the event be an accurate recreation of rural celebrations of the holiday across El Salvador, Nicaragua, Ecuador, and Guatemala—their countries of origin (Cadaval, 1985). Though they were all present for the event, and available to engage with the visitors, I am curious to know whether they were perceived as interpreters, merely reenacting a set of customs, or as authorities with personal knowledge and cultural understanding of the traditions and art presented. It would also be useful to know whether the event was perceived primarily as a
staging of Día de los Muertos as celebrated across Latin America, and not as a holiday with currency and practitioners in the U.S.

If the celebration at the Renwick had broken from the representation of Día de los Muertos as a holiday that occurred most often, or most authentically, outside the U.S., it would have been a quite unusual event at a large, mainstream art institution. From what I can gather, based on research of catalogues and exhibition brochures published, most shows from the 1980s and 1990s framed Día de los Muertos as a Mexican holiday, not a Chicano or Mexican-American celebration. This presentation of the holiday as Mexican, or Latin American, situates the celebration in a foreign cultural space, and one less fraught with the considerations of the political import and cultural presence of Latinos in the United States. With the exception of shows and programming at the National Museum of Mexican Art, the Galería de la Raza, Self-Help Graphics, and other Bay Area arts institutions, Día de los Muertos was not celebrated for Latinos or by Latinos. The holiday was framed as a cultural event meant to educate and entertain non-Latinos. As such, Latinas were brought in to the Renwick to act as guest consultants in the creation of a temporary program. These women were not given the status or responsibilities of curators, and it is difficult to trace whether their engagement with the Renwick Gallery and the Smithsonian Institution left any lasting imprint on the museum complex.

*Latinos and Latinidad for consumption*

In New York City, the celebration of El Día de los Muertos may seem less likely to follow a liturgical or cultural calendar, and more likely to fall in line with established corporate sponsorship. El Museo del Barrio, a leading museum in the collection and
display of Latino and Latin American (especially Puerto Rican) art, has been celebrating el Día de los Muertos since 2004 through the support of Target (Brandes, 2006). The company funds an ongoing program called SUPER SABADO! Target Free Third Saturdays, which features free admission and educational family programming on the third Saturday of every month. During the month of October, the focus has been on celebrating the Día de los Muertos, through a day of festivities that typically include an outdoor procession, traditional Mexican musicians (such as mariachi bands), puppet shows, craft activities, face-painting, and food. The most recent celebration occurred on October 16, 2011, a date that bears no relation to the days of the dead, October 31-November 2, and whose estrangement from the traditional days of celebration was never indicated in the online promotional page (El Museo, 2011). El Día de los Muertos skims the institutional surface of El Museo del Barrio, existing in the temporary realm of educational programming put on by the staff of the museum, much like other holidays, such as Three Kings’ Day, the popular Puerto Rican celebration of Epiphany (Dávila, 2005).

Instead of focusing on spirituality, community, and the dynamism and continuity of cultural traditions, the Día de los Muertos programming at El Museo del Barrio delivers entertainment with a Mexican aesthetic. The holiday is used to draw visitors in to the museum, from the day’s beginning in a parade from Central Park (a more culturally accessible and perhaps neutral place to begin a celebration and collect participants than the museum’s own neighborhood of Spanish Harlem), to arrival at the street outside the
museum, where free face painting prepares children to perform as walking *calaveras*, skeletons, or advertisements for the event.

Once inside the museum, the events continue to encourage visitors to consume rather than create. A café, musical and theatrical performances, and bilingual gallery tours, all reinforce the visitor’s ability to show up at the museum and begin enjoying the holiday through passive reception. The most interactive opportunities appear to be at the “Retablo Making & CalaVera [sic] Mobiles” station, where families can make their own “unique *retablo* inspired by Latin American folk art tradition, along with a fun *calavera* mobile” (*El Museo*, 2011). Though *retablos*—small, devotional paintings common throughout Latin America—do appear within celebrations of *El Día de los Muertos*, especially in the context of home *altares* or in artists’ and community members’ public *ofrendas*, offerings—they are not particular to the holiday and may hold wide appeal for a Latino, and especially Catholic, audience. Likewise, *calaveras* are a common image throughout el Día de los Muertos celebrations, but their presentation as mobiles renders them into portable children’s toys that may be taken home and enjoyed as souvenirs of a day out.

The generalized appeal and presentation of el Día de los Muertos may speak to the mass audiences the museum hopes to attract. El Museo del Barrio proudly announces that it has increased its annual visitation from 20,000 to 250,000 in the past decade. Concurrently, under the direction of its first non-Puerto Rican director, Julián Zugazagoitia, the museum shifted its mission to exemplify not only the cultural production of Puerto Ricans, but also all Latin Americans (*El Museo*, 2011). To match
the expanded mission and focus (or perhaps the new mission was the result of wanting new visitors) Zugazagoitia endeavored to diversify the visitorship to the museum and noted in an interview: “Perhaps my greatest satisfaction is that more Latinos are coming, and more diverse Latinos, but non-Latinos are coming, too” (Sheets, 2011). This expansion has not come without costs, as there were protests surrounding the new director’s appointment, and concerns about the loss of a distinctly Puerto Rican museological voice to a more generic Latin American, or even Mexican perspective (Dávila, 2005).

