

DISSERTATION

WELCOME TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD: DISMANTLING XENOPHOBIA WHILE
BUILDING COMMUNITY AT THE LOWER EAST SIDE TENEMENT MUSEUM

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Summer 2025

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ABSTRACT

WELCOME TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD: DISMANTLING XENOPHOBIA WHILE BUILDING COMMUNITY AT THE LOWER EAST SIDE TENEMENT MUSEUM

Few issues occupy U.S. political, social, and cultural discourse like immigration. Since the earliest days of the U.S. as a nation, immigration has been a subject of contention and an important point of public discussion. Popular rhetoric about immigration works to exacerbate xenophobia and present immigrants as the antithesis of American values. In this dissertation, I argue that the Tenement Museum works to dismantle xenophobia through a rhetoric of neighborliness. This neighborliness combines ideologies of mutual respect and social responsibility that in turn work to negotiate the tension of difference and create networks of support. As visitors move through the museum's guided tours, both in the recreated tenement homes and the neighborhood, and participate in the engagement practices, they are asked to become neighbors with the families represented and immigrants at large. This embodied neighborliness invites visitors to bring immigrants into their community and assume a level of responsibility for their wellbeing while simultaneously reaffirming heteronormative family structures as the framework of who is deserving of care.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would have been lost during this dissertation process without the support of so many people. First, I would like to thank my committee, Katie Knobloch, Eric Aoki, and Carolin Aronis, for their steadfast support throughout this process. Each of you has challenged me to think about both my scholarship and the world in such different and impactful ways. Of course, I want to thank my advisor and mentor, Greg Dickinson. Thank you for continuously letting me pop into your office for a two-second chat that turns into thirty minutes. Your continued support during my time at Colorado State made it possible for me to finish this degree. I will cherish our time talking about cities, food, and the people who have impacted our lives, and I feel lucky to have had these conversations.

Next, I would like to thank my family and friends who have supported me on this journey and have put up with my constant calls. Gran, Aunt Terrie, and Aunt Val, I am so blessed to have such a wonderful family support system in you. Shelby, Erin, Emma, Dewey, Madison, Kylie, Meredith, Caitlyn, and Brenda, you all are the best friends a girl could ask for, and I couldn't have gotten through this process without you to vent with. Thank you for putting up with my questionable taste in movies, for the constant dinners and beers at Odell's, and for being such a wonderful support system during this process. I would also like to give a special shout-out to my cat, Susan, for being my constant companion during this process. At times you were a bit of a distraction, but ultimately, I would have been a wreck without you.

Most importantly, I need to thank my mom. I absolutely could not have done this without you. You provide me with support in literally every aspect of my life, which has made it possible to achieve each milestone. Thank you for absolutely everything.

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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION: CONSTITUTING THE NEIGHBOR

On a Thursday morning in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, I shuffle my way into a recreated Garment shop. I sit down at a sewing machine, hear the recorded buzz of the workers as they craft their garments, and am transported back to 1980s Chinatown. In 1965, Mrs. Wong moved to 103 Orchard Street with her husband and children in search for a better life for her kids. In the recording playing in the recreated shop, she states, “I brought my daughter Yat Ping, also Yat Fong [Alison] who was just born. Having to carry them was really heavy... I had Yat Fong [Allison] on my back. I also had bowls, a camera, and a lot of moon cakes” (*103 Orchard*, n.d.). I hear the story of how Mrs. Wong carved out a home in the Lower East Side portion of Chinatown, before starting work in the garment industry. The Wong’s faced challenges from the language barrier, racism, and dangerous working conditions, but after years of hard work in the face of adversity, ultimately retiring with no fingerprints, they achieved their original goal and sent all of their children to college (*103 Orchard*, n.d.). Reminiscing on her mother’s experiences Yat Ping states, “I am proud of her actually. Although I never said that to her. But maybe I should now that I think about it. Yeah, maybe I should. I’m really proud of her achievements” (*103 Orchard*, n.d.). The Wong’s story was one of the many stories at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum that moved me.

