

MUSEUM CULTURE IN THE ANGLO-AMERICAN
ATLANTIC WORLD, c. 1750-1815

A Senior Honors Thesis

by

SHERRY MYERS

Submitted to the Office of Honors Programs
& Academic Scholarships
Texas A&M University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the

UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE
RESEARCH FELLOWS

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Major: History/Journalism

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ABSTRACT

Museum Culture in the Anglo-American
Atlantic World, c. 1750-1815 (April 2006)

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During the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries, the Anglo-American Atlantic world saw a rise in the number and popularity of museums as cultural institutions. By concentrating on the premier museums in each culture, the British Museum and Charles Willson Peale's Philadelphia Museum, this project seeks to establish two things: 1) the circumstances that allowed museums to become a vanguard in the British and American societies of 1750-1820, and 2) the kinds of changes museums instigated upon assuming a role of significant cultural influence. The social climate of these two populations was such that museums were able to assume a function

fashioned by contemporary social conditions. The impacts of the Enlightenment, a rising middle classes, and the creation of a consumer culture coalesced to set the stage for museums to become a force of significant social influence. As these museums gained in popularity, they began to influence their surroundings. They became forums for social change, serving as institutions of education that aimed to instruct both the erudite elite and the “curious” in matters of virtue as well as in matters of intellect. Museums offered a new form of popular entertainment and provided an environment that fostered social mingling between classes. Furthermore, these museums altered their audience’s perceptions of their many worlds, including the natural world, their own culture and national identity, and the world of the “others” that existed outside their borders, particularly the Amerindian, African, and South Pacific cultures. The British Museum and the Peale Museum were used in their respective societies as tools to cultivate a unifying definition of “Britishness” or “Americanness” by creating their own image in opposition to the “others” and by using elements of natural history to instill a sense of pride in the homeland. The institutions’ directors took advantage of the popularity and influence the museums had assumed in their respective cultures and used them to better and strengthen those societies.

DEDICATION

To my parents, Ray and Sue Myers, who don't always understand why I do these things,
but who support me in my endeavors nonetheless.

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Much thanks to my advisor, Troy Bickham, for his constant instruction and advice. His dedication to teaching is highly appreciated by me and all of his students. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the many history professors at Texas A&M who helped me in this process, whether they realized or not. Most notable is Sylvia Hoffert, whose writing critique I always welcome. They all deserve thanks for their assistance in the intellectual aspects of this project.

I would also like to acknowledge those who gave me moral support throughout this process. I am grateful to my family for their encouragement, and would especially like to thank my sister Kristi for giving up her free time to assist me on more than one occasion. Also, thanks to all my friends for offering constant support, caffeine, and endless excuses for study breaks. Most importantly, I would like to thank my roommates Ashley Pagnotta, for the open offer to be my coffee supplier, and Kristi Krenek, both of whom pretended not to mind when my research consumed the kitchen table. I doubt I would have come close to finishing without your help.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vii
I. INTRODUCTION.....	8
II. CULTURAL CONTEXT.....	17
III. SOCIAL INFLUENCE.....	42
IV. CHANGED PERSPECTIVES.....	84
V. CONCLUSIONS.....	112
WORKS CITED.....	114
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	116
CURRICULUM VITA.....	128

INTRODUCTION¹

“ ‘Well, then, madam, (said the Doctor) the matter is agreed on: I will deposit your pretty Silver Penny in the British Museum, nor will I disturb it out of his present habitation. There you shall be welcome to see it as often as you please.’ My mistress could not refuse such honourable conditions: she kissed me at parting, and presented me to the Doctor, who punctually kept his word, brought me carefully to town, and then deposited me in the British Museum.

Thus am I amply rewarded for all my past toils and fatigues, as I now make a conspicuous figure among the greatest curiosities in the first collection of the world. Here I shall enjoy constant repose, secure from care or danger, and out of the reach of adverse fortune.”

From: *The adventures of a silver penny.*
Including many secrets anecdotes of
little misses and masters both good
and naughty.

Printed for E. Newberry, London, 1786.

By 1786, the British Museum had been open to the public for twenty-seven years. In that time, plus the six years that passed between its original founding and opening to the public, the institution had become a fixture in British culture. It was so highly regarded on a general term that it permeated all aspects of the culture, even to the point of turning up, obviously admired, in this children’s story. The British Museum got its beginnings from the personal collection of Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753), a physician and respected naturalist who served as successor to Sir Isaac Newton as president of the Royal Society from 1727 to 1741. His collection had begun in earnest with about 800 specimens he collected during the period between November 1687 and March 1689 that

¹ This thesis follows the style and format of *Chicago Manual of Style, 15th Edition*.

he spent in Jamaica.² Over his lifetime, it grew to become one of Britain's scientific meccas, drawing scholars worldwide. By the time of his death in 1753, the collection contained some 71,000 objects, including a library and herbarium, and he left it to the nation, with the stipulation that his heir receive a £20,000 legacy. On 7 June 1753, the British Museum was officially created by Parliamentary decree, and continues on today, supported by the government, as one of the most venerated museums in the world.

Three decades later and an ocean away, Charles Willson Peale opened a portrait gallery of his own work in his home, many of which were of Revolutionary War heroes. A well known portraitist, the Maryland native was also a former officer in the American army and a "Furious Whig" who became involved in politics in the new republic. In 1780s, he abandoned politics and began adding to the gallery, opening a "moving picture" theater in 1785. When that proved to be unprofitable, he followed through on a suggestion from his brother-in-law and began to expand on the small collection of curiosities he already owned. The museum began growing from there, eventually requiring a move into the American Philosophical Society in 1794, then another to the old statehouse in Philadelphia in 1802. Peale's major claim to fame was the exhumation of the first full mastodon skeleton, which went on display in 1802 and quickly became one of the most popular attractions. Though he never received governmental backing, Peale's Philadelphia Museum served as the de facto American museum. Except for a period of semi-retirement between 1810 and 1821, when his son Rubens took over, Peale

² *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, s.v. "Sir Hans Sloane, baronet (1660-1753), physician and collector," (by Arthur MacGregor), <http://www.oxforddbb.com/view/article/2573> (accessed 19 September 2005).

ran the museum until his death in 1827. At that time, his sons carried on daily operations until 1848 when economic necessity forced them to sell the collection to P.T. Barnum and Moses Kimball.

These were some of the first “museums” in the modern sense of the word. The culture had encouraged “gentlemen scholars” to pursue collecting natural history specimens as a hobby. Many members of the elite had accumulated private “cabinets of curiosities.” It was not until the British Museum, however, that such collections were put on display for the general public.

Both the Peale and British Museums became major attractions in their respective societies, popular enough that some social influence was inevitable. But how exactly did museums such as these affect culture? Looking at this issue is important because it deepens our understanding of the culture of the broader Atlantic world and the major changes experienced during the period between 1750 and 1815. Studies of the Atlantic world concentrate on the complex relationships between those societies surrounding the Atlantic Ocean, particularly in the study of cultural history. This project will further the pursuit of that kind of knowledge by examining the communal significance of the objects displayed in museums and how that significance played out in society.

The traditional research on these museums has taken the form of institutional histories, focusing on the specific details of the organization itself, how they were established, how they operated, and the kinds of things they displayed.³ Others, like

³ Marjorie Caygill, “Sloane’s Will and the Establishment of the British Museum,” in *Sir Hans Sloane: Collector, Scientist, Antiquary, Founding Father of the British Museum*, ed. Arthur MacGregor (London: British Museum Press, 1994), 45-68; Caygill, *The Story*

Edward P. Alexander, have chosen to look at the museum founders who were so influential in the creation of the institution.⁴ By concentrating on their lives and personal experiences, they are able to see the kind of influence they held over their institutions. The educational functions of the museum have also been studied. From popular education to center for advanced research, the knowledge available in museums was undeniable. Some scholars have gone a step further and shown these museums as

of the British Museum (London: British Museum Publications, 1981); J. Mordaunt Crook, *The British Museum* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972); Richard P. Ellis, "The Founding, History, and Significance of Peale's Museum in Philadelphia," *Curator* 9 (1966): 235-58; Roland Force, Maryanne Force and Sarah Stone, *Art and Artifacts of the Eighteenth Century: Objects in the Leverian Museum as Painted by Sarah Stone* (Honolulu, HI: Bishop Museum Press, 1968); O.R. Impey and Arthur MacGregor, eds., *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Edward Miller, *That Noble Cabinet: A History of the British Museum* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1974); Charles Coleman Sellers, *Mr. Peale's Museum: Charles Willson Peale and the First Popular Museum of Natural Science and Art* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1980); David M. Wilson, *The British Museum: A History* (London: British Museum Press, 2002)

⁴ Edward P. Alexander, *Museum in America: Innovators and Pioneers* (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira, 1997); Alexander, *Museum Masters: Their Museums and Their Influence* (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1983); Berta N. Briggs, *Charles Willson Peale, Artist and Patriot* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1952); Eric St. John Brooks, *Sir Hans Sloane: the great collector and his circle* (London, Batchworth Press, 1954); Neil Chambers, "Joseph Banks, the British Museum and Collections in the Age of Empire," in *Enlightening the British: Knowledge, Discovery, and the Museum in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. R.G.W. Anderson (London: British Museum Press, 2003), 99-113; Gavin R. DeBeer, *Sir Hans Sloane and the British Museum* (New York: Arno Press, 1975); Lillian B. Miller, ed., *The Peale Family: Creation of a Legacy, 1770-1870* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1996); Lillian B. Miller and David C. Ward, eds., *New Perspectives on Charles Willson Peale* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991); Sellers, *Charles Willson Peale* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969); M. Ultee, "Sir Hans Sloane, Scientist," *British Library Journal* 14 (1988): 1-20; Ward, *Charles Willson Peale: Art and Selfhood in the Early Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004)

products of the Enlightenment culture in which they were created.⁵ In fact, to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the British Museum's creation, their press published a book devoted to this subject.⁶ Across the Atlantic, Peale scholars have noted similar trends in America.⁷

One of things that has been touched upon is the assignment of meaning to objects, and the conscious effort to express culture through exhibits.⁸ This mostly focuses on a later period, however, specifically Victorian England, but the same trends appear in the eighteenth century.

⁵ Kim Sloan and Andrew Burnett, eds., *Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2003)

⁶ R.G.W. Anderson, ed. *Enlightening the British: Knowledge, Discovery, and the Museum in the Eighteenth Century* (London: British Museum Press, 2003).

⁷ David R. Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic: Peale's Museum and its Audience* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995); Sidney Hart and David C. Ward, "The Waning of an Enlightenment Ideal: Charles Willson Peale's Philadelphia Museum, 1790-1820," *Journal of the Early Republic* 8, no. 4 (winter 1988), 389-418; Joel J. Orosz, *Curators and Culture: The Museum Movement in America, 1740-1870* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990).

⁸ Lynne Cooke and Peter Wollen, *Visual Display: Culture Beyond Appearances* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995); Anne Coomes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture, and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Peter H. Hoffenberg *An Empire on Display: English, Indian, and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery, *History from Things: Essays on Material Culture* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993); Jules David Prown, "In Pursuit of Culture: The Formal Language of Objects," *American Art* 9, no. 2 (Summer, 1995): 2-3.

Much of the background and context information has been studied extensively, particularly the rise of the middle class⁹ and the significant increase in consumption.¹⁰ Both were sufficiently significant trends to warrant attention.

Generally, however, these ideas have not been considered together, as component parts to the whole, and though the museums have been recognized as products of their environment, that has not been coupled with the resulting influences those museums had on their respective cultures. There is also very little recognition and comparison of the similar trends that were taking place on both sides of the Atlantic, nor notice of where their paths deviated.

I intend to show that the British and Peale Museums were products not only of the Enlightenment, though I will indicate that as well, but also of consumerism and of a culture experiencing a major escalation in the influence of the middle class. These are the influences that created a cultural environment suited to the popularity and success of museums, and once reaching that potential, they in turn held significant influence over

⁹ Burton J. Bledstein and Robert D. Johnston, *The Middling Sorts: Explorations in the History of the American Middle Class* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); H.R. French, "The Search for the 'Middle Sort of People' in England, 1600-1800," *The Historical Journal* 43, no. 1 (March 2000): 277-93; Bob Harris, "'American Idols': Empire, War and the Middling Ranks in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Past and Present* 150 (Feb. 1996): 111-41; Roy Lewis and Angus Maude, eds. *The English Middle Classes* (New York: Knopf, 1950).

¹⁰ Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, eds. *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1994); Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Carole Shammas, *The Pre-Industrial Consumer in England and America* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

social dealings and motivated changes in the public's perspectives on and interpretations of the world in all its definitions.

I will specifically be looking at the early, developmental years of the British Museum and Peale's Philadelphia Museum, namely those between 1750 and 1815. Because the American culture had begun as a transplant of the English culture, many of the same trends played out, often with the Americans following a couple decades behind. Although their cultures had evolved over time and notable differences had developed between the two, they were still very closely related and continued to take social cues from each other. Because of this interconnectedness, I am examining museums on both sides of the ocean. Even though I will be covering approximately the first sixty years of the history of the British Museum, while only the first twenty-five of the Peale Museum, the time discrepancy is not a problem. This is a period of change for both cultures, a change that is quickly infused into the young and impressionable American culture though just as influential on the long-established tradition of British culture. Therefore, many of the adjustments that occurred over the course of thirty years in the American museum required sixty in the British Museum. "Culture" in this sense is everything that dictates communal identity: demographic and social characteristics, rules governing interpersonal communication, interpretations of self and the world around them, common beliefs, and shared experiences.

To address these issues, I will be examining a variety of primary sources, including city guidebooks, travelers' accounts, exhibition catalogues, advertisements, the correspondence and personal reflections of the creators and proprietors of the museums,

and the rules and regulations of daily operations. These sources provide insight not only into the technical aspects of the museums, but also the intellectual and administrative ideas behind it. The sources that offer the public's reaction to the museums are equally valuable. When including quotations, I have tried to recreate the identical spelling, punctuation, and syntax of the original document in all cases.

I will present the cultural context in which the Peale and British Museums were situated and which aspects of that culture had the greatest influence on the formation of the museums themselves. The growth of consumer culture created societies that valued material goods in an unprecedented way, giving meaning and definition to those objects that would create a new scope through which individuals would interpret the world. Consumerism impacted the middle class in a major way. As this professional "middling" group rose in size and power, their interests became a major issue in eighteenth century Anglo-American society. The Enlightenment was the third and most significant contemporary social trend to influence museums. A philosophical movement that concentrated on reason, order, knowledge, and the perfectibility of mankind, the museum embraced the concepts of the Enlightenment, which the upper and middle classes saw as a key to social improvement.

Secondly, I will address the social influence of the museum as it operated as a means of education and knowledge. Both the Peale and British Museums had intellectual purposes, though they differed in focus. Peale's Philadelphia Museum concentrated on the United States: preserving the ideals of republicanism and fostering their growth in citizens. Though the British Museum was primarily concerned with the

advancement in knowledge of the already learned elite, both museums served as a form of popular education, and, as a result, became a source of entertainment as well as a venue for social mingling.

Lastly, I will discuss the affect of the museum experience on the contemporary visitor's world view, encompassing the natural world as well as both the internal and external cultural worlds. Natural history exhibits were used to relay the idea of nature as a source of potential benefit and utility. They also promoted an appreciation for the divine as well as a sense of national devotion based on pride in the uniqueness of one's homeland. Museums also influenced the way that typical Britons and Americans looked at the other cultures in the outside world. Besides satisfying a natural curiosity that had emerged from the exploration of new areas worldwide, these ethnographic exhibits helped them classify other cultures in the extant social hierarchy. The definition of "others" created a more sharply defined sense of self as museums influenced the view of yet another "world": the individual's own cultural world. National identity was challenged and reshaped for contemporary Britons and Americans. As a growing international power, Britain tried to reevaluate itself in an international context, while Americans sought to forge a national consciousness based on the new republic.

Taken together, it will provide a thorough look at museums as they served as reflections of their respective cultures and, additionally, worked to shape the societies and social dynamic around them.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

“Whereas from my youth I have been a great observer and admirer of the wonderful power, wisdom and contrivance of the Almighty God, appearing in the works of his Creation; and have gathered together many things in my own travels or voyages, or had them from others...Now desiring very much that these things tending many ways to the manifestation of the glory of God, the confusion of atheism and its consequences, the use and improvement of physic, and other arts and sciences, and benefit of mankind, may remain together and not be separated, and that chiefly in and about the city of London, where I have acquired most of my estates, and where they may by the great confluence of people be of the most use...”

From *The Will of Sir Hans Sloane, Bart. Deceased* (1753)¹¹

Sir Hans Sloane, the man behind the creation of the British Museum, was the quintessential man of the English Enlightenment. In his will he displays key Enlightenment characteristics, including an interest in the perfection of God’s creation as well as its divine reason and natural order, passion about exploration and discovery, confidence in the ability of observation to improve the lot of mankind. The same culture that influenced him also influenced the development of his museum.

The proper cultural setting was necessary for the Peale and British Museum to achieve the level of popularity and achievement that they did. Had the culture not been primed for their presence, had there not been a demand for the kind of services that they provided, Peale would not have had the kind of success that allowed him to boast, “[M]y

¹¹ *The Will of Sir Hans Sloane, Bart. Deceased* (printed for John Virtuoso: London, 1753), 2, quoted in Eric St. John Brooks, *Sir Hans Sloane: the Great Collector and his Circle* (London: Batchworth Press, 1994), 46-47.

income from the Museum has been sufficient to allow me to sport with a part of the profits.”¹²

I plan to review how consumerism, the rise of the middle class, and the Enlightenment were vital aspects of Anglo-American culture as it developed over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with a particular concern with how those processes pertained to and aided the advancement of museums.

For the purposes of this paper, “middle class” refers to the group of professionals (merchants, shopkeepers, bureaucrats, clergymen, lawyers) that comprised about two-fifths of the population. This group was an important part of the boom in consumer culture that saw an incredible increase in the amount of goods produced and consumed throughout Britain and what were, at the time, her North American colonies. It was in this era that individuals first came to buy more products than they produced themselves. As the shift began to a wage-labor economy, the buying power reached unprecedented depths in the social structure. As goods became more prevalent in society, there was a greater emphasis on their importance, creating meaning and significance that went beyond the physical aspects of the good itself. During the colonial period, the middle class in Britain and America grew prolifically in both size and influence, which provoked the ruling elite (i.e., those running the museums) to adjust in response to the new middle class threat. The over-arching theme of all of this was the Enlightenment. The ideologies behind the Enlightenment initiated the desire to put together ordered

¹² Charles Willson Peale to John Isaac Hawkins, 7 October 1804, in *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and his Family*, ed. Lillian B. Miller, et al (New Haven, Conn.: Published for the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution by Yale University Press, 1983-), 2:769.

collections like those that constituted museums, and it dictated the structure of those collections. It motivated elites to make accommodations throughout society and specifically in the museum to train and educate their social inferiors.