With an expanded population, and a desire to continue growing, it follows that El Museo del Barrio has appealed to a celebration of consumption more than culture. This appeal also fits in within the surrounding discourse of el Día de los Muertos in New York City. Stanley Brandes describes the burgeoning awareness of a Mexican presence in the New York metro area with this anecdote:

“My first indication that the Day of the Dead was relevant to New Yorkers came with a New York Times full-page spread, which appeared on Sunday, October 24, 2004. The article dealt specifically with the Day of the Dead as celebrated in Mexico City and was directed towards American tourists flying there for the holiday. Three days later, the normal Wednesday food section…highlighted Mexican Day of the Dead culinary specialties within New York City itself….At Starbucks, there suddenly became available for purchase organic coffee from Chiapas, served in paper cups decorated with Day of the
Dead iconography….Art centers in suburban Westchester County offered craft workshops and lectures to children and adults alike.” (2006, p. 155)

Though the quote is long, it speaks to the positioning of the holiday as one of consumption for a mass public. *El Día de los Muertos* is advertised not as a personal, or political, holiday grounded in Latino heritage, but as an extension of tourism to Mexico. Whether the transport to Mexico occurs by plane or by bodega, Starbucks or suburban craft activity, the journey is to a place outside of the United States. The holiday, as one that has significant roots in the Chicano rights movement in the States, has been neutered and displaced to an escapist locale, an idea of a connection to Mexico. Despite Mexicans constituting one of the fastest-growing immigrant groups in New York, the Day of the Dead, as represented in the popular visual culture of the city and the museum appears not to be for them (Brandes, 2006). Their low visitation rates to the SUPER SABADO! celebration day confirms this disconnect; Zugazagoitia posited that even with the free admission, recent Mexican immigrants to the city were unable to afford to take a Saturday off from work (Brandes, 2006).

To an extent, El Museo del Barrio has succumbed to Judith Mastai’s conception of ‘the museum visitor’ as a generic identity; the institution believes it is appealing broadly, and deeming its publics interchangeable based on an assumed desire for the consumption of Mexican cultural products. The allure of free admission, a carnivalesque atmosphere, and entertainment geared toward children is presumed to drive the visitors’ lines of desire through the door, as the visitors are getting what they probably want out of a Saturday and not challenged with an educational experience (Mastai, 2007). Though the
former director acknowledged diversity across a range of cultural backgrounds, distinguishing between different Latino groups as well as non-Latino groups, the museum does not seem to account for economic disparities. A Saturday event may be free, but that does not mean that it is accessible, particularly to those who work jobs outside the scope of the 9-5, 40-hour workweek.

Despite El Museo del Barrio being a space dedicated to the display of Latino and Latin American art, and its history as having been founded through the Puerto Rican community of Spanish Harlem’s desire for a museum, its engagement with Latino visitors in its El Día de los Muertos programming seems minimal. Latino visitors are incidental to the success of the program, and the traditions of Mexico are not used, so much as represented as an aesthetic. Likewise, visitors can walk into the museum and enjoy the performances and activities regardless of background; there is no required community involvement for the execution of the event. In this case, Latino visitors are perceived as a likely, if not necessary public, and not solicited to cooperate in the planning or presentation of the program as a resource. El Museo del Barrio has made a product, as simple and pleasant as the Day of the Dead coffee from Chiapas at Starbucks, to be consumed by as many New Yorkers as possible.

El Museo del Barrio, in the case of this program, is acting much like a mainstream art museum in that their treatment of the Day of the Dead reflects little engagement with the surrounding Latino community, and instead presents a homogenized, aestheticized version of the holiday as a Mexican celebration. I should note that this particular programmatic approach is not indicative or representative of the full range of their
engagement with Latino cultures, artists, or art. As a counterexample, their upcoming exhibition *CARIBBEAN: Crossroads of the World*

“will highlight over two centuries of rarely-seen works from the Haitian Revolution (c. 1804) to the present. The show features more than 400 works including painting, sculpture, prints, books, photography, film, video and historic artifacts from various Caribbean nations, Europe and the United States. Transcendent in scope, *CARIBBEAN: Crossroads* examines the exchange of people, goods, ideas and information between the Caribbean basin, Europe and North America and explores the impact of these relationships on the Caribbean and how it is imagined.

(Queens Museum of Art, 2012)

This exhibition promises to be a complex undertaking, involving partnership with two other New York City institutions—The Studio Museum, in Harlem, and the Queens Museum of Art—and takes a sweeping view of the Caribbean as an arena in which historical, economic, political, and cultural global exchange has left an indelible mark on the cultures of its peoples. Perhaps it is inappropriate to compare an educational program that is not backed by any object- or exhibition-based curatorial effort (the Day of the Dead) with a significant exhibition of over 400 objects and the support of three museums, but this disparity in approach reinforces the complexity of Latino visitor engagement. Within the same institution, in this case El Museo del Barrio, it is possible to have dramatically different forms of engagement at work. With the 2011 celebration of the Day of the Dead, El Museo del Barrio acceded to a homogenizing, aestheticized,
*Latinized*, representation of the holiday as a neutral festival that had Mexican roots, but little in the way of contemporary, individual Latino practice.

