

MONTGOMERY COLLEGE
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY/ ANTHROPOLOGY
AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

AN 101 - INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY
– *Museum Assignment, Tara Tetrault*

You are to prepare a 4 page paper analyzing a museum exhibit at the Smithsonian Institute (SI). You must go down to the Smithsonian and walk through an exhibit. You will need to describe the exhibit in full detail, including what was the exhibit about and describe how the display was arranged. After describing the exhibit in full ask yourself, what cultural issues are being addressed? Next, you will critique the exhibit for content and as a public educational exhibit by addressing the following questions (you need not be an expert in the field to accomplish this task, but rather take a hard look at the exhibit and provide a thoughtful answer).

I. Introduction

- A. Introduce the Exhibit and Museum you are going to critique
- B. Why you chose it
- C. Procedures: Describe what you did during this project

II. Describe the exhibit in full detail

- A. Describe environment/ cultural landscape
- B. Required: What is the exhibit about?
- C. Required: Describe at least one artifact present in the exhibit
- D. *Optional: The exhibit may tell you:*
 - 1. How are the objects made and used?
 - 2. Does the exhibit tell you how they have changed?

III. Exhibit Content Analysis

- A. How does this exhibit inform us about people in a time and place?
- B. Did the curator discuss the history of a culture or was the focus on the aesthetics of the objects or people seen in the exhibit?

C. Summarize this: *Use your summary to pull it together by doing the following: Look at the exhibit in the context of being at the Smithsonian Museum you selected (i.e., if you chose the National Museum of American History (NMAH), what part of history did they exhibit address?).*

For example:

- C. 1. Who co-sponsored it and could their expertise have any bearing on content?
- C. 2. Why was it here on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.?

IV. Critique: consider the questions under categories A, B or C to write your critique

- A. Critique as an Exhibit: what did you learn from this exhibit?

Was the museum exhibit user friendly? That is- - was the text written so you could understand it? Was the display and text difficult to see or aesthetically pleasing? Was there a hands-on element to the exhibit?

B. Critique the Artifact use: How do the artifacts help or hinder the telling of the story? (For example, is it clear why the artifacts are there? Is there enough information about the artifacts? Did they relate to the text?)

C. Analyze the exhibit as a public education piece: This asks for you to provide your opinion on how well the curator did creating this exhibit.

Please talk to me before or after class about this assignment. Feel free to continue this discussion throughout the time in which you are completing the assignment. You can also e-mail me at Tara.Tetrault@montgomerycollege.edu.

This is a chance for you to try your hand at analyzing an exhibit and learn about the opportunities at the Smithsonian Institute, but most of all, have fun!