The Enlightenment as it played out in Britain and America has been the subject of many enquiries over the years, and a number of scholars have specifically discussed the Enlightenment influence on the early museums and on their proprietors.¹³ Other contemporary cultural phenomena, especially the rise of consumerism¹⁴ and of the middle class,¹⁵ have been outlined by various scholars, and despite their influence in

¹³ R.G.W. Anderson, M.L. Caygill, A.G. MacGregor, L. Syson, eds. *Enlightening the British: Knowledge, Discover, and the Museum in the Eighteenth Century* (London: British Museum Press, 2003); Henry Steel Commanger, *The Empire of Reason: How Europe Imagined and America Realized the Enlightenment* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977); Sidney Hart and David C. Ward, "The Waning of an Enlightenment Ideal: Charles Willson Peale's Philadelphia Museum, 1790-1820," *Journal of the Early Republic* vol. 8, no. 4 (winter 1988), 389-418; Roy Lewis and Angus Maude, eds., *The English Middle Classes* (New York: Knopf, 1950); Joel J. Orosz, *Curators and Culture: The Museum Movement in America, 1740-1870* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990); Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich, eds., *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2000); Kim Sloan and Andrew Burnett, eds. *Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2003);

¹⁴ Peter Borsay, "The English urban renaissance: the development of provincial urban culture, c.1680 - c.1760," in *The Eighteenth-Century Town*, ed. Peter Borsay (London: Clarendon Press, 1989), 159-181; T.H. Breen, "'Baubles of Britain': The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* 119 (May 1988): 73-104; Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1994); Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); James Walvin, *Fruits of Empire: Exotic Produce and British Taste, 1660-1800* (New York: New York University Press, 1997)

¹⁵ Burton J. Bledstein and Robert D. Johnston, *The Middling Sorts: Explorations in the History of the American Middle Class* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Leonore Davidoff

preparing a society primed for museum culture, these are not among the factors generally recognized as major cultural influences on museums.

These cultural trends – consumerism, growing middle classes, and the spread of Enlightenment ideas – were instrumental in creating a society that would embrace museums as a significant and meaningful form of cultural memory.

Consumerism

Consumer culture paved the way for museums. In a world increasingly understood and evaluated in terms of material culture, museums utilized a form of expression that people in all ranks of society could identify with. Before the eighteenth century, consumer goods held very little value in Anglo-American societies. Relatively scarce and difficult to come by, these goods were a luxury reserved for the wealthy. Due to changing ideas about luxury and the beginnings of industrialization in the eighteenth century, however, consumerism quickly became one of the dominant characteristics in British and American culture. As consumerism infused the culture at all levels, material goods became not only the way they identified with others in their own society, but it also determined how they would evaluate the rest of the world. Once the value of

and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society, and Family Life in London, 1660-1730* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Bob Harris, ““American Idols’: Empire, War and the Middling Ranks in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain,” *Past and Present* no. 150 (Feb. 1996), 111-141.

consumer goods was in place, museums offered a perfect venue for that evaluation of the world through objects to take place.

One of the first major changes that led to the development of a consumer society was a psychological one. The concept of and attitudes toward luxury were evolving in the eighteenth century. For the first time, fashion became an important part of the average Briton's and, slightly later, American's purchasing decisions, along with practicality and durability.¹⁶ Such newly popular items as pictures and looking glasses had aesthetic value only and were, in fact, nonessentials.¹⁷ In the eighteenth century, these kinds of items, once strictly aristocratic luxuries, became increasingly available to the middle and lower classes.¹⁸ Confounded by more relaxed ideas about work and the acceptability of leisure activities, "luxury" became desirable, and achievable, to all. Any qualms that may have existed over the potential for immorality in the indulgence of luxury were eased by Britain's international success and imperial expansion, which they believed indicated that God's favor was still with Britain.¹⁹ By displaying material objects from foreign lands their representatives had visited, explored, or conquered,

¹⁶ Richard L. Bushman, "Shopping and Advertising in Colonial America," in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, eds. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1994), 245; Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "Changing Lifestyles and Consumer Behavior in the Colonial Chesapeake," in *Of Consuming Interests*, eds. Carson, Hoffman, and Albert, 109.

¹⁷ Bushman, "Shopping and Advertising," 245; Carr and Walsh, "Changing Lifestyles," 60.

¹⁸ Carole Shammas, *The Pre-industrial Consumer in England and America* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 185.

¹⁹ Bob Harris, "'American Idols': Empire, War and the Middling Ranks in Mid-Eighteenth Century Britain," *Past and Present* 150 (Feb. 1996), 138.

museums served as a constant reminder of that overseas success and the resulting assumption that divine favor was still on Britain and her children.

Relaxed ideas about luxury made consumer goods more appealing, and developments in industry and distribution made them more widely available. English factories were increasingly capable of producing large quantities of textiles, ceramics, cutlery, and other consumer goods.²⁰ Another key element in making so many material goods available to the masses was the improvement and expansion of commerce. The extension of Anglo influence overseas had greatly facilitated the development of strong trade relationships, and those foreign contacts brought tobacco, tea, and sugar into Britain. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the consumption of such goods exploded. Sugar was a prime example. Between 1709 and 1711, 40 million pounds of sugar were imported to Britain. By the end of the century, that figure was 322 million.²¹ The success of foreign products stimulated an interest in international exploration by inspiring further hope for the discovery of new cash crops and other profitable imports. The effects of such an international trade went far beyond economics alone. Foreign influences from the Mediterranean and the Pacific were incorporated into various forms of material culture, including clothing and architecture.²² As material goods flooded the British and American markets, foreign cultures were increasingly identified with their

²⁰ Barbara G. Carson, "Early American Tourists and the Commercialization of Leisure," in *Of Consuming Interests*, eds. Carson, Hoffman, and Albert, 403; Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular," 26.

²¹ Walvin, *Fruits of Empire*, 169.

²² Robert Anderson, introduction to *Enlightening the British: Knowledge, Discovery, and the Museum in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by R.G.W. Anderson, et al (London: British Museum Press, 2003), 3.

corresponding goods: China with tea or the West Indies with sugar, for example. Museums were able to take advantage of and further that pattern by displaying certain material objects to represent a culture.

To understand the kind of significance that consumer goods acquired during the eighteenth century, it is necessary to see that the connection with material objects was important on every level of the social hierarchy. It was distribution, the final major component of the elaborate commercial system that brought consumer goods into the societies, that made consumer goods valuable to individuals in all classes.²³ Better transportation networks and the proliferation of shops were possibly the greatest aides for Britons and Americans looking to buy goods. By the earliest days of industrialization, “the fixed local shop was a feature of the British urban experience, for rich and poor alike.”²⁴ London was obviously the nucleus of the grandest displays of material consumption, with countless shops providing nearly every good imaginable good from all over the world, but town living in general encouraged conspicuous consumption, fueled by the modern mentality known as “keeping up with the Joneses.”²⁵

The increased availability of goods ensured that consumer culture spread even to the lowest sectors of society. Consumerism was so influential in the world of museums because the entire body of people desired to possess material objects. Before these changes began occurring, even the rich tended to live in an understated fashion. Oftentimes, one tankard would be shared by the whole table. Silverware and table sets

²³ Bushman, “Shopping and Advertising,” 233.

²⁴ Walvin, *Fruits of Empire*, 161.

²⁵ Carr and Walsh, “Changing Lifestyles,” 102; Walvin, *Fruits of Empire*, 153, 159.

were not even commonplace until the 1720s, but as the mindset and lifestyle that is consumerism began to take effect, large numbers of nonessential items like tea sets, books, musical instruments, mahogany tables with matching sets of chairs, and ceramic plates, began to appear.²⁶ “Things” took on a greater and greater importance in Anglo-American cultures. The middle classes sought out the mass production of elite high culture,²⁷ while the lower classes, though unable to participate in consumer society in anything for than token ways, still paid greater attention to the material manifestations of comfort and ceremony than they ever had before.²⁸ For Britons and Americans, the experience of owning and valuing consumer goods was such a universal experience that it became a common way for all individuals to examine the world. This method of examining *things* was adopted by museums and due to its broad influence in society was a powerful mode of communication that could speak to countless individuals.

Consumer goods became so prevalent that objects began to acquire new meanings that went far beyond its own its actual function. Simple items such as tea became heavily politicized during the American Revolution through events like the Boston Tea Party, in the process of which it assumed a meaning far more complex than the drink itself.²⁹ Definitions of social status were also based around consumption and possession of certain goods.³⁰ This was the method of analysis adopted by museums,

²⁶ Bushman, “Shopping and Advertising,” 233.

²⁷ Sweeney, “High-Style Vernacular,” 7

²⁸ Carr and Walsh, “Changing Lifestyles,” 59, 66-7, 111

²⁹ Joan Hoff-Wilson, “The Illusion of Change: Women and the American Revolution,” in Alfred Young, ed., *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976), 388.

³⁰ Shammass, *Pre-industrial Consumer*, 293, 297

particularly as related to ethnographic exhibits. In the Leverian Museum, for example, were many of the artifacts collected during the travels of Captain James Cook, including bowls and garments from the Hawaiian islands. As expected, such items would foster discussion about the items itself, but, due to the contemporary consumer culture and the meanings and emotional attachments Britons and Americans were now accustomed to relating to consumer goods, they were able to draw broader and more complex assumptions about those foreign cultures from the observation of some examples of their material culture.

At museums, individuals had the opportunity to encounter physical links to foreign cultures through the display of artifacts.³¹ This often pertained to the newly-encountered cultures of the South Pacific, but also served to provide a unique connection to foreign cultures in the Mediterranean, Asia, Africa, and throughout the Americas. Because material culture was the one link that bound all levels of the social hierarchy and blurred the lines between social classes, working in this medium allowed museums to be both beneficial and meaningful to every visitor.³²

The advent of consumerism had an extremely influential role in the shaping of Anglo-American culture in the second half of the eighteenth century. It was consumerism that gave new meaning and importance to material objects, creating an innovative avenue for expression. It was this mode of expression that museums used to communicate with their audiences. The creation of a consumer society resulted from the

³¹ Robert Anderson, introduction to *Enlightening the British*, eds. R.G.W. Anderson, et al, 3.

³² Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular," 3.

culmination of evolving ideas about luxury, the beginnings of industrialization, and advances in trade, commerce, and distribution. Consumerism played out in the various realms of the societal class structure and brought about the designation of meaning to the goods themselves.

Middle Class

Museums took advantage of the rise of the middling classes as it took place in early modern Anglo culture. These “middling sorts” were eager to make use of such an institution, while the museum directors, members of the elite, targeted them with programs designed to improve and instruct.³³ Their enthusiastic participation in consumer culture added to the importance and influence of the materialism that simultaneously played out in the museums. In essence, middle class society functioned in a way that made possible the emergence of museums as influential social institutions.

First, it is important to address who exactly the middle class was in contemporary standards. Though “middle class” could be defined in cultural, political, and sociological terms, the most visible characteristic was occupation. Made up of professionals, merchants, bureaucrats, military officers, physicians, clergymen, manufacturers, or really any individual who made between £40-50 per annum, the middle class families constituted about forty percent of the English population during this period. Economic success varied from small shopkeepers who would have barely

³³ Bob Harris, “American Idols,” 140.

qualified as part of the so-called polite society to those merchants who were extremely successful financially in overseas commercial ventures. More than that, however, they would later come to be associated with such noble ideas as independence, freedom from corruption, and political virtue.³⁴

During the seventeenth and eighteenth century, Anglo-American culture saw a drastic increase in both the number and influence of middle class individuals.³⁵ The consumption of material goods and housing that had become so common during this period provided a way for “middling sorts” to create a common bond, and by the 1850s, increased consumption had become one of the primary characteristics of the new middle class. Furthermore, their presence as consumers was so significant that merchants catered to them specifically not only through the sale of goods like tobacco in smaller quantities, but also by the creation of mass market for recreational travel.³⁶ The consumption of goods and services like these was used by families and individuals to establish themselves socially, distancing themselves from their subordinates while trying to move closer to their superiors.³⁷ Besides further solidifying the significance of material goods in the evolving consumer culture, this behavior was indicative of another common practice: efforts to move up socially.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ H.R. French, “The Search for the ‘Middle Sort of People’ In England, 1600-1800,” *The Historical Journal* 43, no. 1 (March 2000): 280.

³⁶ Carson, “Early American Tourists,” 373.

³⁷ Chappell, “Housing a Nation,” 132.

This was a very socially self-conscious group, very aware of their place at the fringe of social respectability.³⁸ “Mine was the middle state, or what might be called the upper station of low life,” said one famous fictional character, “...not exposed to the Labour and Sufferings of the machanick part of Mankind, and not embarrassed with the Pride, Luxury, Ambition and Envy of the Upper Part of Mankind.”³⁹ That consciousness led to a sense of urgency in conveying their worthiness to the upper classes, fostering the desire to demonstrate their new-found wealth and status in public forums. They particularly embraced venues that were designed to facilitate a great deal of mingling, such as public gardens. Museums suited their needs perfectly. It became part of the effort to enter the ranks of “polite society,” the acceptable standard of gentility in behavior and deportment in British society.

While politeness was a largely British interest, middle class Americans had an equally pressing reason to prove themselves. In theory, the American society was to shun all traces of elitism, as it was seen as detrimental to the republic, which advocated equality of all (white, native born) men.⁴⁰ In reality, however, the elite were not so easily convinced that middle class individuals were on their level. For Americans, the museum became an environment for the middle class to demonstrate their worthiness, while upper class museum directors like Peale fashioned an institution that would preserve the republic by educating those middle class individuals on how to honor the nation by behaving virtuously and in a manner befitting a republican citizen, easing

³⁸ Chappell, “Housing a Nation,” 227.

³⁹ Cf. Robinson Crusoe, quoted in Lewis and Maude, *English Middle Classes*, 44.

⁴⁰ Joel J. Orosz, *Curators and Culture: The Museum Movement in America, 1740-1870*. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990), 109.

concerns about the competence of the middle classes. It was Peale's hope that the museum would improve society, "save the idle from vicious habits," and overall serve the nation well.⁴¹

Even as museum directors targeted them for their improvement programs, the middle classes tended to be the ones seeking betterment and self-improvement as prescribed in the Enlightenment culture. Moralistic in nature, they took advantage of educational opportunities provided through the Sunday School movement and coffee house culture, and were able to respond to museums in a similar fashion.

They began to concentrate on that moralistic tenor, coming to see themselves as the ideal middle, better than manual labor, but untouched by the corruption of the elite, and more useful than them as well. One Briton said, "I belong to the middle class, and I am proud of the ability, the shrewdness, the industry, the providence, and the thrift by which they are distinguished, and which have in so considerable a degree contributed to the stability and prosperity of the Empire."⁴² The middle class took pride in their contributions to society, which, in the case of Americans, had to do with the creation of the republican ideal. America became so infused with middle class consciousness that it was seen as a "nation controlled by shopkeepers," a phrase credited to Samuel Adams following the Boston Tea Party and later popularized by Adam Smith.⁴³ By the early 1800s, the political and social influence of the middle class had become so great that

⁴¹ CWP to Thomas Jefferson, 26 February 1804, quoted in Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 82.

⁴² Joseph Chamberlain, quoted in Lewis and Maude, *English Middle Classes*, 48.

⁴³ Ibid.

they now posed a serious and legitimate threat to the elite, whose authority was quickly waning.⁴⁴

Enlightenment

The Enlightenment is arguably the most significant intellectual movement in the history of Western civilization. Peaking in the eighteenth century, the ideas behind the Enlightenment permeated all aspects of European culture, influencing how people looked at politics, history, the arts, and all other facets of their individual societies.⁴⁵ The magnitude of the Enlightenment's impact in this era has caused recent scholars to perceive it not only as a great ideological set, but rather as a lived experience.⁴⁶ Kim Sloane, principal curator of the Enlightenment Gallery at the British Museum, sums up the Enlightenment by saying: "Through empirical methodology, guided by light of reason, one could arrive at knowledge and universal truths, providing liberation from ignorance and superstition that it turn would lead to the progress, freedom and happiness of mankind."⁴⁷ Here, I intend to explain what that means, how the Enlightenment specifically applied to the Anglo-American Atlantic world, what influences these

⁴⁴ Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 68.

⁴⁵ Norman Hampson, *The Enlightenment* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968); Kim Sloan, "'Aimed at universality and belonging to the nation': The Enlightenment and the British Museum," in *Enlightenment*, eds. Sloan and Burnett, 13.

⁴⁶ S.C. Bullock, "Remapping Masonry: a Comment," in "Forum: Exits from the Enlightenment" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, no. 2 (winter 2000): 275; Sloan, "'Aimed at universality,'" 13.

⁴⁷ Sloan, "'Aimed at universality'", 13.

philosophical ideas had on the creation of museums in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and how those influences manifested themselves.

One of the most significant characteristics of Enlightenment philosophy was the emphasis on reason, observation, and order. According to Sidney Hart and David C. Ward, there was a “general desire of [the] age to collect, classify and observe elements of physical and man-made worlds.”⁴⁸ In Europe, the eighteenth century was the glory day of empiricism and the scientific method, inspired by the Scientific Revolution of the preceding generations. Such influential thinkers as Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, and John Locke applied the concepts of experimentation and observation to nature, and Carl Linnaeus created a taxonomic system for classifying and ordering organisms, the basis of which became the foundation of modern biological classification. The need for order was of primary concern in the museums because, as Peale believed, “Subjects of a well arranged Museum are the best means to restore tranquility to a troubled mind.”⁴⁹ Charles Willson Peale was practically obsessed with it. His first comment on the local Baker’s Museum was, “It is arranged without Method. Works of art with Subjects of Nature are promiscuously jumbled together.”⁵⁰ He later explained his philosophy on keeping the museum in order:

To form a Museum fit for a regular system of the Study of nature, it should contain in good preservation some specimens of every department, arranged in some methodical mode, not huddled together without order with respect to their several Natures, &c. otherwise the more numerous a collection is, the more it will distract the Minds of its Visitors: if it gives a

⁴⁸ Hart and Ward, “The Waning of an Enlightenment Ideal,” 401.

⁴⁹ CWP to Rubens Peale and SPS, 6 July 1804, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:737.

⁵⁰ CWP, Excerpt, *Diary 16: A Visit to Baker’s Museum*, June 1798, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:221.

little information, that little will be soon obliterated because not stored in its proper place.⁵¹

According to the guidebook *The Beauties of Nature and Art Displayed*, Peale would have approved of the British Museum: “The British Museum . . . is now in every part so excellently contrived for holding this noble collection, and the disposition of it in the several rooms is so orderly and well designed.”⁵²

The concept of the “Great Chain of Being”, the hierarchy of the physical world, was the supreme example of the application of order to nature. By studying that hierarchy, a man could learn about the natural order in general, and his place in it in particular.⁵³ This was done in an effort to improve the world and relieve some of its misery, a goal many went about by seeking a true understanding of nature and thus the ability to manipulate it.⁵⁴ The ultimate goal of these elite thinkers was to first discover universal knowledge through observation and the application of reason, and then to classify and disseminate it to the public at large.⁵⁵

The pursuit of discovery and progress complemented by the pursuit of knowledge formed a second tenet of the Enlightenment. Enlightenment historian J.R. Pole summed up the contemporary mindset with the phrase “knowledge is power is

⁵¹ CWP to Dr. David Hosack, 29 June 1805, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:857.

⁵² *The Beauties of Nature and Art Displayed, in a Tour Through the World* (London, 1763-4), 2:46.

⁵³ J.R. Pole, “Enlightenment and the Politics of American Nature,” in *The Enlightenment in National Context*, ed. Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (Cambridge, 1981), 198.

⁵⁴ Sidney Hart, “Charles Willson Peale and the Theory and Practice of the Eighteenth-Century American Family,” in *The Peale Family: Creation of a Legacy, 1770-1870*, ed. Lillian B. Miller (New York: Abbeville Press, 1996), 106.

⁵⁵ Hart and Ward, “The Waning of an Enlightenment Ideal,” 416.

progress.”⁵⁶ It was in this spirit that philosophers in this period took a universal approach to knowledge.⁵⁷ Frenchman Denis Diderot was the most literal in his pursuit of universality, as demonstrated by his *Encyclopaedia*, an attempt at a comprehensive collection of the world’s knowledge. Sir Hans Sloane took a slightly different approach up with an effort to create a physical version of that encyclopedia. The idea was to reflect the state of knowledge at that time in the eighteenth century, and it came to fruition in the form of the British Museum. It was legally established as a public institution by the British Museum Act of 1753, which declared that "for the Advancement and Improvement [of knowledge] the said Museum or Collection was intended to and may in many Instances give Help and success to the most useful Experiments and Inventions.”⁵⁸ The desire to generally enhance knowledge inspired quests of discovery. This included the development of scientific exploits in America, which culminated in the famed exhumation of the mastodon skeleton under the supervision of Charles Willson Peale, considered to be the first organized scientific expedition in the United States.⁵⁹ At the same time, overseas expeditions led by such men as Captain James Cook and Sir Joseph Banks, who later became a Trustee of the British Museum, caused a boom in the information available about some of the foreign

⁵⁶ Pole, “Enlightenment and the Politics of American Nature,” 199.