Arlene Dávila thoroughly examined the complications resulting from the tension at play between Latino and Latin American within the context of the politics of class, race, ethnicity, and nationality at El Museo from the late ‘90s through Zugazagoitia’s first years as director (2005). Building upon her work in Latino marketing, and the construction of a homogenized marketing category for a heterogeneous Latino consumer base (2001), Dávila analyzed how these categories worked as part of El Museo’s project to Latinize itself by diminishing the importance of its working class, Puerto Rican, diasporic roots (2005). In making this transition, the museum located itself in a more politically neutral position outside the discourse of Latino struggle and marginalization in the U.S. and asserted its role as a museum that both appealed to Latino (not Puerto Rican) visitors, thus ensuring its mass appeal to corporate funders; and as an institution that curated with an eye toward national and international appeal, not just community and neighborhood reach. El Museo’s presentation of el Día de los Muertos was consonant with a larger project to Latinize itself and reflected the institutional practice of preparing Latino and Latin American culture for general consumption. In the case of el Día de los Muertos, Latinos may have been intended to be a part of that consuming audience, but they were meant to be consumers, not participants or collaborators in a community celebration. Likewise, ‘la toma de la Renwick,’ may have been born of the efforts of Latinas who represented their personal, lived, celebrations of el Día de los Muertos, but it was ultimately received as a performance of Latinidad for a mass audience, many non-
Latino. Within these contexts, Latino visitors and their specific connection to Latino art and cultural customs were elided in favor of a more marketable, broadly appealing product.

**Latinos as desirable community partners**

In developing programs for a Latino audience, institutions should remember the value and power of museum collaboration with its intended audience. This call for greater minority audience inclusion in programming choices has been sounded for decades—in 1969 Julia Hare, one of the coordinators of education and organizers of community outreach at the Oakland Museum, put it plainly, “People are steadily getting tired of people planning for them rather than with them” (Harvey, Friedberg & Seminar, 1971, p. 3). African-American professionals, echoed this sentiment over twenty years later: “...institutions often give lip service by saying they want the organization to be inclusive of all groups, but when they make decisions, they’re restrictive on who’s involved.... Being really serious means sharing power” (Hood, 1993, p. 7). Nina Simon updated this concept of planning with and sharing power in her book, *The Participatory Museum*, and termed this type of partnership between museum and community as an example of co-creative endeavors—ones in which museums trust and value the opinions and expertise of their community partners (2010). Simon highlighted the Oakland Museum of California’s Days of the Dead celebration and exhibition as a premier example of this type of co-creative endeavor.
Museums co-curating and organizing with community

The Oakland Museum has honored Los Días de los Muertos since 1994, when it mounted its first exhibition dedicated to art from the holiday. This foray was begun in 1993 by the museum’s Latino Advisory Committee, which wanted to encourage community healing (possibly from the prior year’s devastating L.A. riots, though this speculation goes unconfirmed by Oakland Museum sources), and “reclaim [the holiday] as a Mexican American tradition” (Gonzalez, 2005, p. 8). In this spirit, the holiday was referred to as Los Días de los Muertos, the days of the Dead, to acknowledge the indigenous roots of the holiday more explicitly by referencing Aztec practices of celebrating multiple days of the dead, instead of the singular Day of the Dead that aligns with All Souls Day on the Catholic calendar (Gonzalez, 2005).

Since its inception, the exhibition and celebration were created in partnership between the museum and the Oakland community, particularly the adjacent Chicano neighborhood of Fruitvale. This collaboration extends throughout all levels of the exhibition and program. A guest curator organizes the show every year, making sure to draw from diverse artists with a range of experiences, for the two-month exhibition. The exhibition is designed and produced to the same standards as any other show at the Oakland Museum, in a representation of art that can destabilize the exhibitionary complex of the museum. Evelyn Orantes, a Project Director from the Education Department, highlighted some of the institutional tensions at work in mounting Los Días de los Muertos at the Oakland Museum:

“In some ways, it’s almost like having a community center in the museum.
And I hesitate to put Days of the Dead in that box because it will be devalued. People will say that the artists that we bring on aren’t ‘artists,’ they are ‘community artists.’ This is a program that challenges the basic ideas about how art is displayed. We take an egalitarian approach, merging artists, community members, and school groups, so you will often see the work of an established artist right next to an installation of glitter-covered macaroni. And I think some museum people don’t know what to do with it.”

(Simon, 2010)

The impact of this co-creative process is made manifest in the exhibitions, and their flattening of the boundaries between high and low art and folk and outsider traditions. But the co-creative process likely also yields results in the very conception of the museum’s governance and goals. That an idea presented by the Latino Advisory Committee and run by a team of community members, volunteers, and museum staff should now be the most popular event on the museum’s calendar, drawing thousands of participants, validates the authority of the working method. Likewise, its popularity and recognition within the museological field suggests that other museums might want to pay attention to how to co-create and see its communities, particularly its Latino communities, as resources and not problems (Mesa-Bains, 2004).

Beyond the art and the interior of the building, the celebration spills out over the plaza before the Oakland Museum. Artists, museum neighbors, and museum staff work together to display altares and ofrendas in a community festival environment. Longtime participants, and newcomers, are all invited to bring their own experiences and talents to
the celebration. They are welcome to make offerings, ask questions, and stand on the
same ground (not separated as an audience would be) as dancers and other conducting
ritual blessings. The emphasis of the celebration remains on the dead, as proscribed by
the holiday, and not on the display of distinct material and visual traditions surrounding
the holiday. Within this context, the Latino or Chicano public is in a position to learn,
personally engage, and reflect upon deaths and losses in a space dedicated to the
observance of a contemporary manifestation of a traditional holiday.