The Tenement Museum works to tell the stories of families like the Wong’s by inviting visitors into what was one of the most densely populated immigrant enclaves in the world. The Lower East Side in New York City is a neighborhood with a vibrant and rich history of immigrants who carved out a home in America, despite the hostility they faced upon their arrival. According to the Tenement Museum, this neighborhood “ha[d] been known as ‘Little

Germany' in the mid-1800s and as 'the world's largest Jewish city' in the early 1900s. The Lower East Side was also home to the largest Puerto Rican community in the mainland United States and is currently one of the country's largest Chinatowns" (*Lower East Side*, 2024). This neighborhood was once full of affordable tenement homes, or low-rise multi-family apartment buildings, and was a common choice for immigrant families. The neighborhood was also the epicenter of the United States' garment industry, employing predominantly Jewish and Italian women before shifting to include Chinese and Puerto Rican immigrants in the late 20th century (*Lower East Side*, 2024). The Tenement Museum works to tell the forgotten story of these immigrants who lived and worked in the Lower East Side, highlighting the resilience and spirit of American immigrants during a time when they are so often dehumanized.

In this dissertation I argue that the Tenement Museum works to dismantle xenophobia through a rhetoric of neighborliness. This neighborliness combines ideologies of mutual respect and social responsibility that in turn work to negotiate the tension of difference and create networks of support. As visitors move through the guided tours, both in the tenement homes and the neighborhood, and participate in the engagement practices, they are asked to become neighbors with the heteronormative families represented and immigrants at large. This embodied neighborliness invites visitors to bring immigrants into their community and assume a level of responsibility for their wellbeing while simultaneously reaffirming heteronormative family structures as the framework of who is deserving of care.

This study works to expand our understanding of the neighbor as it relates to immigration, pointing to the ways in which the intersection of everydayness and storytelling promote the embodiment of neighborliness and civic responsibility. I draw on and contribute to scholarship on rhetoric, museum studies, dialogue, and urban geography to elucidate how the

museum invites a rhetoric of neighborliness. In addition, this dissertation sheds light on the utility of museum engagement practices and community building. Lastly, I contribute to the conversation surrounding the efficacy of museums as centers for community intervention and social good.

This dissertation proceeds in four stages to illustrate how the Tenement Museum works to dismantle xenophobia. In Chapter One, I outlined the historical and theoretical frameworks that inform my analysis. In Chapter Two, I undertake a close rhetorical analysis of the Tenement Museum, demonstrating how the space recreates the homes of families that lived in the building and the neighborhoods they called home. In Chapter Three, I look at the potential facilitated dialogue and storytelling has for museums' engagement efforts by qualitatively analyzing an event I hosted with the Avenir Museum of Design and Merchandising that used the framework of the Tenement Museum's *Your Story, Our Story* engagement series. In Chapter Four, I conclude by discussing the broader scholarly and practical implications of my findings.

This first Chapter works to explain the historical and theoretical underpinnings of my overall analysis pointing to the ways history intertwines with theory to shape visitors' identity. First, I unpack the history of the Tenement Museum. Second, I outline the concept of neighborliness and the history of American immigration pointing to the ways they have impacted each other. Third, I outline my theoretical frameworks of public memory and museum engagement. The concept of the neighbor has both theological and ideological underpinnings that inform how we perform as community members, build cities and neighborhoods, and treat immigrants who inhabit these spaces.

Historical and Theoretical Context

History of The Tenement Museum

The Tenement Museum was founded in 1988 after social activist and historian Ruth Abram and curator Anita Jacobson stumbled upon 97 Orchard Street in their search for the perfect place for an immigration museum that works to preserve this important aspect of our collective past. To accomplish the undertaking of starting a museum, Ruth Abram needed to come up with the initial funds to lease 97 Orchard's two storefronts and its dilapidated residential floors. The nonprofit museum initially raised \$300,000 from various companies and foundations which was used to lease the buildings and draft plans for the larger space (Hirsch, 1988). The foundation of the museum's original core exhibitions lay in their photography exhibit on tenement life and their various weekend presentations which included a children's musical costing \$7 for adults and \$5 for students, "an illustrated presentation based on an oral history of the life of a Jewish family from Poland" costing \$10 for adults and \$5 for students, and a walking tour (Hirsch, 1988). Each of these events and exhibits helped to provide initial revenue that funded a full-time curator, Anita Jacobson, and 21 paid staff members but they set out to raise an additional \$3 million from various donors to buy and renovate the building (Hirsch, 1988). A grant from the Philip Morris Companies gave the museum the funds to bring on 18 historians who were able to begin researching the history of the tenants in these apartments (Hirsch, 1988). Years later the museum realized the importance of preserving the buildings they acquired in the 1980s so in the mid-2020s the museum started a \$7 million restoration project for 97 Orchard Street that was made possible by various foundations including a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities CARES Act (Barron, 2023).