⁵⁷ Hart and Ward, “The Waning of an Enlightenment Ideal,” 416.

⁵⁸ 26 George II c. 22: British Museum Act of 1753, section I, p. 333, quoted in Brooks, *Sir Hans Sloane*, 50; Sloan, “Aimed at universality,” 14.

⁵⁹ Hart and Ward, “The Waning of an Enlightenment Ideal,” 407.

cultures newly introduced to the British. This hunt for new cultures and lands, along with the formulation of fresh ideas, epitomized the quest for discovery.⁶⁰

Part of the appeal of unfamiliar territory was the potential for great natural offerings. An appreciation of nature and its law-like order held a significant place in the ideology of the Enlightenment. People found comfort and a source of optimism in Newton's image of the cosmos. He described a harmonious nature which, much like society, was made up of countless individual atoms that could be subjugated by man through the utilization of science and technology.⁶¹ Spiritualism lay behind much of the concerns about nature. It was believed that, by studying the natural order, corresponding moral laws of society could be surmised.⁶² Charles Willson Peale adopted in earnest the Linnaean system of classification in an effort to more clearly demonstrate to members of society those underlying natural, moral laws.⁶³ Interestingly enough, the observation of nature was believed to lead to moral truths about the physical world, and religious doctrines of faith and revelation were discounted as actual evidence of those truths.⁶⁴ It was the observation of nature, and that alone, that Enlightenment thinkers believed dictated proper human behavior.⁶⁵ As one of those men, Peale wrote, "[T]he more they become acquainted with the wonderful works of Nature the more they will adore the

⁶⁰ Sloan, "Aimed at universality", 14.

⁶¹ Roy Porter, "The Enlightenment in England," 10.

⁶² Pole, "Enlightenment and the Politics of American Nature," 196.

⁶³ Edward P. Alexander, *Museum in America: Innovators and Pioneers* (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira, 1997), 5.

⁶⁴ Porter, "Enlightenment in England," 200.

⁶⁵ Pole, "Enlightenment and the Politics of American Nature," 196

Creator and contentedly see the justice of their own situation.”⁶⁶ The fascination with human nature, particularly with how it related to nature, was an important ideological characteristic of the Enlightenment.

In fact, this concern with people and human society formed one of the most important tenets of Enlightenment philosophy. A prominent characteristic of the eighteenth century in Europe and America was an interest in the study and betterment of society as a whole.⁶⁷ It was from this interest that the modern social sciences grew. The most notable of these new subjects was the study of sociology, pioneered by Adam Ferguson. He and like-minded individuals dedicated themselves to determining the process through which human beings internalized moral, social, and intellectual values.⁶⁸ They studied behavior and expression of the individual and of society as a whole with the aim of characterizing human nature.⁶⁹ In so doing, these new scholars hoped to achieve unity: unity between the separate spheres of human behavior and knowledge, and unity in society.⁷⁰ This was more specific to the Enlightenment in England and America, where they found that the adoption of the common goals suggested by Enlightenment ideology facilitated a bond between the social classes.⁷¹

The unification of the Anglo and American societies concentrated primarily on the goal of bettering society. Besides an interest in people and society itself, the

⁶⁶ CWP to James Calhoun, 19 June 1796, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:157.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁶⁸ Phillipson, “The Scottish Enlightenment,” 20.

⁶⁹ John Mack, “‘Ethnography’ in the Enlightenment,” in *Enlightening the British*, eds. R.G.W. Anderson, et al, 114.

⁷⁰ Hart and Ward, “The Waning of an Enlightenment Ideal,” 413.

⁷¹ Porter, “Enlightenment in England,” 12.

Enlightenment was characterized by a spirit of improvement and social betterment.⁷² The general conviction of the importance of charity led to efforts to create and improve upon schools, reformatories, hospitals, orphanages, and asylums.⁷³ Thomas Coram, a shipwright who made his fortune as a builder and merchant, is a perfect example for this kind of charitable mind frame. He dedicated his fortune to the creation of the first foundling hospital, which besides providing a home for orphans, experimented in new educational, medical, and scientific methods.⁷⁴ The same motivation behind the development of the other social sciences inspired a curiosity about mental health. It was during this period that Bedlam, the infamous London asylum, was opened as an institution for studying and treating the mentally ill.⁷⁵ Overall, the once commonplace belief that destiny ran the lives of humans, who had no choice but to resign themselves to that fate, began to be replaced by a new faith in the ability of man. Ultimately, the “faith in man’s capacity to control and direct events” motivated them to expand the role of governmental, educational, and health institutions in an effort to minimize human misery and maximize happiness.⁷⁶ The middling classes were encouraged by the new Enlightenment credo of social progress and were inspired by a new faith in the ability to improve one’s self.⁷⁷

⁷² Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 28.

⁷³ Porter, “Enlightenment in England,” 12.

⁷⁴ Reginald H. Nichols and Francis A. Wray, *The History of the Foundling Hospital* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935).

⁷⁵ Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety, and Healing in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 3.

⁷⁶ Porter, “Enlightenment in England,” 12.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

The idea that the Enlightenment was to be embraced by the middle classes and the public at large was one almost exclusive to the British and American versions of the ideology.⁷⁸ The concept of the Enlightenment was clearly complex, and it evolved differently as it spread, influenced by distinctive political, economic, and social traits that ultimately resulted in the creation of nuances such as this one. Historically, the English Enlightenment has been considered relatively insignificant, especially in comparison with their ground-breaking Scottish neighbors. More recently, however, historians have come to recognize England as an inspiration and a model for the philosophies developed in the societies of their continental counterparts.⁷⁹ England had undergone small political and social changes over the years, slowly adjusting their culture as times changed. From the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215, to the execution of King Charles I in 1649, and the Glorious Revolution in 1688, England had gradually been forced on the system to make it fit contemporary circumstances. By the time the Enlightenment came into vogue, it was not necessary for England to undergo the kind of dramatic transformation other nations were facing. Instead, they had already found value in empiricism and the exercise of free thought.⁸⁰ As ideas came to English society, they were able to develop, unhindered by existing institutions or by the state.⁸¹ It was that environment that initiated the incorporation of society as a whole into the Enlightenment trend. Even Bath, the most “genteel and enlightened” of all the English

⁷⁸ Phillipson, “The Scottish Enlightenment,” 21.

⁷⁹ Pole, “Enlightenment and the Politics of American Nature,” 193.

⁸⁰ Porter, “Enlightenment in England,” 4.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 7

resorts, was open from the 1750s on to anyone who could afford it.⁸² One contemporary description went:

Every upstart of fortune, harnessed in the trappings of the mode, presents himself at Bath, as in the very focus of observation – Clerks and factors from the East Indies, loaded with the spoil of plundered provinces; planters, negro-drivers, and hucksters ... agents, commissaries, and contractors ... usurers, brokers, and jobbers of every kind; men of low birth, and no breeding ... all of them hurry to Bath, because here without any further qualification, they can mingle with the princes and nobles of the land ... Such is the composition of what is called the fashionable company at Bath; where a very inconsiderable proportion of genteel people are lost in a mob of impudent plebians.⁸³

That being said, the English, along with the American, Enlightenment ideologies were indebted to the philosophical advancements of the period that were made in Europe. Regardless of the English tradition in that area, it was continental thinkers that most thoroughly investigated the relation of natural law to the moral principles of government.⁸⁴

Most of these specifically English Enlightenment characteristics hold true in American philosophy, as well, because the American culture at this point was a fairly recently transplanted version of the original culture of the mother country. There were, however, some distinctly American qualities to the Enlightenment on the western side of the Atlantic. Because the social systems and institutions were not yet fully entrenched, it was much easier for Enlightenment ideals to actually take hold and make some serious impact rather than being well-intentioned, idealistic philosophy. The unique political

⁸² Porter, “Enlightenment in England,” 12.

⁸³ [Tobias Smollett], *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (London 1771), 1:70-71, quoted in Porter, “Enlightenment in England,” 12

⁸⁴ Pole, “Enlightenment and the Politics of American Nature,” 193.

and religious institutions of the colonies combined with its distinctive natural environment to create a spirit of self-sufficiency that defined much of what America was and did. In America, the Enlightenment was not just ideas, but was actually translated into a value set with long-term significance.⁸⁵ It was because of this background that Joel J. Orosz said that Americans had “a stronger commitment to ideas of political and intellectual freedom, more ardent belief in perfectability of man, and deeper faith in efficacy of reason to order society”,⁸⁶ and Henry Steele Commager asserted that America realized what Europe only imagined.

When Henry F. May, one of the most noted American Enlightenment scholars, divided the American Enlightenment into four periods, he said that they all had one common factor: a faith in reason.⁸⁷ Thomas Jefferson relied on this faith to tell him that his observation that all men were created equal was, in fact, a reasonable conclusion. He exemplified another unique aspect of the Enlightenment in America: the most significant enlightened thinkers were often also the main figures of the community instead of being ideological rebels. These ideals were imbedded in such influential men as Jefferson, James Madison, and Benjamin Franklin, which indicates just how strongly the Enlightenment had taken hold in America.

It was a culmination of the various ideas of the Enlightenment—the concern with human nature and society; the emphasis on reason, order, and observation; the importance of knowledge, discovery, and the pursuit of progress; a great respect and

⁸⁵ Ibid., 195.

⁸⁶ Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 14.

⁸⁷ May, *The Enlightenment*, 5.

love for nature and for the natural law it follows; and the distinctly Anglo-American characteristic of inclusiveness—that resulted in the creation and development of museums that would prove to be highly influential in their societies. By analyzing the British and Peale museums in context of each of these typical Enlightenment characteristics, the extent to which the museums were thoroughly seeped in Enlightenment thought and ideals becomes clear.

Conclusions

These three cultural characteristics run throughout everything that follows and will be brought up repeatedly. The contemporary consumer culture made material goods more valuable, giving them a significance they had never before had. As Britons and Americans began to see the world in terms of material items, it made sense for a cultural institution to rise up and cater to that new view. Museums expressed their message in a physical language; a language their societies were primed to understand.

That culture of consumerism was, in part, the result of a burgeoning middle class. They drove consumption to another level by striving to prove their social status through a material medium. The middle class was also significant when it came to museums because they were often the ones targeted to be at the receiving end of the popular education museums offered. It was also their growing dominance that frightened elitist men like Peale and the staff of the British Museum, convincing them of the necessity to culture the middle class, teaching them virtue and respectability, in the event that they did get in a position to overtake them in terms of social or political influence.

Primarily, however, it was the Enlightenment that encouraged museum proprietors to: 1) collect, 2) organize that collection, and 3) share it with the public. Men like Peale and Sloane, who were responsible for the creation of public collections, demonstrated many Enlightenment qualities. Their institutions were products of all three of these social trends. Had those trends not converged at this certain point in history, it is certain that museums would not have come about at that time, either.

SOCIAL INFLUENCE

“...in the hope that no person, who pretends to taste, will visit London without endeavouring to gratify a curiosity laudable in itself, and tending to raise the mind to a just contemplation of the wonders of creative Providence.”

“The British Museum,” *The London Guide*, 1782⁸⁸

By 1782, the British Museum had already become a landmark in Britain. This tourists’ guide to the city encouraged its readers, especially the country-dwelling ones, to make the most of their trips to London with a visit to the British Museum. Known for its ability to entertain with curiosities that ranged from Egyptian mummies to wasp’s nests, it was also recognized as a legitimate opportunity for mental and intellectual stimulation.

In this capacity, organizations like the British Museum exercised an important social influence over such things as entertainment and the pursuit of knowledge. This is notable because these were the topics that often impacted visitors in an immediate and obvious way.

Most of the work done on the social influence of the museums concentrates on them as schools, informal institutions where learning took place.⁸⁹ Peale in particular has actually been recognized for his efforts to straddle the line between entertainment

⁸⁸ *The London Guide, describing the public and private buildings of London, Westminster, & Southwark* (London, 1782?), 125.

⁸⁹ J. Mordaunt Crook, *The British Museum* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972); Gavin R. DeBeer, *Sir Hans Sloane and the British Museum* (New York: Arno Press, 1975); Joel J. Orosz, *Curators and Culture: The Museum Movement in America, 1740-1870* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990).

and pure education.⁹⁰ In regards to social makeup of the audience itself, there have been mixed interpretations. Some maintain that these were open institutions,⁹¹ while others argue that the lower classes were more frequently excluded.⁹² I plan to concentrate on the educational aspects of the museums, but will go beyond merely recognizing the institution as a school.

Museums clearly had a significant social role, part of which included providing a venue for education, entertainment, and the intermingling of classes. They were products of the old paternalistic order, designed to fulfill the needs and responsibilities of the upper classes. The provision of popular education was a “necessary evil” to provide them with the financial resources that would allow them to continue operating as an intellectual center of learning and social preservation. Though they did make the best of it, making efforts to improve those members of the lower class that came through, this was not part of the ideal plan. This change that they forced upon themselves would become highly influential. Entertainment aspects came along with the opening of the

⁹⁰ Edward P. Alexander, *Museum Masters: Their Museums and Their Influence* (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1983); Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995).

⁹¹ Richard P. Ellis, “The Founding, History, and Significance of Peale’s Museum in Philadelphia,” *Curator* 9 (1966): 235-58; Sidney Hart and David C. Ward, “The Waning of an Enlightenment Ideal: Charles Willson Peale’s Philadelphia Museum, 1790-1820,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 8, no. 4 (winter 1988), 389-418; Ruth Helm, “Peale’s Museum: Politics, Idealism, and Public Patronage in the Early Republic,” in *Mermaids, Mummies, and Mastodons: The Emergence of the American Museum*, ed. William T. Alderson (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1992)

⁹² David R. Brigham, “Social Class and Participation at Peale’s Philadelphia Museum, in *Mermaids, Mummies, and Mastodons: The Emergence of the American Museum*, ed. William T. Alderson (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1992); Clare Haynes, “A ‘Natural’ Exhibitioner: Sir Ashton Lever and his Holosphusikon,” *The British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* (2001): 1-14.

collections to the public. For private museum operators like Peale, it was necessary to keep an audience intrigued and returning so that he could make money and stay in business. For the British Museum, which was funded by taxes, there was an obligation to provide things of interest for the satisfaction of their financial backers; it was, in essence, the same responsibility Peale had. Social mingling, another side effect of the inclusion of popular education, was conveniently beneficial to the state of the American republic and to the British middle class.

I have looked primarily at personal correspondence to see the real thoughts and opinions of museum operators, official rules of operation to determine how inclusive the museums actually were, and reactions to the museums by visitors to gauge their perceptions. It is also important to note that “popular education” denotes the kind of learning provided to the public as a whole, especially to those with little prior formal education. The education provided in the museums was not like that received in an official school setting. Rather, it was informal and more generally accessible, but informative nonetheless.

I will begin by discussing the museum in that role. As a center for learning, they provided educational resources for individuals at all levels of society, including women. For the British Museum, its true purpose in that arena was providing a place for scholars to study and improve their knowledge; for the Peale Museum, it was instruction on how to maintain and grow the republic. I will also discuss two of the main side effects of turning the museum into a form of popular education: 1) Aided by relaxed ideas about the pursuit of leisure, they became sources of entertainment, and 2) They became sites

where the mixing of social groups took place. This was an important aspect of British polite society as well as efforts to strengthen the new American society. By filling three important social roles in society (educator, entertainer, and mediator in class relations), museums became one of the greatest social influencers.

Education

These museums functioned as schools, providing popular instruction in an era that valued education but lacked a consistent manner of providing it to a broad range of people. As previously discussed, American culture was seeped in Enlightenment influences. One of the most prevalent manifestations of this was the emphasis on education, self-improvement, and progress.⁹³ The influence of Scotland, the zenith of intellectual prowess in northern Europe, began to take shape in its counterparts in the British Empire as the style and content of Scottish learning spread.⁹⁴ People began to seek out education with the goal of improving themselves and their societies, which, in terms of museums, is very evident in Peale's social efforts. The British Museum, on the other hand, attempted to improve the society through the endeavors of the elites. In an effort to fashion a self-help reformism, Englishman Richard Carlile said, "Let us then endeavor to progress in knowledge, since knowledge is demonstrably proved to be

⁹³ Roy Porter, "The Enlightenment in England," in *The Enlightenment in National Context*, ed. Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (Cambridge 1981), 13.

⁹⁴ Nicholas Phillipson, "The Scottish Enlightenment," in *The Enlightenment in National Context*, ed. Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (Cambridge 1981), 19.

power.”⁹⁵ In an era that valued education and equated knowledge with power, there were increasingly more manners in which members of the lower classes could have access to some of the learning from which they had been financially and socially excluded for so long.

One of the primary forms was the Sunday School movement that began to move through England, providing basic education to lower classes, as, simultaneously, handbooks and digests designed for the edification of the unlearned became more common.⁹⁶ Museums went beyond this category of popular education. They became one of the best learning opportunities for non-elites. Available at little or no charge, museums often provided the most extensive amount of information that any commoner would have access to, and often the most accurate as well. Peale made clear his desire to disseminate accurate information when he appealed to the Library Company of Philadelphia for sponsorship of his museum guide book. He argued that such a publication would “facilitate an acquaintance with the subjects of Natural history in his repository by putting into the hands of the Visitors an accurate description of the object of his attention.”⁹⁷ At the Leverian Museum in London, accommodations were made so that it would be instructive to non-educated visitors, presumably middle and lower class

⁹⁵ Richard Carlile, quoted in M.C. George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*. (Harmondsworth, 1966) p. 18.

⁹⁶ Joseph M. Levine, “The Rise and Decline of English Neoclassicism,” in *Enlightening the British: Knowledge, Discovery, and the Museum in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. R.G.W. Anderson, M.L. Caygill, A.G. MacGregor, L. Syson (London, British Museum Press, 2003), 137.

⁹⁷ Charles Willson Peale to the Directors of the Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, 5 October 1795, in *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and his Family*, ed. Lillian B. Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 2:127.

individuals. Attached to each specimen was a label, identifying it and its origin, a practice later imitated by Peale.⁹⁸ These are example of museum directors making a conscious effort to reach out to audiences traditionally excluded from a serious education.

This provision of knowledge to the lower classes was prevalent enough for Joel J. Orosz to identify the early American museum as an integral part of the educational system.⁹⁹ Peale made an effort to appeal to both the “unwise” *and* the “learned,” and the British Museum declared itself open to any “such studious and curious persons, as are desirous of see the Museum.”¹⁰⁰ Peale obliged working class individuals who wished to visit his museum by taking advantage of new gas light technology and staying open late and occasionally repeating his natural history lectures in the evenings so that those unable to attend during the day due to work obligations would have equal opportunity to experience the museum.¹⁰¹ The British Museum did not make a deliberate effort to draw these individuals in, but they did not actively discourage them from attending, either. In America there was not a long-established tradition of strict separation between the elite and lower classes, while social structure in Britain was more rigid. Because Sir Ashton Lever, like Peale, was operating a private museum that ran on profits, he could not

⁹⁸ Jill Cook, “The discovery of British antiquity,” in *Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Kim Sloan and Andrew Burnett (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 98; CWP to John Isaac Hawkins, 28 August 1806, in Miller, *Selected Papers*, 2:981.

⁹⁹ Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 110.

¹⁰⁰ *Statutes and Rules, Relating to the Inspection and Use of the British Museum...* (London: British Museum Press, 1768), 9.

¹⁰¹ David R. Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic: Peale Museum and its Audience* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 3.

afford to follow traditional protocol for British society and instead accommodated those visitors who lacked formal educational training.