The Oakland Museum’s commitment to co-creating with the Latino community in
the Bay area extends beyond the annual exhibition and programming surrounding Los
Días de los Muertos, to encompass other long-term collaborations, such as the Latino
History Project (LHP). The project was another venture spurred by community needs and
desires identified by the Latino Advisory Committee. In this case, committee members
were concerned that primary accounts of Latino and Mexican American life in Oakland
and the East Bay were absent from documented history and being lost with the passing of
community elders. In 1998, the Oakland Museum’s education department then launched
a four-year initiative to train 14-18 year old Latino teenagers to conduct interviews,
collect and care for photographs and other historic documents, and create posters or
websites to disseminate their findings (Henry, Fruzza & Davidman, 2003). At the end of
their participation in the program, the teens were retained by the education department as
paid interns. This initiative served both the Oakland community and the Oakland
Museum; each benefited from the acquisition of greater knowledge of local history, as
curators were able to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the area and
community members became more involved in directly creating this knowledge. Within the LHP, Latino teens and community elders determined the scope of their research and collaboration and worked together to build a resource for themselves–future researchers, historians, and community members. Though LHP was a history project, and not one that falls within the disciplinary boundaries of art, I include the example because it serves as a possible model for other art museums hoping to engage communities in art historical work, or in work emerging in response to the stated needs of the community. As the Oakland Museum is not strictly an art museum, given that it tells the story of California’s “people, history, art, and ecology,” it has significant art exhibition space and programming and I feel it appropriate to include its modes of Latino engagement in this thesis (Henry et al., 2003, p. 115).

One aspect of the Oakland Museum’s work with Latinos that may be worth investigating is whether the presence of the Latino Advisory Committee has changed the Latino visitors’ perceptions of the museum’s exhibition and education programming. Do outreach efforts feel less like outreach and more like inclusive programming that stems from the Latino community of Oakland’s desires for exhibition and education programs, as a result of this advisory group? How might these perceptions vary across Latino visitors based on their affiliation with the museum and its surrounding neighborhoods? If the Oakland Museum is engaging in the ‘power-sharing’ deemed vital by African-American visitors and non-visitors, has this partnership resulted in increased Latino visitation numbers for the museum and/or in a more culturally relevant and validating experience for those visitors (Hood, 1993)?
The Queens Museum of Art (QMA), in New York City, has also made an institutional space for a community voice within its museum walls. This space is called the Partnership Gallery and it is a site where artwork from community cultural and nonprofit organizations can collaborate with the museum to mount exhibitions that highlight their programs and interests. The gallery also functions as a place for the Education Department to exhibit the artwork of its students, allowing them the opportunity to show their art in the same venue as professional artists (QMA Partnership, 2011). Some exhibitions treat specifically Latino themes, whereas others, like the November 2009 exhibition *Death Collective; 4 different artists and their perspective of Heaven, Purgatory, Hell and Earthly Existence*, a “collaborative installation…about destiny and choice,” coincide with culturally relevant and seasonal interests, such as the Day of the Dead, and are was curated by Latinos. In the case of *Death Collective*, Carolina Peñafiel, the Director of Local Project, a Queens-based nonprofit composed of Latino and Latin American artists, curated the exhibition, thus giving the show a local Latina curatorial perspective.

*Artists working with Latinos, on behalf of museums*

Art museums have also commissioned work from artists that requires community participation, as a means of engaging with Latinos, and other demographics that may not be traditional museum visitors. In 2006, LACMA launched Art Programs with the Community: LACMA On-Site, a multiyear partnership with the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). This program created an art gallery and community art program at Charles White Elementary School that pairs contemporary artists such as
Mark Bradford and Ruben Ochoa, with elementary and middle school students in the surrounding neighborhood in the creation of LACMA exhibitions. This exhibition space is complemented by presentations given by LACMA teaching artists at public libraries through the school district, art education curriculum resources for K-8 teachers that highlight works in the museum’s collection, classroom visits by LACMA teaching artists and museum educators, professional development for K-8 teachers, NexGen membership for all students under 17, and free bus transportation from neighborhood sites to LACMA on the monthly Andell Family Sundays free admission days (Museum Associates, 2011).

The range of programming makes LACMA On-Site a tremendously comprehensive effort that combines outreach and co-creative opportunities to result in a deepened relationship between LA neighborhoods and the museum. The school/community/museum partnership is the largest of its size in the country: as of the 2011 report, 25,732 students and 1,719 teachers have participated in the classroom activities; 38,749 teens and family members have attended a library program; and curriculum materials, gallery guides, and NexGen enrollment forms have been distributed to over 60,000 students and 3,000 teachers throughout District 4. A program of this magnitude does not exist without significant funding; LACMA budget $1M annually for the support of this programming (Museum Associates, 2011).