Abram and Jacobson desired a space that could be used to tell stories about America's immigration history by inviting visitors into the spaces where immigrants carved out their new

lives (Tenement Museum, 1999; About Us, 2024). According to *A Tenement Story* (1999), the space unlocked “the lost stories and forgotten people who had managed to slip through the cracks of time” (p. 6). The museum utilizes material and symbolic storytelling to provide a richer understanding our American history:

By not only informing Americans of their own ancestors, but by actually introducing them, it would forge meaningful connections to current social issues and create a wider sense of empathy. By hearing about one’s forebearers before they knew the language and the customs, before they had money, before they were widely accepted as a part of American society – it might change the way people see immigrants today, who face similar challenges (Tenement Museum, 1999).

The founders of this site were ahead of the shifting trends in the role of museums, believing that these institutions could serve as instruments of social change (Tenement Museum, 1999). The very design of the museum works to materially “catapult us back into time” (Tenement Museum, 1999) to tell the story of a neighborhood that was one of the most densely populated immigrant enclaves in America. To tell the story of the Lower East Side, the museum incorporates a tour-based structures that visitors can choose from. They have eight apartment tours and three walking tours that cover different eras, occupations, and cultural backgrounds. Visitors are invited to move through the apartments and streets of the Lower East Side accompanied by a tour guide who acts as a narrator, sharing the stories of the families that lived in these homes and walked these streets.

Neighborliness

Without the neighbors that reside in the Lower East Side, it would not be the vibrant community it is today. But who gets to count as a neighbor? The concept of being a “neighbor” is pervasive across many cultures, as neighbors function as ethical figures that exist in a liminal space between private and public life. The ideology of “love thy neighbor” presents itself in

Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions, highlighting just how ubiquitous the sentiment is across cultures (Kartzow, 2022).

According to Thiranagama (2019), “in the Western philosophical canon, the neighbor has been frequently used to designate a proximate figure who is not kin, but to whom one may owe obligation or responsibility—a different ethical act from loving one’s partner or family. The neighbor indicates relationships of dense social interaction and imaginations of responsibility and care for non-kin” (p. 274). Within my dissertation I work to understand the neighbor from three key frameworks. First, drawing on pieces of Levinas’ understanding of the ethical responsibility of neighbors, I point to the ways the mediated proximity of the other demands action from us. The second and third framework of neighborliness are intertwined so I discuss them together. In the second framework, I outline the ideological characteristics of a “good” neighbor that comes from lived experience. In the third framework, I outline how these characteristics of a “good” neighbor were solidified by the characteristics that labeled immigrants as non-neighbors. In this intertwined section that discusses these two frameworks, I discuss the identity markers such as race, ethnicity, and other cultural values that have marked who gets to be perceived as a neighbor and who does not.

Levinasian Neighborliness

Emanuel Levinas is one of the key scholars studying the concept of the neighbor and the ethical responsibilities they demand of us (Roberts, 2013). Levinas’ work on responsibility, ethics, and fact-to-face encounters “enables us to see how and why communication with others is both necessary and difficult” (Roberts, 2013, p. 1134). Responsibility functions as an essential component of neighborliness. In *Totality and Infinity* (1979) and *Otherwise than Being* (1998), Levinas argues that being a neighbor demands from us a fundamental responsibility. Levinas (1998) argued that before we tend to ourselves, we first have an ethical responsibility to the

Other or our neighbor (Levinas, 1979/1998; Roberts, 2013). We are confronted with the Other and encounter the Other's face, i.e., their outward form they present to the world, and through this confrontation with the other we would assumed responsibility for them (Levinas, 1998).