The education effort was aimed at the masses, including women, giving them the opportunity to profit intellectually from these institutions alongside the men. In fact, Charles Willson Peale made a point to encourage their attendance and to specify the benefit it would provide. When arranging his lecture series on natural history, he advertised in *Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser*, saying, "It is my wish to behold some LADIES among my hearers; for female education cannot be complete without some knowledge of the beautiful and interesting subjects of natural history."¹⁰² He aimed to have them and their children in his audience, as he demonstrated when he wrote, "Mrs. Ramsey will do me the favor of a Visit when the fishing season begins, & I hope will bring her children with her as I have plenty of room for them to romp in, and be amused and instructed at the same time in Natural History."¹⁰³ Peale believed that education should begin during one's youth, as that is the prime time for them to get started on the right path.¹⁰⁴ This was the ideal way to insure the development of respectable and trustworthy republican citizens. Therefore, he advertised his institution as "an important school for their own and their children's use,"¹⁰⁵ encouraging the development of the

¹⁰² Charles Willson Peale, "Lectures on Natural History," *Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser*, 26 Sept. 1799 in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 258.

¹⁰³ CWP to Richard Key Heath, Philadelphia, 21 Feb 1805, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:813.

¹⁰⁴ David R. Brigham, "Social Class and Participation at Peale's Philadelphia Museum," in *Mermaids, Mummies, and Mastodons: The Emergence of the American Museum*, ed. William T. Alderson (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1992), 3.

¹⁰⁵ CWP, "Address to the Public," *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), January 27, 1800, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:274.

museum as a center for self-education.¹⁰⁶ Although the British Museum was less concerned with the intellectual development of children and in fact banned them initially,¹⁰⁷ overall the same Enlightenment culture of self-improvement could also be found in Britain, where Andrew Kippis declared, “The perusal of the originals in the British Museum, is easily accessible to the curious in this way, who may there freely gratify their curiosity.”¹⁰⁸ Information was available in museums to those of lesser means, but the individual had to make the effort to seek it out.

Museums focused on providing useful knowledge to its visitors. Because the popular education they provided was geared primarily to the middle and lower classes, they wanted to take advantage of the situation by encouraging them to pursue economical uses of their time, preserving the social balance. By concentrating on teaching information with application and utility rather than that of pure leisure, they hoped to improve the lower classes, thus improving society as a whole.¹⁰⁹ Sir Hans Sloane stipulated that usefulness be a characteristic of the institution he left at the time of his death. In his will, he wrote: “That the same may be rendered as useful as possible, as well as towards satisfying the desire of the curious, as for the improvement, knowledge,

¹⁰⁶ Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 108.

¹⁰⁷ British Museum, *Statutes and Rules to be observed in the management and use of the British Museum*, (London, 1757, 1768).

¹⁰⁸ Andrew Kippis, *Biographia Britannica: or, the lives of the most eminent persons who have flourished in Great Britain and Ireland, from the earliest ages* (London, 1778-93), 4:341.

¹⁰⁹ Brigham, “Social Class and Participation,” 79.

and information of all persons.”¹¹⁰ The “usefulness” to which Sloane was referring was generally the kind of utility it would provide to the upper classes.

It was especially important for Peale to stress the usefulness of his museum as he was petitioning the new United States government for financial backing. Historian Orosz noted, “America, which desperately needed capital for development, would welcome museums if and only if they were formed for some practical, useful purpose.”¹¹¹ Peale recognized this, and thus his appeals for state sponsorship often echoed this idea. In 1797, he argued that “my Museum, should it become scientifically arranged[,will] probably be a powerful means of every aid to all the Arts, but more especially to those studying the medical art,”¹¹² and later announced his “ardent desire that it may become extensively useful.”¹¹³ He compared his institution to the larger European museums, declaring his to be “at least equal, if not in quantum, yet in neatness and utility to any of the boasted Museums of Europe.”¹¹⁴

Museum proprietors used their institutions not only to provide basic, useful intellectual instruction to their visitors, but also as a means by which they could, in their own definition, improve the lower classes. Here they had a captive audience and were able to teach virtue and encourage a certain moral code of behavior that would mimic the

¹¹⁰ Hans Sloane, “The Will of Sir Hans Sloane,” 29, quoted in Eric St. John Brooks, *Sir Hans Sloane: the Great Collector and His Circle*, (London: Batchworth Press, 1954), 47.

¹¹¹ Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 14.

¹¹² CWP to American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 7 March 1797, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:177.

¹¹³ CWP, “Address to the Public,” *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), January 27, 1800, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:274.

¹¹⁴ CWP to John Isaac Hawkins, Philadelphia, 17 December 1805, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:915.

“appropriate” deportment of the upper class.¹¹⁵ Peale said that “science and virtue go hand in hand” and therefore believed that his museum, increasingly respected as a scientific institution, had the ability of instilling virtue in those it encountered.¹¹⁶ In dealing with lower classes, the goal became the improvement of civic virtue and the development of character.¹¹⁷ In Britain, the desire to build the character of lower sorts had largely social influences. The culture had trained people to believe that the middling classes were unable to look after themselves and were vulnerable to various moral pitfalls.¹¹⁸ As the middle classes grew in size and influence, this became an issue of particular concern. Already feeling that their social position was being threatened by growing social pressure from beneath them, the French Revolution further frightened the respectability. It convinced them of the importance of channeling middle class behavior and training them to run things in a manner suitable to the current regime which was facing the imminent threat of losing their power to the middle class.¹¹⁹ In anticipation of an imminent transition of power, they sought to reform the middling sorts, preparing them to take on greater challenges, and providing them with the skills that would allow them to be independent from the guidance of the “better sort” and still make sound, moral choices, thus maintaining social stability.¹²⁰ Adam Smith indicated this feeling in British society, saying “Nothing tends so much to corrupt and enervate and debase the

¹¹⁵ Brigham, “Social Class and Participation,” 82.

¹¹⁶ Peale’s Museum, “Announcement of Move to Philosophical Hall,” *General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), September 16, 1794, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:98.

¹¹⁷ Hart and Ward, “The Waning of an Enlightenment Ideal,” 396.

¹¹⁸ Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 82

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 68

¹²⁰ Brigham, *Public Culture*, 28.

mind as dependency and nothing gives such noble and generous notions of probity as freedom and independency.”¹²¹ Thanks to such endeavors, in the mind of the elites, social refinement and moral improvement was achieved, as reflected in reformer Francis Place’s statement: “We are a much better people than we were...better instructed, more sincere and kind-hearted, less gross and brutal.”¹²² By teaching individuals about virtue, the museums helped to refine society and strengthen the skills of the middle class as a group.

In America, the efforts to use the museum as a school of virtue took a slightly different path. While the end goal was the same – social stability, which was increasingly reliant on the cooperation of the common people – in America that result could only come to pass in an institution that sought to instill specifically republican values. If the young nation was to continue, it was necessary that all Americans be contributing to the development of a republic. Peale summed it up in nicely, reminding the Massachusetts Congressional representatives of “the beneficial tendency of such an Institution, in a Republic, to instruct the mind and sow the seeds of Virtue.”¹²³ Peale wanted to create a national museum that could serve the purpose of training proud American republicans by humanizing their minds through the promotion of learning and virtue more than any other school.¹²⁴ Peale was self-consciously aware of his efforts,

¹²¹ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. E. Cannan (London, 1961), 1:35-6, quoted in Phillipson, “The Scottish Enlightenment,” 36.

¹²² Francis Place, quoted in George, *London Life*, 18.

¹²³ CWP to the Representatives of the State of Massachusetts in Congress, Philadelphia, 14 December, 1795, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:136.

¹²⁴ Eve Kornfeld, *Creating an American Culture, 1775-1800: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001), 31.

asking the members of the American Philosophical Society, “Are not the occupations of my latter days the giving light and food to the public mind?”¹²⁵ He saw his efforts as mind-nourishing and believed that what he provided the public was the intellectual and philosophical sustenance necessary for survival. A significant part of republicanism was the assumed participation of enlightened, independent citizens in civic life.¹²⁶ As a result, the acquisition of knowledge went beyond personal edification and became a social responsibility.¹²⁷ It was this very republican, very American goal of a universally educated public that Peale was pursuing in an effort to adequately prepare them for the civic duty of participation.¹²⁸ Peale acknowledged that these things, particularly republicanism, influenced the development of his museum in the guide to the Philadelphia Museum, declaring it to be “worthy of the State which gave it birth.”¹²⁹

Ruth Helm argues that Peale believed that museums would serve the purpose of republicanism by “educating the population, inspiring morality, and encouraging a selfless devotion to the state.”¹³⁰ By serving as a form of popular education, Peale felt his museum was capable of influencing the future of the country. Education was generally believed to have moral applications, and the content of the education available at Peale’s museum was no different.¹³¹ In 1794 it was commented that “the moral effect of a Museum is considerable,” and the seventh chapter of Job was quoted as

¹²⁵ CWP to APS, 7 March 1797, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:177.

¹²⁶ Helm, “Peale’s Museum,” 67.

¹²⁷ Brigham, *Public Culture*, 19.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹²⁹ CWP, “Guide to the Philadelphia Museum” (Philadelphia, 1804), in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:759.

¹³⁰ Helm, “Peale’s Museum,” 74.

¹³¹ Brigham, “Social Class and Participation,” 84; Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 82.

reinforcement of this claim.¹³² The issues of republican duty and moral education were wrapped up in what Linda K. Kerber and others have identified as the prevailing movement of femininity in the early republic: Republican Motherhood. The idea behind it held that women were to take a more vested role in society by assuming the responsibility of raising children to be virtuous, knowledgeable republican citizens who were capable of carrying the new nation to greatness.¹³³ To fulfill these new expectations, it became necessary for women to obtain more education, something that the Peale Museum was very capable of facilitating.¹³⁴ Paralleling appeals made by pioneers in American education reform like Benjamin Rush, Peale did his part to provide the requisite knowledge to women by specifically reaching out to their demographic.

Efforts to improve the virtuosity and opportunities of the less fortunate did not stem from a purely philanthropic place. Most museum founders in the second half of the eighteenth century were wealthier and better educated than the average American.¹³⁵ As members of the respectability, men such as Charles Willson Peale, Hans Sloane, and Ashton Lever felt the pressures of social responsibility that accompanied a position in the upper class.¹³⁶ Traditionally, the elite assumed a patriarchal role in society, and with that came the obligation to look after the weakest of their “children” and to put effort

¹³² “Lover of Nature” in *Dunlap and Claypoole’s American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), March 27, 1794, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:87.

¹³³ Linda K. Kerber, “The Republic Mother: Women and the Enlightenment—An American Perspective,” *American Quarterly* 28 (Summer 1976): 187; Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 3.

¹³⁴ Brigham, *Public Culture*, 6.

¹³⁵ Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 6.

¹³⁶ J.R. Pole, “Enlightenment and the Politics of American Nature,” in *The Enlightenment in National Context*, ed. Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (Cambridge, 1981), 199.

into helping them improve.¹³⁷ Peale, showing his sense of duty toward the people, entreated his friend Nathan Sellers to “state...my temper of accommodation and desire to please, especially towards a Public to whom I am under considerable obligations.”¹³⁸ Though they served other purposes as well, museums were, at least in part, a way for the educated elite to reach out to the uneducated masses, thus fulfilling their social responsibility.¹³⁹ The justification of the British Museum as a state organization relied on this duty and it fulfilled a vital aspect of Peale’s mission of strengthening the nation.

In order to be successful in their museum ventures, Peale and Sloane called upon their fellow social elites who would feel that same sense of duty and obligation to aid the lower classes. When Sloane coordinated the development of what would become the British Museum, he drew on powerful men who he knew would have the resources to get things done, the impulse to make personal use of such an organization, and the sense of social responsibility which accompanied privilege to ensure that those individuals took action. Sloane drew on men such as “Lord Mansfield, baron of Mansfield, lord chief justice of the court of the King’s-bench, one of this majesty’s most honourable privy-council, one of the governors of the Charter-house, and a trustee of the British Museum,” to assume important roles in the function of the Museum, particularly as

¹³⁷ Sidney Hart, “Charles Willson Peale and the Theory and Practice of the Eighteenth-century American Family,” in *The Peale Family: Creation of a Legacy, 1770-1870*, ed. Lillian B. Miller (New York: Abbeville Press, 1996), 117.

¹³⁸ CWP to Nathan Sellers, Philadelphia, 4 December 1805, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:914.

¹³⁹ Brigham, “Social Class and Participation,” 80.

museum trustees.¹⁴⁰ As a former president of the Royal Society, Sloane was able to tap that organization for men with a serious interest in science, nature, and learning in general as well as that sense of paternalism and social obligation. Sloane relied so heavily on the Royal Society, in fact, that Society Fellows held forty of fifty-one original trusteeships, including the famous naturalist, Sir Joseph Banks.¹⁴¹ The Fellows brought their sense of responsibility to the greater public, a zeal for research and study, and their own collective assortment of natural history specimens to the table, to the great benefit of the British Museum as a whole.¹⁴²

It was this kind of support and protection that Peale was looking for. He made an effort to create and improve organizations, such as the American Philosophical Society, of which he became a member in 1786, and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, which he helped found in 1805, that would be able to assist in filling the intellectual, artistic, and scientific chasm in American culture, much like the Royal Society did in Britain.¹⁴³ Like Sloane, he aimed for some of the most influential men and took advantage of the patriarchal notion of society ingrained in them. When trying to get governmental support for the Philadelphia Museum, Peale appealed to Congress as the “Guardians of the public good,” reminding them of that obligation to the lower classes, and, by extension, the importance of the work he is doing by helping the common

¹⁴⁰ Frederick Barlow, *The complete English peerage: or, a genealogical and historical account of the peers and peeresses of this realm* (London, 1775), 2:349.

¹⁴¹ A.E. Gunther, “The Royal Society and the Foundation of the British Museum, 1753-1781,” *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 33, no. 2 (March 1979): 208.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 211.

¹⁴³ Hart and Ward, “The Waning of an Enlightenment Ideal,” 309.

people.¹⁴⁴ When another body of elite, educated men, the American Philosophical Society, failed to serve the public by supporting his work, he laid a heavy guilt trip on them:

[B]elieve me when I say, that I expected, by my present occupation and labours in order to establish a School of Natural History I was intitled to some degree of indulgence from Gentlemen composing a Board of Art and Science – But I am sorry that I have it in my power to say, that in forming a Museum I receive no aid from any publick body of my Native Country and that my obligations come only to some few Individuals who have given articles to a Repository which I have always declared was designed for the benefit of America...this will bring a disgrace on her which I cannot avoid.¹⁴⁵

It is not surprising that Peale was upset about the failure of the government to endorse his museum. He recognized the value of having the support of such a group or the state, as it would provide stability for the institution regardless of outside social or economic issues. Peale feared that without this support, the museum could not last because they would have to spend too much energy attracting and pleasing patrons, instead of concentrating on its useful aspects, and this fear proved to be justified when, in 1848, his sons were forced to sell the collection to P.T. Barnum. The British Museum, with its state support, celebrated its 250th anniversary earlier this decade, and, furthermore, is considered to be one of the most premiere museums in the world.

Regardless, underneath Peale's indignation that these men would not follow through on their societal obligations by failing to support a venture that was designed to aid ordinary Americans lie far less selfless, humanitarian motives. Yes, Peale

¹⁴⁴ CWP to the Representatives of the State of Massachusetts in Congress, Philadelphia, 14 December, 1795, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:136.

¹⁴⁵ CWP to APS, Philadelphia, 7 March 1797, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:176.

championed his museum as a tool for the improvement of the greater American society, and Sloane also gave express instructions that his collection was to be used for “satisfying the desire of the curious, as for the improvement, knowledge and information of all persons,” but they were largely using the fringe benefit of aiding the general public as a source of money and as justification for their primary goal: creating research centers geared toward the intellectual development of the educated elite and, by extension, all of society.¹⁴⁶ Their opinions may have changed over time, but when both the Peale and the British Museums were established as institutions open to the public, financial gain was strongly in mind. Peale stood to profit from the extra admissions fees, while Sloane recognized that the chances for being funded by the state were higher if it were to be a direct benefit to most of society. As we have already seen, this funding was vital to the survival of the institution, and so they were willing to make the sacrifice of admitting commoners so that they could get that state backing and, with it, the center of elite research and education that was their ultimate goal.

It is clear that despite the espoused goal of bringing knowledge to the “curious” as well as the learned, those running and working in the museums were often less enthused to be dedicating to their time to lower class individuals. This elitism was the other effect of the social paternalism discussed earlier, and could lead them to dismiss the lower classes as a whole. Such a condescending attitude, especially in regards to their intellectual and analytical capacity, can be found even in men as esteemed as Thomas Jefferson, who suggested a series of selective exams designed so that “twenty

¹⁴⁶ Sir Hans Sloane, *The Will of Sir Hans Sloane, Bart. Deceased* (London, 1753), 29.

geniuses will be raked from the rubbish annually,” displaying an overall negative view on the common people.¹⁴⁷ It was this “rubbish” that Peale and the other elites hoped to improve with the goal of qualifying them for participation in republican society. Peale was equally condescending and complained about “people who do not take on themselves the trouble of thinking, which is very much the case with the bulk of mankind,”¹⁴⁸ while Squire Randal expressed his own displeasure with those who came to the British Museum but who he felt lacked the understanding to truly appreciate it. He said:

There are but few people, even in this age, who can relish all, or even any of the beauties of those curiosities in the British Museum. Idle girls, or, worse, idle men and women, may go there and admire, for a few minutes, the colour of a snake, or the enormous jaws of a crocodile! but they will return neither wiser nor better; the image will soon be effaced from their minds, their understandings being as much darkened as their memories unretentive.¹⁴⁹

This general attitude of condescension did play out in the museums themselves. For Peale, it was, in particular, the “‘rude and uncivilized’ people who stood on upholstered benches, scratched their names into wooden frames, and fingered the glass” that were particularly irritating.¹⁵⁰ There was a clear perception of the British Museum that those working there felt that giving visitors tours and providing them information

¹⁴⁷ Thomas Jefferson, quoted in Pole, “Enlightenment and the Politics of American Nature,” 202.

¹⁴⁸ CWP to John Hawkins, 7 October 1804, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 769.

¹⁴⁹ *Squire Randal’s excursion round London* (London, 1777), 69.

¹⁵⁰ CWP to Rembrandt Peale, 28 October 1809, quoted in Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 81.

was an inconvenience.¹⁵¹ The British Museum was, technically, open to the public, but their operations proved to be especially restrictive, initially offering no more than 60 tickets per day, depending on which weekday it was. The times that the museum was available for touring were all during the week, in the middle of the day, making it impossible for most working class people to attend, and those who did were hurried through the massive collection in three hours.¹⁵²

The British Museum preferred to move in a more scholarly circle, seeking to make the museum a prominent center of learning, research, and science, an effort that was also made at the Peale Museum in a different fashion. In 1757, the British Museum trustees expressly said, “For altho it was chiefly designed for the use of learned and studious men, both natives and foreigners, in their researches into the several parts of knowledge; yet being founded at the expense of the public, it may be judged reasonably, that the advantages accruing that it should be rendered as general, as may be consistent with the several considerations above mentioned,” essentially stating that their real purpose was as a research institution for the educated, and a compromise had been struck to get the funding to establish the museum.¹⁵³ The British Museum moved consciously in a scientific, scholarly direction designed to facilitate the intellectual development of

¹⁵¹ Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 26-27.

¹⁵² British Museum, *Statues and Rules to be observed in the management and use of the British Museum, By order of the Trustees* (London, 1757).