The LACMA On-Site exhibitions thus far have been extremely local: in 2007, Bradford and Ochoa organized SWAP, a recreation of the local Bonita Swap Meet that included objects created by the neighborhood children alongside LACMA artworks. This exhibition aimed to relate the children’s creations with LACMA works that dealt with
“urban life, community, a sense of identity and nature,” as well as display the breadth of the museum’s collection (LACMA, 2008). As a first program, it appealed to local neighborhood sensibilities, while also introducing the museum’s collection and educators. The second year, British artist Marysa Dowling curated and co-created *Journeys/Recorridos*, a photography exhibition that mapped the students’ lived experiences of their neighborhoods and city through photography. The following year, students worked with LA-based artist Pato Hebert to create artistic responses to iconic or noteworthy LA spaces, focusing on the Watts Towers and Urban Light sculpture at LACMA, as well as significant community spaces, like MacArthur Park. These three exhibitions were intimately tied to the LA landscape and the lives of the students co-creating with the artists. The most recent show takes a different approach to community specificity, instead of emphasizing the physical markers of the city, the exhibition *A is for Zebra* represents some of the linguistic diversity of the area and, most specifically, of the students of Charles White Elementary. Many of the children enrolled attend bilingual classes and are English Language Learners. *A is for Zebra* drew upon artworks that played with the idea of language and the systems of the alphabet to suggest that artwork might stand in as a common language (Saltzman, 2011). The wall text appeared (via the wearing of special glasses) in both Spanish and English, in a reaffirmation of the value of both languages. The specificity and sensitivity to community, as well as the desired engagement of the LAUSD students in creating the artwork for the exhibitions exemplify the goals of a co-creative endeavor. Though the LACMA On-Site program may not have been launched as a means to specifically attract or embrace Latino visitors, the
bilingualism of the exhibition titles, the aims of the shows, and the emphasis placed on the value of bilingual teaching artists in the 2011 report, suggest that there is a strong commitment to engaging with Latinos (Museum Associates).

The QMA has also sponsored the creation of work made by artists in concert with the Queens community. A 2011 project centered around the refiguration of immigrant identity, as a “unique, new global citizen in a post-national world” and aimed to create a “sociopolitical movement.” The project, led by artist Tania Brugera, is aptly named *Immigrant Movement International*, and pushes at the boundary of “useful art,” that is, an artists’ endeavor to meld art with society, to achieve social and political impact at the personal level of people’s lived experience outside the museum (Queens Museum of Art, 2012). I should clarify that Brugera classified useful art as art that focuses on the aesthetic of usefulness, as opposed to design, which seeks to make useful objects more beautiful (*Immigrant Movement International*, 2011). This distinction is important, because the manifestation of her project—an office in Corona, the QMA’s neighborhood, that provided meeting space for immigrant outreach organizations and sponsored monthly “Make a Movement” Sundays, activities that fostered coalition-building across diverse immigrant communities in Queens—may not look like an art object. For some, Brugera’s provision of a space for activism, outreach, and legal services would constitute the work of a small nonprofit, not of an artwork. Without the possibility of a phenomenological experience, where does the artwork lie and how is this work distinguished from an educational outreach program? A full exploration of relational aesthetics and useful art is beyond the scope of my thesis, but I do wish to note that I am aware of these questions.
For the purposes of this study, I hold that Bruguera’s project engages the immigrant (and many Latinos are among this group) communities of Queens in a co-creative practice of artmaking more than of outreach. As Bruguera has framed the interactions that occur in the space and the utility of the project to its participants as the art of the work, the immigrants in Queens who make use of the space are making art. Though Bruguera’s project may be to refigure immigrant identity, she may also be doing valuable work of shifting the visitors’ perception of the museum. With the sponsorship and exhibition of this useful art project, the QMA gains a role as an agent of community improvement. Likewise project participants may reconsider their own roles and expand it to include the role of an artist.

Whether working as advisors, guest curators, artists, or collaborators in the organization of an educational program or event, the endeavors included in this section all demonstrate an engagement with Latinos as valuable partners in co-creation. Though the degree of organizational involvement varied, from the Oakland Museum’s longstanding reliance on its Latino Advisory Council to LACMA’s more recent partnership with the LAUSD schools in Latino neighborhoods, the museum programs mentioned depended upon the participation and collaboration of Latinos in order to be successful. Throughout the partnerships, there was an attention to the specificity of the community and people engaged in the co-creative process.

**Latinos as a target for outreach**

Outreach efforts are varied across and within art museums, but one of their primary
goals is to facilitate the participation of an underrepresented visitor group in museum activities. This engagement differs from co-creative endeavors because it does not require the collaboration of the intended target audience in order to carry off the project. Instead, planning may happen within the walls of the institution, to be executed off-site, outside the parameters of typical museum discourse (such as when tours are given in Spanish instead of English). Outreach efforts may also be distinguished from programs that seek to represent Latinidad because they are specifically directed to a Latino visiting audience. These outreach efforts recognize that Latinos do not typically come to mainstream art museums and seek to redress this underrepresentation.

Some institutions have acknowledged that building their capacity to serve Latino visitors and encourage their engagement with the museum may require staffing changes. Within the Denver Art Museum, a Latino Cultural Programs Coordinator position was created and filled in January 2012 (Cembalest, 2011). As a secured position not contingent upon grant funding, the creation of this role demonstrates a significant institutional commitment to taking on culturally specific Latino outreach, programming, and visitor studies (M. Salazar, personal communication). Though it seems few mainstream art museums have institutionalized this commitment to Latino visitors through the creation of a staff position, it is a possibility for museums to consider. Barring that, a better network of museum professionals and researchers interested in Latino visitor studies might provide some of the support needed for this type of inquiry (M. Salazar, personal communication).