The face is not simply the physical appearance of the Other but their outward existence and vulnerability encompassing what it means to be human (Levinas, 1979/1998; Toumayan, 2004; Roberts, 2013). This face is not necessarily a physicality such as race or ethnicity, but the confrontation of complete Otherness of what makes a neighbor completely unique from us (Roberts, 2003). Levinas (1998) states "the face of a neighbor signifies for me an unexceptionable responsibility, preceding every free consent, every pact, every contract. It escapes representation; it is the very collapse of phenomenality" (p. 88). We encounter this vulnerability and are "held hostage" to the other through our ethical responsibility to care and tend their existence (Levinas, 1979/1998; Toumayan, 2004). Levinas (1998), drawing on his religious background, references the commandment thou shalt not murder when discussing the responsibility we have toward the neighbor, articulating the fundamental need to keep the Other alive. However, this exchange is not transactional but an individual responsibility that holds us hostage. The term hostage conveying the complete lack of control one has towards the call to responsibility. Our responsibility to the Other exists outside of their responsibility to us. Levinas (1998) states "we do not need this knowledge in the relationship in which the other is a neighbor, and in which before being an individuation of the genus man, a rational animal, a free will, or any essence whatever, he is the persecuted one for whom I am responsible to the point of being a hostage for him" (p. 59). However, the self and other are not the only players in Levinas' ethics of responsibility, there is also the concept of the third party.

The third party, or all the Others in existence, is put in relation to The Other or neighbor. For Levinas (1979) the third party is somewhat the Others' Other or by default the "whole of humanity," that ultimately extends our responsibility (p. 213). Rather than duality found within the self and the other, the third party highlights the importance of the public or community (Levinas 1979/1998; Simmons, 2018). Neighborliness ultimately extends beyond our individual relationships between each other to include other community members near and far. For Levinas, proximity is less grounded in the notion of space and place or nearness, but a mental closeness we get when we are face-to-face with the Other and take in their uniqueness and difference.

This idea of closeness and the confrontation of difference forces us to take responsibility for the Other. This responsibility is the essence of neighborliness that requires action. Scholars have theorized the concept of the neighbor as something you *do* rather than something you *are* (Painter, 2012). Assuming the role of neighbor is not passive. It requires true commitment to the wellbeing of others. Society works to assume this level of responsibility and care for individuals they deem to be worthy of the effort, and traditionally within American discourse throughout history, immigrants are not regarded as neighbors, which I will unpack in future sections (Ono & Sloop, 2002; Cisneros, 2008; Lee, 2019; Flores, 2020; Tempo and Diner, 2022).

Within the museum, the concept of the neighbor operates as an ambiguous identity that is centered more around community than literal proximity, much like Levinas' notion of the third party. In this dissertation I am using features of Levinas theory to build an ethic of neighborliness that is utilized within the museum's design and engagement programming. The museum adopts parts of a Levinasian ethic of neighborliness that invites visitors to celebrate the uniqueness and Otherness of the families represented while adopting responsibility for their wellbeing and support. This responsibility is evident through two features of the museum's

framework. First, in the museums call to action for the support for immigrants and migrants that is shared by educators within each tour. Second, within their engagement practices that ask participants to confront difference through storytelling. While carrying similar features of Levinas' notion of neighborliness, the museum diverges by simulating the act of meeting individuals in person through their evocation of the memories of the families present. This mediation acts as a proxy for Levinas' ethic of neighborliness by allowing the commemoration process to invite a mediated encounter of the Other. Levinas prioritizes an in-person confrontation of the Other that allows an immediate interaction with the face, bringing "a notion of truth" through closeness (p. 51). Levinas focuses on this in-person encounter of the Other stating, "to approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it" (p. 51). Through this encounter we assume responsibility without fully knowing the Other. When we are in literal proximity with the Other "we risk it all, exposing ourselves and thereby making ourselves vulnerable" (Roberts, 2013, p. 1138). However, the museum's commemoration of immigrants who are no longer alive acts as a mediator for this encounter with the face and enactment of vulnerability. While this encounter functions differently than Levinas' in-person encounter, the combination of material remnants and active storytelling works to create an ethic of neighborliness that acts in a similar fashion. The concepts of neighborliness, responsibility, and ethical action were missing when the families I discuss moved to this country and continue to be absent now. However, the museum's use of personal oral histories and home making, tours, and engagement events provide a space to center these concepts. This in turn, pushes visitors to engage in the alterity of the Other, fighting assimilation. Within the museum the Levinasian concept of the neighbor as it relates to Otherness and the ideological concept of the neighbor as it

relates to sameness are acting on visitors simultaneously, complicating the confrontation of difference.