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 3.

society.¹⁵⁴ The British Museum Act of 1753, which created the museum, acknowledged its purpose as a center of learning and development, saying, "...the Advancement and Improvement whereof the said Museum or Collection was intended to and may in many Instances give Help and success to the most useful Experiments and Inventions."¹⁵⁵ For the Trustees, the scholarly work done at the British Museum was its most important activity, but education was one of its most essential characteristics. Anne Goldgar broached the idea of a "trickle-down" theory, which states that certain aspects of culture should be left to the elites, as they would get the most out of it. They, in turn, would pass the benefits they gained on to the public at large. This would also challenge the notion of the museum as a highly effective form of education for the commoner.¹⁵⁶ While this was the case at the eighteenth century, the British Museum ultimately came to be considered an institution of scholastic merit and national pride that they did not want to cheapen by charging for admission, regardless of the fact that educating the public was a secondary goal.

Charles Willson Peale subscribed to the "trickle-down" theory, as well. In a letter to a friend, he wrote, "The bulk of mankind are stupid Animals and seldom think for themselves, such men as yourself must think, execute for them and afterwards find

¹⁵⁴ Marjorie Caygill, "Sloane's Will and the Establishment of the British Museum," in *Sir Hans Sloane: Collector, Scientist, Antiquary, Founding Father of the British Museum*, ed. Arthur MacGregor (London: British Museum Press, 1994), 55.

¹⁵⁵ 26 George II c. 22: British Museum Act of 1753, section I, p. 333, quoted in *Sir Hans Sloane*, 50.

¹⁵⁶ Anne Goldgar, "The British Museum and the Virtual Representation of Culture in the Eighteenth Century," *Albion* 21 (2000), 196.

their senses to comprehend the value of your Work.”¹⁵⁷ Peale was also trying to create an intellectual niche for himself. He was in a tough position as he tried to create a scholarly institution, designed with the goal of preserving the ideological and practical aspects of the republic that would also successfully appeal to a popular audience, a necessity stemming from the fact that the museum admission fees were his family’s source of income.¹⁵⁸ Peale saw his work as a scientific enterprise and sought to legitimize his venture by getting members of such prestigious intellectual groups such as the American Philosophical Society and the Library Company of Philadelphia involved in the museum and by receiving endorsements, resources, and advice from influential naturalists like Sir Joseph Banks and Thomas Jefferson.¹⁵⁹ By the early years of the nineteenth century, Peale had sponsored the exhumation of the first full mastodon skeleton and thus established himself as a respected naturalist in his own right, solidifying a spot in the intellectual community. His reputation as an authority worthy of running a major resource for elite study of natural history was further enhanced when Jefferson bestowed upon him the honor of receiving the specimens collected from Lewis and Clark’s famed westward journey. This was as close as Peale would get to national support for his museum.

To the museum directors, the lower classes were clearly inferior. Peale’s museum, a shrine to the American republic that honored its heroes and its nature, made an effort to improve those non-elites in order to serve the overall good of the republic.

¹⁵⁷ CWP to John Isaac Hawkins, 28 August 1806, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:981.

¹⁵⁸ Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, “Entrepreneurs and Intellectuals: Natural History in Early American Museums,” in *Mermaids, Mummies, and Mastodons*, ed. Alderson, 26.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

At the British Museum, the priority was improving society through scholarly development. For both museums, the most enticing reason for taking on the responsibility of popular education was the financial resources that came with it. They were able to make the best of that opportunity by providing an education to the lower classes that concentrated on virtue, self-improvement, and useful knowledge, the effects of which would benefit the elites as well as the lower classes.

Entertainment

“C.W. Peale exerts himself to establish an Institution not only for the support of his family, but with the ardent desire that it may become extensively useful, as well as amusing; and this with out the pecuniary aid of government.”

Charles Willson Peale, “Address to the Public”
Aurora General Advertiser, 27 January 1800¹⁶⁰

This opening statement of Peale’s “Address to the Public” summoned up the museum as a form of entertainment, and the reasons it came to be so. Some of the issues included financial backing from the state and how having it affected that particular museum, generating revenue by continuously “amusing” and intriguing visitors in order to make a living, and the increasing acceptability of useful but non-religious leisure activities.

The issue of state sponsorship affected the museum as an entertainment venue just as it affected its educational abilities. Because the British Museum had external

¹⁶⁰ Charles Willson Peale, “Address to the Public,” *Aurora General Advertiser*, Philadelphia, 27 January 1800, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:274.

support, the Trustees were able to concentrate their efforts on research and learning opportunities for the educated elite and did not have to overly concern themselves with bringing in a public audience who would pay the bills. They were under obligation to serve them, however, because the public was technically their financial backer. Because Peale's institution was self-funding, he had to cater to the common people to ensure a steady cash flow.

As previously discussed, both institutions were interested in serving as a center of knowledge for the use of the erudite, and both compromised by offering themselves as a school for the betterment of the general public in order to secure valuable resources. Despite these gallant educational goals directed at both the elite and the middle class, museums evolved into sources of amusement. Fortunately for the Peale family, Ashton Lever, and other museum directors, it was becoming more socially acceptable for an institution to both amuse and instruct. They were now able to preserve, for the most part, the scholarly image they wished to project even as the admission of the public turned in into a place of diversion.¹⁶¹ The museums also received much of the same treatment as other types of entertainment. Advertisements in newspapers and in the form of posters were becoming increasingly common for such diversions as the theater and musical concerts, and museums followed suit.¹⁶² As ideas about leisure changed and the demand rose, museums would eventually improve their tourist facilities and services

¹⁶¹ Brigham, *Public Culture*, 80.

¹⁶² John Feather, "The Power of Print: Word and Image in Eighteenth-Century England," in *Culture and Society in Britain, 1660-1800*, ed. Jeremy Black (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1997), 54.

in order to better accommodate those who wished to visit the museum for less scholarly purposes.¹⁶³

Directors took advantage of their museums' potential to attract an audience, using it as a means to an end. Having already made the sacrifice to become a provider of popular education in exchange for financial resources, it was recognized that they had the opportunity to make the best of the situation and improve the lives of their lowliest visitors, thus improving their societies as a whole. In Britain, much of the entertainment was found in various blood sports found repugnant by moral middle classes. It was this group which was particularly interested in enlightenment, self-improvement, and in using the museum for that means. Due to the rowdy nature of those physical pastimes, they had the potential for instigating public disorder.¹⁶⁴ Institutions such as the British Museum offered a seemingly ideal alternative: entertaining enough to keep their interest, and hopefully educational enough to sufficiently culture uncouth audience members.

Peale was a pioneer in the museum world, recognized for his efforts to balance his responsibilities as an educator, a scholar, and entertainer.¹⁶⁵ He tried to make it acceptable to advertise his museum, an action which would have normally destroyed the scholarly image he was trying to portray, with the justification that, in the end, it would

¹⁶³ Barbara Carson, "Early American Tourists and the Commercialization of Leisure," in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, eds. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1994), 375.

¹⁶⁴ Emma Griffin, *England's Revelry: A History of Popular Sports and Pastimes, 1660-1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2005), 36.

¹⁶⁵ Alexander, *Museum Masters*, 41.

bring people to enlightenment.¹⁶⁶ This is also where the educational efforts of the elite reaching out to the lower classes previously discussed came into play. Operating, at least in part, as an entertainment establishment, also gave them the opportunity to continue functioning for the use and benefit of gentlemen scholars. It was through these educational channels that the museum directors made the best of their new roles as entertainers.

The museum as entertainment was one of two main recreational roles that they assumed. This was the role often taken on by private museums. In the opening quote, Peale mentions that the museum is his manner of providing for his family. This put him and other proprietors of private museums such as the Leverian, into a unique position. Because they relied on admission fares for their income, it was their best interest to keep a steady flow of people coming through the museum. They could not afford to be snobby, which is why Peale would stay open late on certain evenings, taking advantage of the invention of gas lighting and giving members of the working class the opportunity to visit and subsequently give him their twenty-five cents.¹⁶⁷ Though they attracted tourists who were visiting the city, it became necessary to get the home-town people to visit – and not just once. To keep them coming in, and their money with them, Peale and Lever had to come up with new and exciting ways to capture their attention. For this reason, the private museums tended to be more entertainment-minded.

If done well, there was opportunity in museums for financial success. About two decades after the original opening of his museum, Peale wrote to friends that “the profits

¹⁶⁶ Hart and Ward, “The Waning of an Enlightenment Ideal,” 413.

¹⁶⁷ Brigham, *Public Culture*, 3.

of the museum are considerably on the rise,”¹⁶⁸ so much so, apparently, that “my Income from the Museum has been sufficient to allow me to sport with a part of the profits.”¹⁶⁹ If he had enough left over to “sport with” after caring for seventeen children, eleven of whom lived to maturity, he clearly enjoyed some success. Though Peale went through difficult times, the true decline of the museum didn’t take place until after his death. Sir Ashton Lever, however, did not always enjoy the same fortune. His “Holophusikon” did have its share of success, largely due to his unique display format and the sheer volume of specimens he had collected.¹⁷⁰ He pioneered his own visually powerful style for displays, designed to strike the viewer with awe and wonderment.¹⁷¹ He would put together odd combinations of subjects, like ostriches with musical instruments, with the dual goal of entertaining the viewer and providing them with some visual intrigue. Ultimately, however, the demands of having to constantly interest the public caught up with him. Always looking for new, exciting specimens to add to his assortment, Lever eventually began spending more than he made from admission fees, forcing him to put his museum up for sale through a lottery in 1786. Taken over by James Parkinson, who essentially ran it into the ground, the collection was sold off in pieces in 1806.

Peale also felt the pressure to constantly provide fresh exhibits. He, however, used his social connections to bring in artifacts instead of spending a fortune on them.

¹⁶⁸ CWP to John DePeyster, 3 March 1805, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:815.

¹⁶⁹ CWP to John Isaac Hawkins, 7 October 1804, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:769.

¹⁷⁰ Haynes, “A ‘Natural’ Exhibitioner,” 6; See note 4 in Rubens Peale to CWP, Jan-Feb 1803, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:486

¹⁷¹ Haynes, “A ‘Natural’ Exhibitioner,” 4.

He wrote to his brother-in-law John DePeyster, saying, “I now take the liberty of requesting you to use your interest in having brought from the Islands where you have any concern in trade, such articles as may improve my Collection of Natural History which in time will become a Valuable part of my American Museum – and such expense as I can afford will be paid for the purchase of such articles.”¹⁷² He called upon a sense of duty not just as a member of the gentry, but as an American presented with an opportunity to aid his countrymen. In other efforts to build his collection, Peale took advantage of something else distinctly American: the natural environment. He contacted respected European naturalists and museum directors, men like A.M.F.J. Palisot de Beauvois and Sir Joseph Banks, seeking advice and offering to exchange specimens he had on hand, duplicates from his own collection that were unique to the Americas, for extra ones they had. Banks referred Peale on to James Parkinson, Lever’s successor, “who in order to give variety to his Collection is Constantly in the habit of vesting some of the money Collected from the Exhibition in new Curiosities will certainly be ready to enter into Exchanges & he who Continually receives Presents must of Course Possess abundance of duplicates of little use to himself.”¹⁷³ Peale recognized that he and Parkinson had the same goals and were presented with the same problems and challenges, and thus suggested a mutually advantageous relationship which would allow

¹⁷² CWP to John DePeyster, 3 December 1791, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:4.

¹⁷³ Sir Joseph Banks to CWP, London, 1 October 1794, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:99.

them to help add variety to the other's collection, for, as Peale said, "I possess a New World, and you the Old."¹⁷⁴

Besides diversifying their collection, private museums could bring audiences in with such remarkable and unusual sights as a six-footed cow,¹⁷⁵ snake with two heads,¹⁷⁶ and a Chinese lady's shoes measuring four inches long.¹⁷⁷ Having such items on display brought in crowds of domestic and foreign visitors like Henry Wansey in the hope that "Philadelphia will be one of the most desirable of Cities on the Continent."¹⁷⁸ Music could also be used to accomplish this as well. The study of music was common for those who could afford the instruction. In 1790, education reformer Benjamin Rush wrote in his *Information to Europeans Who Are Disposed to Migrate to the United States* that a taste for music "prevails very generally in our large cities, and eminent masters in that art who have arrived here since the peace have received considerable sums of money by exercising their profession among us."¹⁷⁹ Peale took advantage of this interest by providing an "excellent Organ for the use of such Visitors as are acquainted with Musick,"¹⁸⁰ with the hope that "some amateurs, who have formed themselves into

¹⁷⁴ CWP to James Parkinson, 20 December 1800, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:296.

¹⁷⁵ Unknown, "Description of Peale's Museum," *National Gazette* (Philadelphia), September 4, 1793, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:69.

¹⁷⁶ CWP, "Guide to the Philadelphia Museum," 1804, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:763.

¹⁷⁷ Henry Wansey, "Excerpt," *The Journal of an Excursion to the United States of North America in the Summer of 1794* (Salisbury, 1796) in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2: 97.

¹⁷⁸ CWP to Dr. Edward Stevens, 28 June 1805, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2: 857.

¹⁷⁹ Benjamin Rush, *Information to Europeans Who Are Disposed to Migrate to the United States*, 1790, in *The Letters of Benjamin Rush*, ed. Lyman H. Butterfield, (Princeton, 1951), 1:550.

¹⁸⁰ CWP, *Guide to the Philadelphia Museum*, (Philadelphia: Peale Museum Press, 1804), in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:763.

societies for their improvement, by practice, will perform in the Museum occasionally on Evenings for their amusement on my giving them some tickets to admit their friends.”¹⁸¹ By diversifying his collection and adding interesting and engaging exhibits, Peale was able to attract a larger audience.

While it is obvious in our capitalistic society that Peale would have to entice visitors into his private museum in order to make a profit, it should not be forgotten that it was in the best interests of the public institutions to keep a steady stream of visitors as well. Because of its origins, the British Museum was obligated to welcome the “curious” and faced complaints should they fail to receive those whose tax money funded their institution.¹⁸² Because “[e]very subject of Countrey has a Legal right of admission,” some requisite interest in the prevention of losing their audience to such private institutions as the Leverian Museum, which was making a conscious effort to bring in a crowd, had to be maintained.¹⁸³ The museum proved to be a source of entertainment for the crowds, which were particularly attracted to the natural and artificial curiosities,¹⁸⁴ a result of the “Eagerness and Considerable success” with which the study of natural history was being pursued in Britain.¹⁸⁵ The British Museum was successful in attracting attention, and as interest grew, so did the popularity of coffee house lecture series on natural history, as well as the length of the waiting period for

¹⁸¹ CWP to John Isaac Hopkins, 17 December 1805, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2: 916.

¹⁸² British Museum, *Statutes and Rules to be observed in the management and use of the British Museum* (London, 1757), 3.

¹⁸³ Sir Joseph Banks to CWP, 1 October 1794, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:99.

¹⁸⁴ Caygill, “Sloane’s Will,” 55

¹⁸⁵ Sir Joseph Banks to CWP, 1 October 1794, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:98.

tickets. In the summer of 1773, it was determined that 2,000 people were waiting for tickets at the same time.¹⁸⁶ This kind of wait continued to be an issue until tickets were abolished in 1810.

Museums served one other main function of amusement for their audiences: leisure. While private museums such as Peale's had to assume the role of entertainer to bring in a sufficiently large crowd, the British Museum became a hub of amusement primarily by being a source of leisure. This had a great deal to do with the ongoing redefinition of socially-beneficial leisure in Anglo societies.¹⁸⁷ In a society that had a strong religious background, leisure activities had long been oriented around the contemplation of the hereafter. During this period, however they began to concentrate instead on things that could be shown to and talked about with neighbors.¹⁸⁸ Historian Barbara Carson attributes the changing mental attitudes toward leisure to the development of modern notions of time and work discipline, a desire for sociability with a new and wider range of people, a greater awareness of a broader world, the appreciation of landscape, the pursuit of fashion, and the personal self-confidence to try new things.¹⁸⁹ Leisure was still expected to be moral, rational, and useful, but now had the added expectation of being elegant and fashionable as well.¹⁹⁰ The theater served as a model, having just become legally defensible as leisure. It was determined that individuals had the right to enjoy the theater or any other "rational and innocent

¹⁸⁶ *Commons Journals*, 11 May 1774, quoted in Goldgar, "The British Museum," 214.

¹⁸⁷ Brigham, *Public Culture*, 21.

¹⁸⁸ Carson, "Early American Tourists," 401.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 397.

¹⁹⁰ Brigham, *Public Culture*, 22

amusement, which at the same time, that it affords a necessary relaxation from the fatigues of business is calculated to inform the mind and improve the heart.”¹⁹¹ Peale scholar David R. Brigham believes that it was to take advantage of this and to distinguish his museum from a source of vice that Peale referred to his museum as a form of “rational amusement.”¹⁹²

The altered attitude towards leisure encouraged greater amounts of travel for leisure purposes, a demographic from which museums certainly benefited.¹⁹³ There was still a sense of obligation towards work and responsibilities, so usually opportunities for leisure would pop up only in small increments of a few hours or a few days, which was ideal for visiting a museum.¹⁹⁴

Peale’s museum also fit the new expectations for leisure though it was less-widely used in for that purpose. The museum fit certain requirements of respectable amusement by being useful and family-oriented.¹⁹⁵ The Peale Museum was a family operation, and Charles Willson Peale’s children not only aided him in the operations, including son Linneus who helped selling tickets,¹⁹⁶ but his son Rubens actually took

¹⁹¹ Pennsylvania General Assembly, “An ACT to repeal so much of an Act of General Assembly of this Commonwealth, as prohibits Dramatic Entertainments within the City of Philadelphia and the Neighborhood thereof,” *Laws of the Thirteenth General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Enacted in the Second Sitting* (Philadelphia: printed by Thomas Bradford, [1789]), 14-15, quoted in Brigham, “Social Class,” 83.

¹⁹² Brigham, “Social Class,” 83.

¹⁹³ Carson, “Early American Tourists,” 397.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 399.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 405.

¹⁹⁶ CWP to Rubens Peale, 24 June 1805, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:854.

over in his father's absence.¹⁹⁷ Peale's Philadelphia Museum also welcomed children and women,¹⁹⁸ providing bourgeois women the opportunity to socialize outside the home.¹⁹⁹ In the so-called cult of domesticity that constituted the ideal for contemporary middle- and upper-class women, their lives were centered in the home. The museum provided them the occasion for leisure in the form of social interaction, and Peale expressed his desire to meet the new standard of leisure by being fashionable. He wrote to his daughter, "[B]y our united exertions we hope to make the Museum the Admiration of all men of Science, fashion, & taste."²⁰⁰

It is also important to keep in mind that as the culture changed, particularly under the influence of the Enlightenment, people began looking for new, fresh kinds of entertainment. This was especially true for the growing middle classes. They were seeking out a kind of amusement that incorporated reality and practical knowledge in an effort to be further "enlightened." The museum easily fit this criteria, further increasing its popularity.

Museums took advantage of changing attitudes toward advertising and leisure to strike a tentative compromise between being a purely academic or a purely entertainment institution while remaining true to their purpose of scholarly study.

Social Mingling

¹⁹⁷ CWP to John DePeyster, 3 March 1805, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:815.

¹⁹⁸ CWP to Richard Key Heath, 21 February 1805, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:813.

¹⁹⁹ Carson, "Early American Tourists," 405.

²⁰⁰ CWP to Angelica Peale Robinson, 29 October 1805, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:904.

One of the features unique to the museum as both an educational and entertainment institution was the degree of interaction between social classes. Elite and non-elite would rarely attend the same schools, and in leisure situations such as the theater, the classes were strictly divided.²⁰¹ In the museum, however, when the museum was opened up to all people, it meant that they would be sharing the same space. The middle classes were largely made up of professionals, merchants, bureaucrats, military officers, physicians, clergymen, and manufacturers, and accounted for about two-fifths of the population. That the museum incorporated this group was an important attribute in both cultures and impacted the various classes in different ways throughout the social structure.