Outreach efforts take place in a variety of contexts, from community spaces to the
online realm, and the means of outreach to and engagement with Latino visitors is just as varied. Some institutions participate in linguistic outreach, through the inclusion of Spanish-language material either in the gallery spaces or in the museum’s educational materials. Others take outreach off-site, by bringing museum programs and educators to libraries and schools. Another form of engagement that could be considered outreach comes in the form of relaxing admissions policies and allowing free admission to family groups on certain days, or to children. My discussion of outreach initiatives is by no means comprehensive, but it does provide some examples of what different museums are doing to engage Latino audiences beyond the walls of the institution and draw them in to the space.

*Aquí hablamos español: Establishing bilingual appeal*

Many Latinos are also Spanish-speakers, which gives art museums a, relatively, simple way to reach out to them: through Spanish-language tours, wall text, brochures, and educational programs. The inclusion of Spanish within the museum signals, efficiently, that Latinos are welcomed within the institution. Adamantia Koliou has investigated the positive impact on visitors of providing foreign-language pamphlets, wall text, and educational materials within the context of British museums; it is important to do more of such work in the United States, particularly given the range of (1997).

More recently, and in multiple U.S. settings, Cecilia Garibay has confirmed that Latino visitors appreciate Spanish-language, or bilingual signage and materials (2011). In the case of first-generation Latino immigrants, the presence of Spanish may facilitate the visitor’s navigation and understanding of the museum display. For second-generation
Latinos, the inclusion of Spanish functions as a signal that the museum welcomes them and their linguistic heritage (Garibay, 2011).

Beyond the textual, art museums frequently approach Latino outreach through Spanish-language and bilingual tours and programs. The QMA, DAM, DMA, MFAH, AIC, among others, all offer such tour opportunities for Spanish-speaking visitors. At the QMA, this type of engagement was even possible on a curator-led tour, when Manuela Moscoso offered weekly walk-throughs in English and Spanish of the Queens International 2012 exhibition that she had organized. Given the paucity of Latino curators, this opportunity for a Latino visitor to directly engage with the Latina curator of a show steeped in the art of the borough of Queens was a rare moment of interaction. The QMA also undertakes Latino outreach through its New New Yorkers program, a series of courses for adults who are recent immigrants to New York, hence the name New New Yorkers. The New New Yorkers program offers courses in Spanish, in addition to Mandarin and Korean, that address a number of topics of interest to these new Queens residents: graphic design, art history, photography, etc. The program positions the QMA as a community resource and a space that belongs to these new New Yorkers. It also foregrounds the function of the museum as a welcoming institution, a place where recent arrivals can meet others who share similar interests, and a space where new New Yorkers can make artwork that may be exhibited in the Partnership Gallery.
Moving the museum off-site

Both the MFAH and LACMA do their most involved Latino outreach at sites outside of their primary campus. The MFAH has a relatively long history of community engagement in the Latino neighborhoods of Houston. In 1985, it established a partnership with the Houston Public Libraries to bring MFAH educators and exhibitions to libraries across the city, thus narrowing the geographic distance between populations throughout Houston and the ability to have a MFAH experience. This program has been so successful that the MFAH expanded it in 1998 to include the suburban system of the Harris County Libraries. In this way, the MFAH is engaging in the storefront museum model of the early 20th century. LACMA offers similar educational programming at public libraries throughout Los Angeles. These programs are run by the LACMA teaching artists and are inspired by works in the permanent collection, so that participants become familiar with the holdings of the museum. While these library programs are significant in reducing the impact of logistical and financial constraints to museum attendance, they may only provide a simulation of engaging in the same workshop on the museum site. I would be interested to see how children who participate in the MFAH and LACMA library programs perceive the value and authenticity of their experiences, relative to ones of children who visit the museum’s campus. This critique/question is also applicable to LACMA’s “Maya Mobile” a forty-eight-foot trailer that has been converted into a mobile archeology-themed exhibition and classroom about the Maya and other cultures. Though this mobile classroom delivers some aspects of the LACMA experience
to schools for a three-week visit period, does it interest the student participants in visiting the museum’s primary campus?

Among the museums I reviewed, off-site programs were more heavily focused on ‘outreach’, which is to be expected, but this may provide an excuse for the museums to not engage a diverse population on its primary campus. Without this engagement, art museums do not change the visitor use of their facilities, and can only share a limited part of their collection. Likewise, the reprisal of storefront museums or neighborhood outposts can create an unintentional segregation of the museum audience. While outposts such as LACMA-On Site may meet the professed desires of minority neighborhood audiences who would like the museum to experience their community and ease any transportation difficulties involved in getting to the primary campus, it is unclear whether these programs encourage minority visitors to make use of the whole institution (Hood, 1993). It is also unknown whether this community-centered exposure to the art museum encourages young audiences to feel more comfortable and amenable to visiting the primary museum campus. Museums should account for these implications when considering whether to develop off-site programs as a means of expanding its involvement with Latinos. Moving programming off-campus in order to reach the largely Latino neighborhoods may remove the barrier of transportation cost and time, but it does not explicitly encourage the potential Latino audience to take ownership of the museum space.
Online outreach

Art museums can also extend the influence of their institution and its collections through the creation and distribution of online material for K-12 teachers and elementary and secondary students. Since 2003, there has been a tremendous growth of online outreach within the museum community, with many institutions building a robust social media and online presence (Wetterlund & Sayre, 2009). One of the popular means for online connection comes in the form of lesson plans for a K-12 audience. These lesson plans are created by the education staff at a museum and reflect a varied degree of multicultural engagement and awareness, and can solicit varied participation from a Latino audience. The MFAH, AIC, and LACMA prepare lesson plans that are available for teachers to download, or request, free of charge on their websites.

