

Rethinking the Northwest Coast Indian Hall

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As a final project for my annual class, Anthropology in and of Museums, we worked together to put together a website/blog thinking through the Northwest Coast Indian Hall at the American Museum of Natural History.

The hall is the oldest cultural display in the museum and has been largely untouched since the 1920s. It is paradigmatically associated with its founding creator, Franz Boas, although its current layout in fact does not reflect Boas' Victorian sensibilities. The corridor like feel to the current hall is because many of the original objects, installations and display cases, including the large canoe, now hanging from the ceiling in the entrance foyer in front of the hall, have been removed. The Hall however, does follow's Boas initial display strategy of organizing material into cultural areas, or tribes, along the NW Coast and contains many of the objects he collected during the Jesup Expedition and subsequent field trips.

The class evaluated the past and present of the hall, pulling together empirical observations, archival photographs and documents, and presented some of their ideas for re-curating the hall. WE also contextualized this within the broader frame of indigenous museology, other exhibitions of NW Coast material and multiple interest groups and voices who have a stake in thinking through the future of the hall.

We hope that this site will encourage the museum to invest more in the anthropology exhibits - all of which are sorely in need of restoration, renovation, and reconceptualization!

<http://blogs.nyu.edu/blogs/hg26/rethinkingamnh/>