Both the British and American societies had their own motivations for adopting socially inclusive formats. In contemporary British culture, the concept of the “polite society” governed all social interactions. Polite society, according to historian Phillip Carter, consisted of “those who sought a reputation for refinement, whether this reputation be politeness or sensibility, sociability or snobbishness; and of those activities and locations within which individuals, conduct writers or social analysts claimed to detect and pursue refined behaviour, whether this be the nation at large, the city or more intimate venues within these spheres.”²⁰² One of the most important attributes of polite society was social mingling. It was the individual’s opportunity to show off his or her polite sensibilities, and was the middle classes greatest tool for establishing themselves

²⁰¹ Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education, 2001), 38.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 19.

socially. Coffeehouses, public gardens, and public assemblies were ideal places for mingling, and museums easily fit into that category. While it had previously been frowned upon to step out of one's assigned social position, as the middle class grew in number and wealth, social climbing became increasingly acceptable.²⁰³ Interaction between classes was also becoming more common in the new United States of America, where Peale followed republican goals by keeping the museum open to all.²⁰⁴ Because of this open society they were attempting to set up, it was necessary that some sort of accord be established between the different social elements, or the republican experiment would fail. Though the gentry attempted to consolidate power and wealth, the open land and multitude of religious and ethnic groups kept American society relatively fluid, especially in comparison to the British.²⁰⁵ Peale scholar Lillian B. Miller says that Peale reinforced that idea through his "emphasis on reason and the individual's capacity to make appropriate decisions based on experience allowed for a social mobility that was in essence democratic."²⁰⁶

Overall, social access in the museum played out differently in each social rank. For the elite, this marked an awkward moment in the transition from a paternal system to a truly inclusive one, a change motivated by Enlightenment ideologies. While they claimed open minds, intent on aiding the middle and lower classes, they were still

²⁰³ Porter, "Enlightenment in England," 10.

²⁰⁴ Brigham, *Public Culture*, 3.

²⁰⁵ Hart, "Charles Willson Peale," 101.

²⁰⁶ Lillian B. Miller, "The Peales and their Legacy, 1735-1885," in *The Peale Family: Creation of a Legacy, 1770-1870*, ed. Lillian B. Miller (New York: Abbeville Press in association with the Trust for Museum Exhibitions and the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 1996), 92.

largely in the older, more rigid and elitist mindset. Peale, who so often stated his desire to be useful to the public, complained:

I wish I could also prevent visitors from putting their fingers on the Glasses and frames in the different parts of the Museum, they dirty the glass and destroy the brilliency of the gilding. The standing on our covered benches is another dirty custom, could I be often in the museum I should prevent it as I sometimes do taking out my Handkerchief and wiping and brushing after them, without uttering a syllable.²⁰⁷

Peale also openly recognized socially significant patrons, and though his intentions were, in theory, democratic, the elite class was largely overrepresented in his audience, as they tended to be richer and better educated than the most of the citizens of Philadelphia.²⁰⁸

And at the British Museum, though they were obligated to make tickets available to any person desiring of them “according to ... prescribed rules,” they were still extremely concerned with one’s personal status and rank.²⁰⁹ The application directions for tickets states, “Such as apply for Tickets, may deliver, in a List, to the Porter, containing the Christian and Surnames of each Person, together with their Titles, Rank, Profession, or Trade, and their several Places of Abode.”²¹⁰ The true availability of the British Museum to the public was questioned due to the attitude of the respectability. Squire Randal, the author of a travel account of London, declared, “This is certainly one of the most valuable institutions for promoting literary knowledge in the universe, and the vast number of valuable manuscripts has already thrown great light on the history of

²⁰⁷ Charles Willson Peale to Rembrandt Peale, 28 October 1809, quoted in Brigham, *Public Culture*, 28.

²⁰⁸ Brigham, *Public Culture*, 7; Brigham, “Social Class,” 86; Gary Kulik, introduction to *Mermaids, Mummies, and Mastodons*, ed. Alderson, 13

²⁰⁹ Squire Randal, *Squire Randal’s excursion round London* (London, 1757), 65.

²¹⁰ British Museum, *Directions to such as apply for tickets to see the British Museum* (British Museum Press, 1782).

England. But ... consider the vast number of idle people, who come to view the curiosities, and who by their ignorance can never relish their beauties.”²¹¹ Visitors found those members of the elite who ran the museum to be rude and inconspicuous with their aversion to the job. The museum’s policies were very restrictive, and the guides were rarely helpful in explaining the collections.²¹² Rather, they would hurry visitors through in the allotted three hours in an effort to get back to their regular work. In these museums, the kind of class distinctions that reflect the preferred concentration on elite scholarly research and that were indicated in Anne Goldgar’s “trickle down” theory – that such resources would be better utilized in the hands of the educated elite, whose accomplishments would then benefit society as a whole – were evident. This period was marked by a clumsy transition in the respectability from this frame of mind to a more democratic and open sense of obligation to improve the common people. Even Peale himself, a staunch American patriot whose museum he claimed was birthed of republicanism, varied between the two extremes.

For the middle classes, however, they saw social and educational forums like museums as ripe with opportunity. As discussed earlier, the “middling sorts” had come to enjoy great importance and influence during this period due to their increased size and financial power.²¹³ Though they may have gained wealth, the members of the upper middle class were long denied social rank due to their “inferior” birth. Because of that,

²¹¹ Squire Randal, *Squire Randal’s Excursion*, 68.

²¹² Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, MA, 1974), 26-7; Louis Simond, *Journal of a Tour and Residence in Great Britain, during the Years 1810 and 1811, by a French Traveller* (New York, 1815), 1:81-83.

²¹³ James Henretta and Gregory H. Nobles, *Evolution and Revolution: American Society, 1660-1820* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1987), 242.

this group had to create their own opportunities to establish themselves. Museums provided them with the opportunity to rub elbows with their social betters, and an occasion to display how cultured they were. This phenomenon was also responsible for primarily upper middle class audiences in concert halls and theaters, and led them to donate the resources they did have to the betterment of various social institutions. Peale's colleague Benjamin Latrobe wrote to him about the establishment of the Philadelphia Academy of the Fine Arts, saying, "Among the Names I observe those of a number of Men whom I did not suspect of any taste for, or knowledge for any Arts but that of bookkeeping or cookery. I am glad however that they have come forward with that most essential support of all Art Money."²¹⁴ Though they did not necessarily have a genteel background, the men Latrobe speaks of did have the financial resources to make an impression.

They were also able to take advantage of such social opportunities as might arise in the museum setting or in the associated gardens in order to make economic, as well as social, connections. If there was occasion for middle class individuals to bring their work into such an interaction, they could economically benefit through the creation of new contracts and the potential of new upper class clients. Further education was another way to aid their economic pursuits, and the museum provided such an opportunity, giving them the chance to improve their lives and make themselves more socially valuable.²¹⁵ Despite conflicting attitudes among the elite towards the middle

²¹⁴ Benjamin Henry Latrobe to CWP, 17 July 1805, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:866.

²¹⁵ Brigham, *Public Culture*, 19.

classes, sometimes resulting in socially handicapping situations, members of that middling class were often able to take advantage of what opportunities were still available to them, using those to create economic and social advantages.

The lower, working classes, generally those below the level of shopkeeper, had a more difficult time taking advantage of the things that the museum had to offer. Being part of the working class could restrict an individual on either side of the Atlantic from seeing such museums. Even though Peale did make an effort to stay open late to accommodate day workers, it was possible that the price of admission would deter certain visitors.²¹⁶ For example, a Moravian woman noted in her diary in 1810 that though she and her friends wished to see the mastodon skeleton, they determined the fee was too high.²¹⁷ This was an especially relevant problem when the mastodon exhibit opened. Displayed separately from the main, permanent exhibit, Peale charged an additional fee, on top of the standard \$0.25, to get into that exhibit.²¹⁸ When David R. Brigham studied the demographics of Peale's audience, he discovered that, in fact, few working class individuals were listed as visitors, suggesting that contemporary social restraints were still very influential in the museum itself.²¹⁹ Peale's democratic words would suggest that it was not intentional, but, regardless, he did a sufficient job keeping out the riff raff.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 3.

²¹⁷ Catherine Fritsch, "Notes of a Visitor to Philadelphia, Made by a Moravian Sister in 1810," translated by A.R. Beck. *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 36, no. 3 (1912): 360, quoted in Brigham, *Public Culture*, 27.

²¹⁸ Brigham, *Public Culture*, 26.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 9; Brigham, "Social Class," 86.

In the early years of the British Museum, it was the attendance procedure that deterred many would-be working class visitors.²²⁰ When it was first opened to the public, the museum was open most weekdays, excluding holidays and days of thanksgiving, from 9:00 to 3:00. Tours ran on the hours from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm, and on the thirty-odd days a year that the museum was open 4:00-8:00, tours were also offered at 4:00 and 5:00. If a member of the working class managed to get the day off of work, he or she still had to face the complicated ticket application system, which required advanced notice and restricted entry to ten individuals per tour.²²¹

It seems clear, then, that while the museums did provide various opportunities, both economically and socially, to middle class individuals, the gap between the middle and working classes was widening in this particular venue. The lower classes were probably better off obtaining their information from the small, cheap books that had appeared in abundance since the publishing business had begun to prosper. This is something Peale hoped to take advantage of with his museum guide by providing detailed information at minimal cost.²²² Most of the social stratification that this demonstrates resulted from the same paternalistic attitude toward the lower classes that inspired them to use museums as schools for the general public.²²³

The museum had different effects on the individual classes, but overall they were places of testing societal limitations in an effort to determine where the boundaries lay.

²²⁰ Caygill, "Sloane's Will," 55.

²²¹ British Museum, *Statutes and Rules to be observed in the management and use of the British Museum* (British Museum Press, 1757).

²²² Hart and Ward, "Waning of an Enlightenment Ideal," 406.

²²³ Brigham, *Public Culture*, 25.

Roy Porter argues that the Anglo-influenced Enlightenment created a need for harmony throughout society, thus encouraging an open nature.²²⁴ In reality, this meant reaching a place of compromise that could suit both sides of the spectrum; a compromise that included the provision of popular education in the form of museums. They were used to establishing community boundaries by identifying with certain social groups through dress, behavior, and social connections.²²⁵ Another British historian, Peter Hoffenberg, has studied exhibitions in the Victorian era, discovering that by merely showing up, an individual represented themselves, their race, and their nation to everyone in the audience. He also argues that social identities were constructed by the labeling and integration of these visitors.²²⁶ These patterns were also taking place at the end of the eighteenth century. Particularly in societies that were largely segregated, if museums provided an opportunity for any amount of social mingling, those few moments of interaction would leave stronger impressions and mental images of that class than would long-term relations. In the museum itself, mini-battles over the integration of commoners begin to take place. The British Museum facilities were particularly heated, due to the more rigid social hierarchy. The Reading Room was generally considered to be for the use of serious scholars only, while the outdoor gardens could be freely used. That left the main part of the museum to be fought over, and it was here that the clumsy phase of social development, the place where the elite were torn between helping and

²²⁴ Porter, "Enlightenment in England," 12

²²⁵ Brigham, *Public Culture*, 1.

²²⁶ Peter H. Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display: English, Indian, and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), xviii.

shunning the lower classes, became most significant.²²⁷ Though initially the integration of commoners was seen as restrictive to the more refined segments of society, that image relaxed through time.²²⁸

The social mingling aspect of museums meant something different to each social class. The elites shied away from it, the middle class welcomed the opportunities it brought, and the working class really did not get to take advantage of it much. Regardless, it was one of the major side effects of providing both popular and elite education, and became one of the most distinctive traits of this particular kind of institution.

Conclusions

Though museums were begun with elitist, paternalistic goals, opportunities to influence society in positive ways arose out of that. Though popular education was not their primary concern or goal, it existed nonetheless, and individuals of the middle and lower classes who were able to attend benefited from that. At the same time, they were able to provide morally acceptable entertainment that not only served as an alternative to immoral and potentially harmful forms of amusement, but also indoctrinated audience members with useful knowledge and ideas about virtuous behavior. Part of this came from economic necessity, part from legal obligation, but also from the elitist sense of paternalism that permeated their societies.

²²⁷ Goldgar, "The British Museum," 217.

²²⁸ Brigham, *Public Culture*, 7.

Though the upper classes were not always thrilled about it, the class mingling that resulted also served society well. Middle class Britons were able to make the effort to improve themselves while Americans of various classes had the opportunity to feel each other out and become comfortable with those that would have to be their close allies and partners if the republic was to succeed. All of these were socially influential measures museums were able to accomplish while pursuing intellectual discoveries by the educated elites that would be beneficial to society. From the start, that was their primary goal, though the byproducts generated in the pursuit of that objective ultimately proved to be equally, if not more, significant.

CHANGED PERSPECTIVES

A well organized Museum is an Epitome of the World, where the various interesting subjects of every country may be brought into one view.”

Charles Willson Peale to the American Philosophical Society, 7 March 1797²²⁹

To Peale, the ideal museum was a microcosm of the world. Here a visitor could find the greatest products of humankind: books, art, mechanical inventions, and cultural relics, as well as the greatest product of the divine: nature. Any person who took the time to carefully consider the articles before him or her could learn about the world in all its representations. Through this reproduction of the earth in both its physical and human dimensions, this “world in miniature,” as Peale so famously called it, the viewer’s perspectives on that world changed.²³⁰ Therein lays the greatest importance of museums in Anglo-American culture during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Their ability to influence the way an audience looked at the world was of major significance, regardless of whether that influence was intentional or was simply inferred by the observer.

Because the museums were disproportionately concentrated on natural history, their relationship with nature has received a good deal of attention.²³¹ Though this era

²²⁹ CWP to American Philosophical Society, 7 March 1797, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:177.

²³⁰ CWP, “Address to the Public,” *Aurora General Advertiser*, Sept. 28, 1800, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 274.

²³¹ Eric St. John Brooks, *Sir Hans Sloane: the great collector and his circle* (London: Batchworth Press, 1954); Neil Chambers, “Joseph Banks, the British Museum and Collections in the Age of Empire,” in *Enlightening the British*, ed. Anderson, 99-113; Marjorie Caygill, *The Treasures of the British Museum* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1985); Robert Huxley, “Natural History Collectors and Their

has been well acknowledged as a period of national re-identification, that redefinition of nationalistic sentiment is rarely attached to museums.²³² While the literature generally demonstrates the negative images and stereotypes of outsiders denoted during this time of imperial expansion, there has not been any real synthesis of these viewpoints.²³³

Museums, particularly the British and Peale Museums, were instrumental in changing their audience's perspectives on the surrounding world. This included the natural world, which, through interaction with the museum, became a source for useful knowledge and the proving ground for the enlightened and Deistic idea that nature justified the natural order. Their perspectives on the external cultural environment, the world run by "outsiders," ranged from a blanket image of non-Englishmen or non-Americans to an appreciation of the economically beneficial information museums provided. They had a more enthusiastic approach to the internal cultural world, that which is also defined as national identity. Through the museums, national identity came

Collections: 'Simpling Macaronis' and Instruments of Empire," in *Enlightenment*, ed. Sloan and Burnett, 80-91; Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: a History of the Modern Sensibility* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

²³² Jeremy Black, ed. *Culture and Society in Britain, 1660-1800* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1997); Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Colley, "Britishness and Otherness: An Argument," *Journal of British Studies* 31 (Oct. 1992): 309-329; Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Peter Dobkin Hall, *The Organization of American Culture, 1700-1900: Private Institutions, Elites, and the Origins of American Nationality* (New York: New York University Press, 1982).

²³³ Joe Cribb, Jessica Harrison-Hall and Tim Clark, "Trade and learning: the European 'discovery' of the East," in *Enlightenment*, eds. Sloan and Burnett, 258-269; Peter H. Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display: English, Indian, and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Ian Jenkins, "Ideas of antiquity: classical and other ancient civilizations in the age of Enlightenment," in *Enlightenment*, eds. Sloan and Burnett, 168-177; Adrienne L. Kaeppler, "Eighteenth Century Tonga: New Interpretations of Tongan Society and Material Culture at the Time of Captain Cook," *Man* 6, no. 2 (June 1971): 204-120; Arthur MacGregor, "North American Ethnography in the Collection of Sir Hans Sloane," in *The Origins of Museums*, eds. Impey and MacGregor, 232-6.

to be associated with distinctive traits: republican virtue for the Americans and global power for the Britons. It was museum experiences that caused these kinds of changes.

I looked primarily at the public's interpretation of the museums, while also examining the correspondence of those individuals who were vital in the museums' regular operations and guide books which listed museum contents and commentary on the exhibits. These sources provided the opportunity to gauge the true feelings and intentions of the directors themselves, how the objects were used to carry out those intentions, and how the museums were capable of influencing people's perspectives on society and the surrounding world. Through these sources you can see the influence of the Enlightenment played out through an emphasis on understanding the world and mankind through the application of reason.

I will first discuss the new ways in which people came to see the natural world. Altered interpretations of and ideas about the outside cultural world, the "other" cultures of the world, will be addressed as well, followed by the self-conscious redefinition of themselves as a culture. As museums changed the way that people looked at the world at large it affected every other aspect that characterized their national consciousness.

Natural World

The British and Peale Museums were the products of cultures that already valued the natural world. In fact, it was that interest that birthed both collections. Much of Sir

Hans Sloane's collection, which would later become the British Museum, was gathered from his own travels, or contributed by friends.²³⁴ Historian Luke Syson may have best summed up Sloane's mission: "[His] collection set out to make manifest the wonders of God's universe to mankind, to stimulate enquiry, provoke to satisfy enquiry and, by an emphasis on the rare, the exotic and the exceptional, to encourage speculation on the mysteries of nature and the ingenuity of humankind at its centre."²³⁵ Sloane was one of many gentleman scholars who took up the study of nature as a hobby and were known to have "discussed natural history in their parlors, promoted public lectures on chemistry and natural philosophy, corresponded with foreign savants, and created local membership societies to collect and display specimens and apparatus."²³⁶ Personal and educational goals, as well as economic and political ones, motivated the compilation of private collections, often called cabinets of curiosities, by intellectual groups like the Royal Society and the American Philosophical Society and by individuals with means.²³⁷

As a result, the museums created by the conglomerations of these private collections were often the best resources for learning about and studying the natural

²³⁴ *The Will of Sir Hans Sloane, Bart. Deceased* (London: printed for John Virtuoso, 1753), 2, quoted in Eric St. John Brooks, *Sir Hans Sloane: the Great Collector and His Circle* (London: Batchworth Press, 1954), 47.

²³⁵ Luke Syson, "The Ordering of the Artificial World: Collecting, Classification and Progress," in *Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Kim Sloan and Andrew Burnett (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2003) 110.

²³⁶ John C. Greene, *American Science in the Age of Jefferson* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1984); Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, "Entrepreneurs and Intellectuals: Natural History in Early American Museums," in *Mermaids, Mummies, and Mastodons: The Emergence of the American Museum*, ed. William T. Alderson (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1992), 23.

²³⁷ Robert Huxley, "Natural History Collectors and Their Collections: 'Simpling Macaronis' and Instruments of Empire," in *Enlightenment*, ed. Sloan and Barnett, 80.

world, whether the viewer was highly educated or not. There you could find “a wasp’s nest...a vulture’s head, some serpents, birds, spiders, lizards, and other articles; but what must attract particular notice, is a fine young flamingo stuffed.”²³⁸ Charles Willson Peale declared, “Such a Museum, easy of access, must tend to make all classes of people in some degree learned in the science of nature without even the trouble of study.”²³⁹ The goal stated here was the provision of knowledge to all people, regardless of their social station, and truly the museum was one of the few institutions that could serve an educational purpose for both the elite and middle classes. Because of this interest in nature, these museums were top-heavy in the natural history category. For that reason, their importance in serious scholarly research was often recognized. Of the British Museum Thomas Birch said, “In short, the Naturalist will find in this Musaeum almost every thing which he can wish and will be greatly assisted in his Inquiries and observations by the catalogue of it in 38 volumes in fol. and 8 in quarto containing short accounts of every particular, with References to the Authors, who have treated them.”²⁴⁰ Museums, however, were not merely “instructive and pleasing by many authentic facts on the faculties, dispositions, organic powers, social affections and economy of the animals, so admirably ordained by their great Creator,” but went beyond the instruction of mere fact and actually constructed a new interpretation of nature that influenced the

²³⁸ *A new and compleat history and survey of the cities of London and Westminster, the borough of Southwark, and parts adjacent...* {[London], 1769), 342.