These lesson plans reflect the scope of the museums’ collections, but to varying degrees. AIC relegates its lesson plans specific to Latinos to a pre-Columbian past, with activities based on “Ancient Indian Art of the Americas.” In the case of the MFAH materials, Learning through the Arts Curriculum, the lessons for a K-6 audience include some Latin-American content, but only in the form of “art, folktales, and stories” that draw from a colonial, and pre-Columbian past. Despite the MFAH’s possession of an excellent collection of Latin American modernist work, the Latin American and Latino artistic production of the 20th century is not represented in these lesson plans, which effectively renders Latin-American art a thing of the past. By contrast, LACMA’s lesson plans for a K-8 audience are brimming with Latino and Latin American contemporary art and activities that examine the positionality of the artist and audience. As a nod to the
importance of state testing standards, all three museums clearly link how their lesson plans address different learning standards required by their particular states.

Removing structural obstacles to visitation

The MFAH, AIC, and LACMA all offer free admission to children, in a recognition of the role that ticket prices can play in restricting visitation to those who can pay the fee to enter (Jun et al., 2008). LACMA has the most accommodating policy of the three, with its NexGen program that offers free membership to all children under the age of eighteen, and free admission to one accompanying adult per NexGen member. This program eliminates cost concerns for family visitation, and effectively makes LACMA free for families, so long as the children are enrolled in NexGen. The application can be downloaded in English and Spanish, which facilitates enrollment in the event of Spanish-dominant caregivers. However, AIC and MFAH are not as inclusive in their entrance policies, allowing only the children to be granted free admission to the museum. AIC does encourage families to make use of the Vitale Education Center, and advertises on its website that coming to visit the education center is always free, but this does not carry over to the collections-holding museum space.

Childcare requirements may also impose restrictions on Latino families that wish to visit art museums (Jun et al., 2008). For adults who have children of varied ages in their care, it may be difficult to schedule a museum visit that only provides programming targeted to the younger or older children; LACMA addresses this need by scheduling “Intergenerational Classes for Students Ages 5 to 105.” The ability of an entire family
group to participate in art programming together significantly eases the logistical complications of a visit and may be particularly relevant for Latinos, who are more likely to visit in multigenerational family groups (Jun et al., 2008).

**Looking beyond the numbers: Listening to Latino voices**

The marginalization of Latinos within art museums may stem from an attitude of troubled disquiet or indifference, as Amalia Mesa-Bains articulated the views of museum professionals: “How we receive diverse communities and how we learn from them are elements we have largely ignored because we have come to think of audience as a problem, not a resource” (2004, p. 102). Mesa-Bains, a Chicana artist, scholar, and activist speaks to the silence of the art museum community as regards its Latino visitors. In the documented history I have reviewed, Latino visitors have rarely been spoken to, their complex opinions rarely sought out in interview form (or anything longer than a telephone survey or questionnaire), and their input has not been actively solicited by art museums eager to create experiences that are valued by Latinos. So far, I have only found one book that deals specifically with the topic of Latinos in mainstream museums—whether as members of the audience or members of the personnel—and this book has received limited scholarly review since its publication (Ríos-Bustamante, 1998). The utter lack of published qualitative visitor studies regarding the perceptions and experiences of Latino art museum visitors stunts the development of museum exhibitions and programs that might draw from these perspectives and better include and validate these visitors.
Likewise, soliciting the experiences and knowledge of Latino visitors will continue to undo some of the hegemonic power structures of the museum, in which white, well-educated, middle-class museum professionals, museum funders, and museum critics work in tandem to reproduce the organizational mores that have valorized their culture and lived experiences at the expense of marginalized minority groups (Fleming, 2002). Museums could also promote the ability to speak Spanish, or a background in Latin American and Latino studies, as valued assets in its education department staffing decisions. The current lack of Latino representation on staff decreases the possibility of this population being considered in programming choices. LACMA provides an example of the inclusion of Latino educators on-staff as “teaching artists.” Six out of the twenty-five artists and educators listed on the education staff are Latino, which is significant not only for the demographic employment statistics, but also because these teaching artists are highly visible members of the education department. Their names and biographies are listed on the LACMA website, which puts them in a position of relative prominence and values them as individuals who are of interest to the public. Furthermore, these teaching artists are not restricted to Latino-specific programming, and instead teach courses and workshops across the LACMA spectrum of programming. In this way, a LACMA visitor’s exposure to a Latino teaching artist is just as likely regardless of whether that visitor is learning about Mexican muralism or Edo printmaking techniques.