²³⁹ Charles Willson Peale to Thomas Jefferson, 6 June 1802, quoted in Joel J. Orosz, *Curators and Culture: The Museum Movement in America, 1740-1870* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990), 82.

²⁴⁰ Thomas Birch, “Memoirs relating to the Life of Sir Hans Sloane Bart formerly President of the Royal Society” (British Library, Additional MS 4241), fol. 25, quoted in Brooks, *Sir Hans Sloane*, 53.

way people saw the natural world. Museum exhibitions concentrating on nature exposed the audience to the potential usefulness of and resources available through the natural world, instilled a greater appreciation and devotion to divine creation, and helped promote a sense of personal pride in the national homeland.

Part of the Enlightenment culture was the emphasis placed on reason and usefulness, and utility became a valuable characteristic in any person or thing one might encounter. The study of the natural world brought about an understanding that there were great resources available in nature that could be potentially beneficial to humanity as a whole. Sir Hans Sloane considered this to be one of the most valuable aspects of his collections, and left an argument to that affect in his will:

Now desiring very much that these things tending many ways to the manifestation of the glory of God, the confusion of atheism and its consequences, the use and improvement of physic, and other arts and sciences, and benefit of mankind, may remain together and not be separated, and that chiefly in and about the city of London, where...they may by the great confluence of people be of most use...²⁴¹

Museum exhibits could pass useful knowledge on to a larger number of people who might be able to benefit from it. Thomas Birch recognized a number of occupations that could benefit from the knowledge available to them at the British Museum. “Here,” he wrote, “the young Physician, Chemist and Apothecary may become well acquainted with every substance, Animal, Vegetable or mineral, that is every employ’d in medicine.” He also recommended that those interested in finding mines in Great Britain get to know the various metals, ores, and rocks that might be relevant. He also suggested that the “Potter, the painter, the Glass-maker, the Lapidary, and many other artists” could find

²⁴¹ Sir Hans Sloane, *The Will*, 2-3, quoted in Brooks, *Sir Hans Sloane*, 46-47.

materials at the museum that could help them create better manufactures.²⁴² The British Museum was founded at least partially on the principal that the “Advancement and Improvement whereof the said Museum or Collection was intended do and may in many Instances give Help and success to the most useful Experiments and Inventions.”²⁴³ There was a sincere hope that the knowledge gained through the museum collections would pay off in other aspects of life. This is one of the ways that Anne Goldgar’s trickle-down effect would be put into effect: an already learned gentleman could come in, see something that intrigued him, and create something that would be generally beneficial.

Peale’s Museum was also lauded for opening people’s minds to the potentially advantageous uses of nature. In 1794, it was described as bringing “to light our many treasures in animals, plants and mineral, suggesting thereby new branches of manufactures and commerce, which otherwise may lie dormant for a long time.”²⁴⁴ The Peale family in particular believed that the study of natural history had utility in a completely different spectrum: that of personal gratification. The patriarch, Charles Willson Peale, wrote, “Natural History has [a tendency] to promote Natural and

²⁴² Birch, “Memoirs relating to the Life of Sir Hans Sloane Bart,” 25, quoted in Brooks, *Sir Hans Sloane*, 53.

²⁴³ 26 George II c. 22: British Museum Act of 1753, section I, p. 333, quoted in Brooks, *Sir Hans Sloane*, 50.

²⁴⁴ “Lover of Nature” in *Dunlap and Claypoole’s American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia) March 27, 1794, quoted in *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and his Family*, eds. Lillian B. Miller and Sidney Hart (New Haven: Published for the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution by Yale University Press, 1983-), 2:87.

Individual happiness.”²⁴⁵ He passed this idea down to his sons who, in their turn, declared “that from natural history the wants of man are satisfied, and, that from a more perfect knowledge of the works of nature, very much may yet be done, independent of the qualification which this study affords to the philosopher and benevolent man.”²⁴⁶ Searching out the utility in nature led to a greater admiration for the natural world, but also held the potential for the objectification of natural resources. This view of nature provided a mental framework for the appreciation of the visual pleasure and well as the potential profit, both personally and economically, of nature.²⁴⁷

The natural history collections of Peale and Sloane were also able to further the Enlightenment emphasis of love and appreciation of divine creation. Examples of the natural world were used to fashion a bond between man and God. They were able to play to the contemporary concern with natural order, manifested in the idea of the Great Chain of Being, by demonstrating that order in the museums. This contributed to Peale’s obsession with the use of Linnaean classification in his exhibits.²⁴⁸ He promoted an understanding of the social order as well, saying, “[T]he more [the people] become acquainted with the wonderful works of Nature the more they will adore the Creator and

²⁴⁵ Charles Willson Peale, *A Scientific and Descriptive Catalogue of Peale’s Museum* (Philadelphia: Samuel H. Smith, [1796]), quoted in Kohlstedt, “Entrepreneurs and Intellectuals,” 23.

²⁴⁶ Raphaelle and Rembrandt Peale, “Advertisement for Baltimore Museum,” *Federal Gazette and Baltimore Advertiser* (Baltimore) October 25, 1796, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:159.

²⁴⁷ Barbara Carson, “Early American Tourists and the Commercialization of Leisure,” in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, eds. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1994), 402.

²⁴⁸ CWP to Dr. David Hosack, 29 June 1805, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:857.

contentedly see the justice of their own situation.”²⁴⁹ Like Peale and other renowned thinkers like Sloane’s predecessor as president of the Royal Society, Isaac Newton, Sloane wanted to affirm God’s role in the workings of the universe, another way of justifying the natural and social order by declaring it to be divinely ordained.²⁵⁰

By impressing upon the audience the harmony and perfection of God’s creation, the museum became, in essence, a “secular house of worship.”²⁵¹ Peale believed that the study of nature, “so admirably ordained by their great Creator,”²⁵² was beneficial for “constantly elevating the mind in adoration of the divine Architect.”²⁵³ He was providing a sanctuary for those in the city; a place where individuals could come closer to God through the admiration of his creation. Peale considered this to be one the great benefits of his institution, and when he advertised the museum’s move in 1794, he reminded the public that “the contemplation of the marvelous works of God exalts the soul to him, inspires congenial goodness, and that love of order so indispensable to public and private prosperity.”²⁵⁴ At the British Museum, they followed the belief that faithfulness to a naturalistic aesthetic indicated man’s level of spirituality.²⁵⁵ In this way

²⁴⁹ CWP to James Calhoun, 19 June 1796, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2: 157.

²⁵⁰ Marjorie Caygill, “Sloane’s Will and the Establishment of the British Museum,” in *Sir Hans Sloane: Collector, Scientist, Antiquary, Founding Father of the British Museum*, ed. Arthur MacGregor (London: British Museum Press, 1994), 47.

²⁵¹ Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 29.

²⁵² CWP, “Advertisement for Subscription to *A Scientific and Descriptive Catalogue of Peale’s Museum*,” *Dunlap and Claypoole’s American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), November 14, 1795, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2: 128.

²⁵³ CWP to American Philosophical Society, 7 March 1797, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2: 167.

²⁵⁴ Peale’s Museum, “Announcement of Move to Philosophical Hall,” *General Advertiser* (Philadelphia) September 19, 1794, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2: 98.

²⁵⁵ Syson, “The ordering of the artificial world,” 109.

it served as a Deistic temple. True to the religious trends of the day, the museum provided a resource that allowed them to justify their faith by grounding it in the reason of nature.²⁵⁶ It was believed that only through a true understanding of nature could they appreciate the divine.

These displays of nature further offered a new medium through which the American audience could feel a sense of pride and attachment to their homeland. Such exhibits could be used to infuse a nationalistic pride in the unique landscapes and wildlife of their native soil. As a natural scientist and amateur scholar, Peale felt the need to explore the natural resources exclusive to the Americas. Early in the formation of his museum, he promoted his new venture, saying, “In our thick forests I find birds that perhaps are never seen on the cleared fields, and every succeeding year our country furnishes me with some new species which I had not before.”²⁵⁷ His excitement reveals the great naturalistic potential of the new world and his eagerness to share that others people through his museum. He made an effort to note the unique qualities of American species and always looked for the differences between American and European specimens of the same species.²⁵⁸ He noted, “I have always found some difference in the Birds which has been described as belonging to both continents. It is interesting to get the [living] one in good condition, for a better comparission and also to give it a

²⁵⁶ Samuel G. Hefelbower, “Deism Historically Defined,” *The American Journal of Theology* 24, no. 2 (April 1920), 218.

²⁵⁷ CWP, Broadside: “My design in forming this Museum” (Philadelphia) 1792, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:16.

²⁵⁸ Peale’s Museum: Minutes of Committee, 12 July 1792, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:38.

place near one I have from Great Britain handsomely mounted.”²⁵⁹ It was those unique attributes that made American nature valuable and distinctive. Those were the special qualities he concentrated on and drew his audience to, hoping to fire up the kind of fondness for American nature – and, thus, America – that he himself felt.

In 1806, Peale wrote, “Can I suppose that you have not a love for Natural history? yet you pass without seeing my Labours in the Museum.”²⁶⁰ Peale believed that his museum, as the British Museum did, would open people’s minds to love and respect nature, and as a result come to appreciate the usefulness of the natural world, recognize God’s hand in its creation, and feel pride in its uniqueness.

The Outside World

Nature was one of the main focuses of these museums. Another area of significant interest, however, was ethnography. In the eighteenth century, the world as members of Anglo-American societies knew it was expanding. As new areas were discovered, a backlash occurred in Western culture as they tried to process these new people and their way of life. There was a great interest in the foreign cultures and lands as Britons and Americans sought to sort through the differences between them and the new-found “others” they constantly encountered. This behavior was motivated by economics, the innate curiosity that came as a result of the Enlightenment, and the desire

²⁵⁹ CWP to Thomas Jefferson, 22 October 1805, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:901.

²⁶⁰ CWP to Dr. Samuel Latham Mitchill, 21 January 1806, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:925.

to fit alien cultures into their existing structure of the world. Museums answered people's questions about foreign civilizations, and in so doing would permanently alter the way those cultures were seen.

For those individuals who had a vested economic interest in international trade, museums could be particularly useful. As the empire grew, international trade became a huge part of the British economy.²⁶¹ Many goods like cotton, tea, and sugar, which were becoming increasingly commonplace, came from their colonies and other trading partners. Their colonial outposts, in particular, were responsible for maintaining such a massive global empire.²⁶² Before the Revolution, Americans also concentrated on international goods, spending thirty percent of per capita income on goods that originated outside that colony.²⁶³ Some of the Southern agricultural producers relied on foreign markets to purchase their cotton, rice, and flax. It was not long before middle class individuals got in on the action, as well, considering the potential for profit as a merchant or ship builder. Good businessmen, however, typically do not like to make blind business decisions. Museums gave them the opportunity to learn a bit about the culture before making a serious economic commitment. There was also the opportunity for any quick-minded individual looking for the next big cash crop to hatch a brilliant scheme inspired from what he saw on display.

²⁶¹ James Walvin, *Fruits of Empire: Exotic Produce and British Taste, 1660-1800* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 158.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 173.

²⁶³ Carole Shammas, *The Pre-industrial Consumer in England and America* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 292.

Besides those coming to exhibitions with economic motivations, there were also some visitors who were simply curious. Curiosity and an interest in gaining knowledge were key Enlightenment characteristics. It carried over into an interest in travel and the development of a new sense of fashion. As interest increased in foreign lands and ethnography, travel became an increasingly popular pastime.²⁶⁴ Published travel accounts such as the collection by Awnsham Churchill, which was put into print in 1704 and reprinted many subsequent times, experienced a boom in popularity.²⁶⁵ Many more people were traveling in the eighteenth century than ever before, largely due to the commercial development, industrial progress, and agricultural improvements going on in the society.²⁶⁶ Not everyone, however, could afford such trips. For them, the museum could function as a substituted for travel. Lever's collection has been seen as a kind of "map of mankind," giving individuals the opportunity to travel the world without leaving the building.²⁶⁷ Initially, this meant examining artifacts from a certain area. After panoramas became popular, though, it brought foreign cultures into the museum on a whole new way. One of Peale's friends recommended that he go see a panorama of London that was on display in New York City because it inspired awe and wonder.²⁶⁸

The general interest in foreign cultures spilt over into fashion and style. In 1757, the British victory in the Battle of Plassey gave the East India Company control over

²⁶⁴ John Feather, "The Power of Print: Word and Image in Eighteenth-Century England," in *Culture and Society in Britain, 1660-1800*, ed. Jeremy Black (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1997), 64.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ Carson, "Early American Tourists," 375.

²⁶⁷ Clare Haynes, "A 'Natural' Exhibitioner: Sir Ashton Lever and his Holophusikon," *The British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24 (2001), 9.

²⁶⁸ John DePeyster to CWP, 6 May 1795, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:113.

India. As time passed, Britons slowly began to get accustomed to Indian culture. By the end of the century, the Indian influence began to appear in architecture in the form of verandas. The “imperial rich” – the ones who made their money from the empire – were especially enthusiastic about embracing foreign culture through building style, resulting in manors like Sezincote, which was built in North Oxfordshire in 1793. Furniture and clothing were also influenced by the international styles, and sections dedicated to “Indian missilanies dress” were found in the British and Leverian Museums.²⁶⁹ The influence of foreign cultures in the Anglo-American lifestyle came not only from “India,” but also from the Mediterranean, greater Pacific, and Native American cultures.

Perhaps the greatest fascination with foreign cultures was motivated by a concern that superseded both economic interests and curiosity. The chief issue was fitting these new people groups into the extant social structure. The museums laid out that structure for its visitors. Above the contemporary Western society were the idealized and revered cultures of antiquity. The ancient world affected culture in a few ways: 1) in fashion through the neoclassical style, and 2) through the “Grand Tour.” The Grand Tour was a primarily British institution reserved for the wealthy. Designed to serve a broadly educational purpose, it took the visitor on a tour through the ancient world, giving those educated individuals familiar with Latin texts an opportunity to discover the glory of Rome for themselves.²⁷⁰ “Enlightened” Europeans paralleled their current establishment

²⁶⁹ Kevin M. Sweeney, “High-Style Vernacular: Lifestyles of the Colonial Elite,” in *Of Consuming Interests*, eds. Carson, Hoffman, and Albert, 7; Rubens Peale to CWP, Jan 1803, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 485.

²⁷⁰ John Mack, *Art and Memory in World Cultures: The Museum of the Mind* (London: British Museum Press, 2003), 138.

with the standard of perfection they associated with the Greeks.²⁷¹ The artwork and other artifacts brought back often reflected these ideas. The glorification of the ancient cultures was shown in the British Museum through the exhibition of Egyptian religious artifacts, including a mummy, and an entire section of “Antiquitates Romanae” helped bring the “Grand Tour” home to those who could not afford to make the trip themselves. The various artifacts worked to glorify the ancient cultures of Egypt, Greece, and especially Rome. The saloon of Montague House, which housed the British Museum, was fully decorated with artwork depicting the gods, and on the dome “is represented a council of the heathen gods,” a reminder of the glory to which Britain aspired.²⁷² Over time, neoclassicism became more of a historical curiosity than a manual for life. By that time, neoclassical culture was already safely stowed away in the museum to be admired in future generations.²⁷³ For the time being, however, “civilizations of antiquity” were the ideal.

Impulses of reason and order dictated that newly discovered civilizations fit into the social spectrum somewhere, and as such were generally placed in an inferior social rank. Just as the ideal ancient cultures were more or less grouped together, all of the “other,” or non-Anglo, non-European, cultures, were clumped together.²⁷⁴ While many

²⁷¹ Syson, “The Ordering of the Artificial World,” 109.

²⁷² *A new and compleat history and survey of the cities of London and Westminster, the borough of Southwark, and parts adjacent...* ([London], 1769), 342-3.

²⁷³ Joseph M. Levine, “The Rise and Decline of English Neoclassicism,” in *Enlightening the British: Knowledge, Discovery, and the Museum in the Eighteenth Century*, eds. R.G.W. Anderson, M.L. Caygill, A.G. MacGregor, L. Syson (London: British Museum Press, 2003), 139.

²⁷⁴ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 6.

diverse areas might be represented – “South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, New Holland, and the new discovered Islands in the south seas,” in the case of Peale’s museum – often their distinctive characteristics were not that carefully noted.²⁷⁵ The British Museum had a section generally described as “Indian utensils” and another as “Indian missilanes dress,” while Peale also had a section denoted as an “exhibition of arts and customs in foreign countries,” making no distinction as to which peoples were represented in that collection.²⁷⁶ Thought they might have been identified in the exhibit itself, they were largely assimilated as a group. One of Peale’s advertisements read that “[a] collection of the arms, dresses, tools and utensils of the aborigines of diverse countries, may also fill a considerable space.”²⁷⁷ Arms, the first items Peale noted, were concentrated frequently focused on, calling attention to the presumably violent nature of the “inferior” peoples. One descriptor of the Peale Museum noticed “shields, bows, arrows, petrifications, Indian and European scalps, &c. &c. &c.” on display, while the British Museum was described as having “a great number of instruments of war” among the artifacts from the civilizations around the Pacific Ocean.²⁷⁸ Especially when put in comparison with refined consumer goods being produced by the Europeans, such as the

²⁷⁵ CWP, *Guide to the Philadelphia Museum* (Philadelphia, 1804), in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:761.

²⁷⁶ Rubens Peale to CWP, January 1803, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:486; Peale Museum, Minutes of Committee, 19 July 1792, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2: 38.

²⁷⁷ CWP, Broadside: “My design in forming this Museum,” (Philadelphia, 1792), in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:18.

²⁷⁸ Unknown, “Description of the Peale Museum,” *National Gazette* (Philadelphia, Sept. 4, 1793), in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:69; *A new and compleat history and survey*, 244.

“great variety of elegant feather-muffs” made in England and Germany, the native peoples of the new, foreign lands looked crude and sordid.²⁷⁹

Nevertheless, museums offered more information about these new cultures than any other contemporary resource, thanks to donations by Captain James Cook and other explorers. When visitors came, however, they encountered subtle stereotypes, like the assumption of a violent nature, and blurred lines between the groups so that cultures came out skewed, clumping them together in an inferior light.

The Inner Realm: National Identity

Museums in Britain and American in the late eighteenth century played many roles. They entertained. They taught the public about the nature and the world around them. They created an atmosphere designed for those already educated to study those same things and to draw conclusions about them. Perhaps their greatest influence, however, lay in their ability to form national identity.

One of the time-honored functions of museums has been as a medium for preserving and promoting popular memory, championing a common cultural heritage.²⁸⁰ That memory is tied to personal and cultural identity, and by using artifacts, museums were able to conjure up stories of the past and offer a common ground from which to approach history: the senses.²⁸¹ Museums were thus venues that allowed for the

²⁷⁹ “Lover of Nature” to *Dunlap and Claypoole’s American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, March 27, 1794), in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:87.

²⁸⁰ Mack, *Art and Memory*, 12, 19.

²⁸¹ Ibid.; Jules David Prown, “In pursuit of culture: The Formal Language of Objects,” *American Art* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 2-3.

exploration and redefinition of ideas about nationality and national identity specific to the British and Americans. They were able to suggest an answer to the questions: What does it mean to be “British”? What is “American”?

Though long-established and long-feared as a nation, Britons were in the position to redefine themselves and to recreate what it meant to be British. A period of great escalation, imperially, sparked a nationalistic response and created the need to clarify their national identity in an international context.