Though the focus of this research lies in how Latino visitors are engaged by art museums, and thus my research centered around education programming initiatives, visitor studies, and data about people, I think it is important to note one commonality
amidst the institutions I examined: they all had curatorial departments devoted to Latin American, pre-Columbian art, or Latino art. The MFAH, AIC, LACMA, DAM, DMA, Oakland Museum, QMA, and Museo del Barrio, all represent work by Latino, Latin American, or Pre-Columbian artists in their collections. Regardless of their specific collecting emphasis, the art of America has become the art of the Americas.

Within DC, the Smithsonian American Art Museum appointed a curator of Latino art in October 2010, effectively creating a department and collecting mission where one had not previously been articulated (Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2010). This level of commitment and institutional reorganization may be difficult for many museums to undertake, but I do think it worthwhile for curators to consider how to better represent the art of the Americas.
Chapter 5: Looking to 2050 and the Latino Future

Instead of suggesting conclusions—or positing the varied ideas, perceptions, and identity negotiation processes of a Latina/o other than myself—I would like to return to possibilities. My thesis began with the articulation of an absence: the absence of the voices and experiences of Latino visitors from art museum visitor studies. By using my own voice, as well as the theoretical and scholarly voices of women such as Carol Duncan, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Karen Mary Davalos, among others, I hope that I have begun to build into the extant gap in the art education, and visitor and museum studies literature. Looking to 2050, when the United States population will have shifted dramatically, toward a majority-minority, significantly more Latino nation, I would like to reprise Farrell and Medvedeva’s call to consider these numbers (2010). And, more than the numbers, to consider the people behind the numbers and by what means museums will engage them as visitors.

To facilitate the welcoming of Latino visitors to art museums, I believe that as researchers we must build a community of shared interest and information regarding the engagement of Latino visitors. Currently, much of the research and informal museum evaluation and programming surrounding Latino visitors remains within institutional files and unpublished reports. I, like Farrell, Medvedeva, and Merritt in the 2010 Center for the Future of Museums report, encourage the dissemination of Latino art museum visitor studies. Though presentations at conferences are an invaluable means of sharing current...
work, it would be tremendously beneficial for art museum professionals across the

country to have a published record of the studies that have been conducted. Perhaps

internal reports could be submitted to national organizations, such as the Diversity

Committee of the American Association of Museums for web hosting. In moving Latino

visitors from positions of absence to presence, it is critical for the art museum community
to build upon its efforts and part of this process is recognizing what has been done.

Much as Elizabeth Merritt recommended reconceiving museum research so that it
did not only look to other museum institutions for information and points of reference, I
would like to extend this call to interdisciplinarity (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010). Within
my search for studies related to Latino visitors to art museums, I found that the National
Parks service and other agencies and researchers within leisure studies had begun to
make inroads regarding how to engage and conceive of diverse Latino publics. It may be
useful to seek out the research on Latino visitors or patrons conducted by institutions that
serve as informal learning environments when shaping studies of Latino visitors to art

museums.

Another factor that art museums and researchers may wish to consider when
embarking on culturally responsive Latino visitor studies is the ability of their staffs to
engage with these publics. When one of the themes that emerged throughout the museum
literature I reviewed was the desire for shared power (Hood, 1993) and cultural group
representation for collaboration and co-creative endeavors (Harvey et al., 1971), it
becomes imperative that museums diversify their own staffs (Merritt in Farrell &
Medvedeva, 2010). Museum professionals and researchers have noted that it becomes
quite difficult to diversify exhibitions and programs when very similar ideas and perspectives are the result of homogeneous staffs (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010; Tortolero, 2000). This diversification of the sources of information from which art museums construct their exhibitions, programming, and outreach efforts may attract a more diverse visiting public.

In the move to include Latino visitors within art museums, we must not only pay attention to diverse sources of information, whether in the form of publications from beyond the purview of art museum research or a multicultural museum staff, but also to the voices of Latino visitors to art museums. While Farrell and Medvedeva advocate for large surveys and the addition of museum-specific research questions to extant survey projects administered by the Census, I believe that having a more nuanced understanding of the identity negotiation processes and experiences at work in a Latino visitor’s visit to an art museum requires sustained qualitative research (2010). Such research may not generate the same sweeping data as a national survey-driven approach, but it will facilitate the understanding of complexity within a museum’s Latino visitors. Whether this solicitation of experience and perspectives comes in the form of focus groups led by the art museum staff or a consultant, or comes about as a matter of the ongoing conversation between a Latino advisory group and the museum staff, such communication is critical.

Inherent in the existing literature on Latino, and other minority, visitors is the desire for visitor inclusion within museums (Hood, 1993; Davalos, 2001; Dávila, 2005; Falk, 1993; Harvey et al., 1971; Simon, 2010). As the field of culturally responsive
visitor studies and Latino visitor studies grows, it may behoove art museums and museum researchers to investigate the impact that efforts to attract and include these visitors has not only on the visitors and institutions, but also on the larger community surrounding the museum. Given recent political rhetoric regarding the value of museums as a public good, and suggestions that museums exist for the benefit of affluent citizens and are funded at the expense of the poor, art museums would be well served to be able to reassert their position as a public space and as a public good (H.R. Rep. No. 112-421, 2012). Through such research, art museums might shift their self-conception and recognize their role as members of a community, and affirm their place as sites with the potential for the engagement of diverse communities in dialogue with each other and with art (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010).
References