Though long active in foreign affairs and disputes in Europe, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Britain experienced an unprecedented growth into new lands. They became an international power, establishing colonies throughout the world, but particularly in the Americas, South Pacific, and Asia. When this small island turned itself into a massive global empire, asserting commercial, naval, and missionary dominance in many new areas worldwide, it became necessary for them to examine how they saw themselves. Increasingly, their conception of national identity was based upon Britain’s position as a global power.²⁸² And while they saw their overseas expansion as a sign that they retained God’s favor despite increasing immorality and indulgence in luxury, it was their comparisons of self to outsider that constructed their true understanding of identity.²⁸³ They saw themselves in contrast to the new groups of people they encountered during overseas exploration, noting the differences in culture,

²⁸² Bob Harris, “‘American Idols’: Empire, War and the Middling Ranks in Mid-Eighteenth-Century American Family,” *Past and Present* 150 (Feb. 1996), 138.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

religion, and color.²⁸⁴ British historian Linda Colley called Britain “an invented nation heavily dependent...on the triumphs, profits and Otherness represented by a massive overseas empire.”²⁸⁵ In this period, the broad, largely abstract idea of empire manifested itself to Britons mostly in economic terms or by marked differences between their own culture and those alien cultures encountered in international exploration.

Throughout the eighteenth century, British national identity was reshaped. Strengthening patriotic sentiments became an important trend. The British Museum proved to be an institution that garnered the kind of national pride that became so important at this moment in British history. It provided them with an opportunity to show off their accomplishments as a nation, particularly those with scholastic merit, which reflected well on them as a whole.²⁸⁶ Even before it became a public institution, it was reported that Frederick, Prince of Wales, had visited Sloane’s private collection and “express’d the great pleasure it gave him to see so magnificent a collection in England, esteeming it an ornament to the nation.”²⁸⁷ British scholarship and academic achievements were also celebrated through the accumulation of some libraries, several of which, including the Harleian and Cottonian collections, were made part of the British Museum.²⁸⁸ Pride in these accomplishments was seen even in guide books, one of which declared, “the whole may be justly esteemed an honour and ornament to this

²⁸⁴ Linda Colley, “Britishness and Otherness: An Argument,” *Journal of British Studies* 31 (1992): 5.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁸⁶ Anne Goldgar, “The British Museum and the Virtual Representation of Culture in the Eighteenth Century,” *Albion* 21 (2000).

²⁸⁷ *Gentleman’s Magazine* 18 (1748): 301, quoted in Brooks, *Sir Hans Sloane*, 47.

²⁸⁸ Graham Jefcoate, “‘Most curious, splendid and useful’: The King’s Library of George III,” in *Enlightenment*, eds. Sloan and Burnett, 38.

island.”²⁸⁹ Perhaps, however, the kind of admiration and esteem the museum warranted for the nation and its people was best described in the words of a foreigner:

The British Museum is rather a monument of the progress of the arts and sciences, than the means of giving them a higher degree of perfection. The cabinet of natural history, and the collection of manuscripts, medals, mechanical inventions, &c. are very interesting, and in point of value almost inestimable. **To these, the nation every year makes new additions, not unworthy of the wealth and the greatness of the people.**²⁹⁰ (emphasis added)

The British Museum gave Britons the opportunity to form a patriotic appreciation and admiration of their country through the utilization of both reason and creativity.²⁹¹

There, they could find manuscripts like the Magna Carta that documented the glory days of English history, or they could see a miscellany of artifacts collected from the many parts of the globe to which their presence and influence had recently spread, evidence of their nation’s international prowess.²⁹² The “great number of instruments of war” from Asian and Pacific cultures demonstrated the kind of opposition they had been able to subdue in the campaign to assert their global dominance.²⁹³

The American Revolution was still recent history when Peale opened his museum in Philadelphia in the 1780s. With the American victory in that war came a

²⁸⁹ *The beauties of nature and art displayed, in a tour through the world* (London, 1763-4) 2:46.

²⁹⁰ Johann Wilhem von Archenholz, *A picture of England: containing a description of the laws, customs, and manners of England* (London: printed for Edward Jeffery, 1789), 2:218.

²⁹¹ Colley, “Britishness and Otherness,” 5.

²⁹² *A new and compleat history and survey of the cities of London and Westminster, the borough of Southwark, and parts adjacent...* ([London], 1769), 342.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 344.

crisis in national and individual cultural identity. No longer subjects of a king, individuals belonging to the fledgling United States sought to redefine themselves as citizens of a republic. Charles Willson Peale was a staunch patriot and supporter of American independence. One of his goals became having the museum serve as a model of republican virtue, teaching individuals how to embrace their new responsibilities. Although Peale probably would have preferred to an environment full of scholars, he recognized the potential good the museum could do for the country and thus sought to create an environment that would foster the development of good republican citizens by inspiring curiosity and increasing knowledge. He promoted the contemporary campaign of reformers like Benjamin Rush that emphasized the importance of educating citizens.²⁹⁴

Before Peale began collecting natural history artifacts, he operated a portrait gallery that was open to visitors. He, along with several of his children, were well known portraitists, and when he created the museum, Peale felt it was important to include some of his greatest portraits of influential Americans in his museum so that they could serve as models of the ideal male citizen. In 1794, English antiquarian Henry Wansey noted that at the Peale Museum, “what particularly struck me at this place, was portraits (kit-cat length) of all the leading men concerned in the revolution: -- Washington, Fayette, Baron Steuben, Green, Montgomery, Jay; and many others, to the number of thirty or more; which after a century hence, will be very valuable in the eyes

²⁹⁴ Kohlstedt, “Entrepreneurs and Intellectuals,” 23.

of posterity.”²⁹⁵ Wansey recognized that these men were heroes and role models for the American people, and the preservation of their images would be appreciated by Americans for generations to come. Years later, Peale noted his pride in his selection of portrait models, for none had “disgraced” him.

His museum was founded, like other American museums, in response to American cultural needs.²⁹⁶ His portraits of war heroes reflected the demand for American artists, authors, and scientists, to distinguish their work from that of Europeans, thus self-consciously creating a distinctive American culture.²⁹⁷ One of the unique things about Peale, however, was that he answered the call to foster a unique American culture not only through art but also through science. He used science to establish Americans as intellectual equals on par with the rest of the world. Peale took pride in his scientific accomplishments, seeing the perfection of his taxonomic method as a national, as well as an individual, achievement.²⁹⁸ One of his chief desires was to “present to the American as well as the European World an evidence of our progress in department of Science, whose successful cultivation has always been a characteristical

²⁹⁵ Henry Wansey, Excerpt, *The Journal of an Excursion to the United States of North America in the Summer of 1794* (1796, represent ed., New York, 1969), p. 134-136, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:97.

²⁹⁶ Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 9.

²⁹⁷ Lillian B. Miller, *Patrons and Patriots: Encouragement of the Fine Arts in America, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 38.

²⁹⁸ Edward L. Schwarzchild, “Death-Defying/Defining Spectacles: Charles Willson Peale as Early American Freak Showman,” in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 83.

mark of an advanced civilization.”²⁹⁹ This mission became an especially important one in light of the theory of American degeneracy proposed by highly-renowned French naturalist George Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon. Buffon argued that species in the Americas were weaker and more delicate than their European counterparts, and those species that went from Europe to America would eventually devolve. In yet another example of the Enlightenment desire for universal understanding, Buffon compiled his *Histoire naturelle* in an effort to understand the full complexity of the natural world. In it he wrote:

In America, therefore, animated Nature is weaker, less active, and more circumscribed in the variety of her productions; for we perceive, from the enumeration of the American animals, that the numbers of the species is not only fewer, but that, in general, all animals are much smaller than those of the Old Continent. No American animal can be compared with the elephant, the rhinoceros, the hippopotamus, the dromedary, the camelopard, the buffalo, the lion, the tiger &c.³⁰⁰

With the 1803 exhumation of the first full mastodon skeleton, the largest land animal discovered to date, Peale was able to satisfy both desires: to prove Americans were accomplished scientists and to completely debunk Buffon’s assertion.

In his effort to prove himself, Peale aspired to the level of the most esteemed museums of Europe, saying, “The Museum progresses and will I hope in my time considered the best ordered, if not equal in Magnitude to those of Europe, yet more useful than most of them for the Studies of Nature,” and “I do not despair of making it at least equal, if not in quantum, yet in neatness and utility to any of the boasted Museums

²⁹⁹ CWP to the Directors of the Library Company of Philadelphia, 5 October 1795, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:127.

³⁰⁰ George Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, *Histoire naturelle* (1766)

of Europe.”³⁰¹ Foreign visitors like Henry Wansey noticed that Peale’s museum “is not yet so extensive as the Leverian Museum in London, but it is every day increasing.”³⁰²

While some Europeans criticized the museum, those, like Wansey, who recognized the newness of Peale’s work often found it impressive for its age. Peale did hope to impress foreigners, using a technique that was later used by Australians as they attempted to establish themselves in the British empire as a young, developing colony with great potential: creating exhibits that showed off their unique nature in an effort to promote themselves and demonstrate their promise.³⁰³

Besides acquainting the outside world with American specimens, Peale used the uniqueness of the American natural world to create a sense of national pride.³⁰⁴

Previously, there was very little national sentiment that united the thirteen colonies. The closest they had come in the past was the common experience of British consumerism. When the American Revolution ended and the relationship with Britain was altered, that sense of nationalism fell through. Peale attempted to replace that with a sense of nationalism based on a pride of the natural world. He recognized that potential of the museum early on, as he demonstrated when he wrote:

³⁰¹ CWP to John Isaac Hawkins, 20 May 1805, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:837; CWP to John Isaac Hawkins, 17 December 1805, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:915.

³⁰² Henry Wansey, Excerpt, *The Journal of an Excursion to the United States of North America in the Summer of 1794* (1796, represent ed., New York, 1969), p. 134-136, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:97.

³⁰³ Peter H. Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display: English, Indian, and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 29.

³⁰⁴ Ruth Helm, “Peale’s Museum: Politics, Idealism, and Public Patronage in the Early Republic,” in *Mermaids, Mummies, and Mastodons: The Emergence of the American Museum*, ed. William T. Alderson (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1992), 67.

[T]he Museum ought to be perminant, for when one the people become acquainted with & feel the importance of having the opportunity of seeing the samples of the various fossil kingdom, especially the Minerals & Clays; the production of the air, land & water – they will in the most simple mode know how to appreciate the subjects of their country – to draw benefits generally in various Manyfactorys, in Arts, and in trade & for commerce.³⁰⁵

The Peale family possessed a sense of pride in the splendor of American nature that the patriarch hoped to pass on to the public. During a trip to London, Peale's son Rubens wrote, "We have seen the Sun 2 or 3 times within the last week yet it shines nothing like so bright as in America but that is our lot, and we must be contented," and Peale's *Guide to the Philadelphia Museum* noted almost exclusively animals native to the Americas, including the grizzly bear, American buffalo and elk, and South American llamas, as the "most remarkable" of his quadruped room.³⁰⁶ He was excited about the promise of the unknown that the American continents possessed and therefore promoted the exploration of the uncharted areas of the new nation.³⁰⁷ This became especially relevant with the Lewis and Clark expedition of the Louisiana Purchase. Peale had the privilege of displaying many of the artifacts gathered during that trip, a benefit of his friendship with Thomas Jefferson. He expressed his gratitude in 1805 by writing, "I am very thankful for these additions to the Museum, everything that comes from Louisiana must be interesting to the Public."³⁰⁸ Peale, more than most, was self-consciously patriotic in his preservation of art – and with it, history, in the case of the portraits – as well as

³⁰⁵ CWP to James Calhoun, 19 June 1796, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:157.

³⁰⁶ Rubens Peale to CWP, Jan-Feb 1803, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:485; CWP, *Guide to the Philadelphia Museum*, 1804, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:761.

³⁰⁷ Kohlstedt, "Entrepreneurs and Intellectuals," 23.

³⁰⁸ CWP to Thomas Jefferson, 22 October 1805, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:901.

science.³⁰⁹ He felt that learning about and becoming familiar with those parts of nature that made America unique would heighten their sense of national consciousness.

Historian Edward Schwarzchild argues that it was a conscious appeal to nationalistic sentiment that gave most of Peale's exhibits their power and popularity.³¹⁰ One of his goals was, in fact, to build an "American Museum"³¹¹ that would serve as a testament to the individuality of an American national identity.³¹² "By his long and individual labours," Peale once wrote of himself, "he has reared a fabric which he need not blush to say, Philadelphia ought to be proud of—If any one doubts this assertion, let ocular demonstration prove the extent of its merit."³¹³ He believed he and his hometown should be proud of what his museum demonstrated – the ideal new republican, the scientific achievement of Americans, the sense of national pride and consciousness based on the natural world – in short, what it meant to be American during the early years of the republic.

Both institutions used the work of the elite academy to assert their intellectual prowess on an international scale. By proving themselves to be legitimately intellectual societies, they secured respect from their critics and provided a centralized establishment which embodied the nation's accomplishments, and as such inspired the pride and loyalty of the people. The sense of patriotism was only one way in which museums could define one's national identity. Peale used the museum to promote his definition of

³⁰⁹ Orosz, *Curators and Culture*, 4.

³¹⁰ Schwarzchild, "Death-Defying/Defining Spectacles," 84.

³¹¹ CWP to John DePeyster, 3 December 1791, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:4.

³¹² Schwarzchild, "Death-Defying/Defining Spectacles," 86.

³¹³ CWP, "Address to the Public," *Aurora General Advertiser*, Jan. 27, 1800, in *Selected Papers*, ed. Miller, 2:274.

republicanism and the ideal citizen. He understood that the success of the nation was dependent not only on the citizens involved but also on the respect the nation received from external entities, and as such sought to demonstrate the depth of academic achievement Americans were capable of. Peale hoped to inspire pride not only in their accomplishments, however, but also in the unique American experience created by their one-of-kind physical atmosphere.

While the Americans reveled in their distinctive nature and its untapped potential, Britons took pride in foreign natures, because those alien environments were reminders of their global supremacy. British patriotism hinged on the depth of their imperialism as much as their intellectual accomplishments. More than ever, Britons had to adjust their view of themselves to account for an international context. For both nations, the redefinition of their national identity stemmed from changes in their global positioning: Britain as a significant global power and America as an independent nation.

Conclusions

Museums taught the British to see themselves as a global power to be reckoned with. Across the Atlantic, the Peale Museum was shaping the way Americans saw themselves. No longer regal subjects, they became consciously aware of their position as republican citizens, many of them making a serious effort to improve themselves for the future. Peale used the natural world to help shape this new pride in being American. Ultimately, nature, the thing once thought of by Europeans as the proof that America

was inferior, provided the mastodon-shaped key to showing its quality and intellectual achievements.

Their view on those outside their culture, however, was not always so positive. The cultures of antiquity were idolized while the newly discovered foreign cultures were subjugated in an attempt to understand them in terms of the extant social structure. Through the power of suggestion, all of these foreign cultures were clumped together and associated with disreputable stereotypes.

Like the ancient cultures, nature became idolized. Nature was credited with being the primary source of reason in the universe. It represented untapped knowledge and utility and served as the validation of the natural order. In the United States, nature became part of the unique American experience that bound together all citizens. It was the use of material culture in museums that prejudiced the viewers' perspectives on all aspects of the world: the physical earth and both parts of the man-made earth: the internal, national realm, and the external cultural world represented by the "other."

CONCLUSION

As all cultural institutions do, the museum in the Anglo-American Atlantic world between 1750 and 1815 reflected the culture from whence it came. British and American societies were marked by the greater influence and size of the middling class. It was that class that helped fuel the consumer culture birthed of the seventeenth century, and it was also that class that was targeted by initiatives for social betterment instigated by the upper classes. The quest for social improvement was one of the many tenets of Scottish Enlightenment ideology to manifest itself in the British and Peale Museums. The Enlightenment principles of order, reason, and discovery were all instrumental in the design and implementation of the museums, but it was perhaps the influence of consumerism that best prepared contemporary society for museums. For a culture that increasingly valued goods in their everyday lives, material items were a natural medium through which museum proprietors could communicate to their audience.

The use of material culture in museums proved to be such a powerful channel of communication that the museums themselves began to influence society. For the erudite elite, it was a place for them to contemplate some of the mysteries, both great and small, of the universe. The paternalistic culture of the day was designed for these men to use the museum to its full advantage, and then to pass along beneficial pieces of knowledge to the general public. It was an increasingly a consumer-oriented and capitalistic society, and both Peale and Sloane recognized that certain sacrifices would have to be made to financially maintain institutions that battled the intellectual void in society. In this case, they both opened their collections up to the general public, though provisions

were set to exclude the absolute lowest tier of society. Good things came of it for all: the museum directors had the cash flow necessary to keep the museum alive and useful for scholars, and the middle and lower classes had access to a kind of popular education that they had rarely been privy to. As a result of this compromise, the museums became sources of entertainment and leisure, as well as forums for the social mingling that was destined to occur. Through the learning and the social betterment that took place at the museums, they were able to have a positive influence on society.

The influence was strong enough in some areas to help shape the audience's perceptions and opinions of nature, other cultures, and themselves. Through these three aspects of the world ran one common thread: national identity. Perceptions of nation and self as part of nation were addressed explicitly in some cases, and the definition of nature and of foreign cultures all resulted in determining what the self was not. The ideas of Britishness and Americanness that museums helped shape during this period were truly modern conceptions of nationalism.

In the eighteenth century, museums were able to significantly influence their surrounding culture by taking advantage of certain social changes, i.e. the increased value of material goods, to rewrite and preserve the popular history and memory of their culture in a physical form.

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CURRICULUM VITA

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Education

Texas A&M University	August 2006
College Station, Texas	Overall Grade Point Ratio: 3.724/4.00
Bachelor of Arts, History	Major G.P.R.: 3.75
Journalism	Major G.P.R.: 3.67
Minor in Business Administration	

Honors

University Undergraduate Research Fellow, Class of 2006
 Honors Thesis: "Museum Culture in the Anglo-American Atlantic World, c. 1750-1815"
 Supervised by Dr. Troy Bickham
 Recipient of the 2005 Undergraduate History Essay Prize
 Awarded by the History Department, Texas A&M University, May 2006
 Candidate for graduation with University and Foundation Honors (August 2006)
 Texas A&M University President's Endowed Scholar (2002-2006)
 Texas A&M University Distinguished Achievement Scholar (2002-2006)
 National Merit Scholar (2002)

Extracurricular Activities

Change , Marketing Director	April 2003-May 2006
In charge of public relations and advertising for a student organization dedicated to raising money for deserving students who cannot afford their class rings which are one of Texas A&M's most treasured traditions. I also assumed the responsibility of organizing and managing the application process and competition for the ring scholarships themselves.	
Gaines Junction , Assistant Editor	May 2005-May 2006
Reviewed manuscripts submitted to Gaines Junction, the online undergraduate interdisciplinary journal of history published by the Sigma Rho chapter of Phi Alpha Theta, for content. After the selection process, I was called upon to edit manuscripts for grammar and style in preparation for publication.	
History Club	Fall 2005-May 2006
College of Liberal Arts Cornerstone Program	Fall 2002-May 2006
The Dean's learning community, designed to give a select group of honors students the opportunity to learn in a creative environment, take part in international learning experiences, and foster mentor-pupil relationships with respected faculty. Chosen as a charter member, I was able to participate in the process of designing and developing the program.	

Professional Associations

American Historical Association
National Council of Public Historians
Organization of American Historians
Phi Alpha Theta

Employment History

Aggieland Visitor Center, Tour Guide Aug. 2004-May 2006
College Station, TX

Korman Marketing Group, Temporary Office Assistant July 2001
Dallas, TX

Technical Skills

Proficient with Microsoft Office (Microsoft Word, Power Point)
Some experience with Adobe Creative Suite (InDesign, Illustrator, Photoshop)

Languages

Spanish (Reading ability: good; Writing ability: good; Speaking ability: fair)