Ideology and Immigration

As I stated above, scholars have argued that the neighbor is “a proximate figure who is not kin” (Thiranagama, 2019, p. 274). This idea of neighbors being different from family highlights the tension of the role that places individuals in a liminal space of homogeneity and difference. At the same time, through the evocation of lived experience the museum invites visitors to embody a rhetoric of neighborliness that is centered around shared understanding and mutual respect through the recreation of homes, facilitated tours, and community engagement programming working to situate immigrants as “good” neighbors who are altruistic, hardworking, resilient, and community oriented. This embodied neighborliness invites visitors to find similarities with the families represented as neighbors are a reflection of us. Through the discursive practice of crafting the “bad” immigrant, we have consequently created the “good” neighbor. At a most basic definition, an immigrant is someone that comes to live in a country from a foreign place. A neighbor is someone that lives near you. American citizens have a long history of not wanting to share space, or be neighbors, with immigrants which has placed these terms in opposition (Lee, 2019; Flores, 2020; Tempo and Diner, 2022). As a result, United States discourse has painted immigrants as non-neighbors by labeling them as pollutants, leeches, lazy, immoral, and criminal (Ono & Sloop, 2002; Cisneros, 2008; Lee, 2019; Flores, 2020; Tempo and Diner, 2022). Consequently, the act of creating a “bad” immigrant who is exploitative, lazy, and immoral that needs to be expelled, conversely creates a “good” neighbor who is its antithesis as seen with their altruism, hard work, resilience, and community connections. In attempt to disrupt this framework, the museum invites visitors to call on their everyday lived experience, find commonalities with immigrants, and classify them as “good” neighbors.

Rather than searching for homogeneity, the museum holds space for this negotiation of both shared experience and celebration of difference. Visitors are asked to negotiate the tension between self and other to fulfill the expectations of neighborliness that are grounded in networks of support and respect. Rather than pushing for immigrant assimilation and homogeneity, this rhetoric of neighborliness invites visitors to identify with the immigrants through the acknowledgment of shared human experience and celebrate the niche cultural experiences that make these immigrants unique, thus dismantling xenophobia and promoting civic action. This role of neighbor that the museum is inviting visitors to embody sits in the liminal space of homogeneity and difference, combining features of Levinas' and our shared understanding of a "good" neighbor. However, it is important to note that the museum centers able bodied family units which reaffirms specific characteristics of the "good" neighbor.

Immigration in the United States

The United States has a complex relationship with immigration. While being a country founded on the concept of immigration, xenophobia permeates the foundations of our discourse. If being a neighbor is centered around hard work, altruism, community, and respect, then American discourse has worked to paint immigrants as non-neighbors, who are out of place, foreign, and non-belonging. Within this dissertation I utilize the broad term of immigrant to match the language the museum utilizes for the purpose of consistency. Their overall mission is to commemorate the diverse experience of immigrants across the United States, allowing many identities to be represented in the space through their design and programming, therefore their use of the broad language is intentional. However, it is important to note that the reasons for immigrating to the United States is varied and carries different historical context that holds individual significance that I will acknowledge as I introduce each family throughout Chapter 2.

In this following section, I will map out the history of American immigration broadly before outlining how we constituted who gets to be a neighbor and who does not.

Late 1800s to The Present

During the early nineteenth century, there were little to no regulations put in place regarding immigration (Bon Tempo & Diner, 2022). In fact, “having been born elsewhere did not deprive an individual [of citizenship], so long as he happened to be a white male of European background and not deemed to be a pauper” (p. 89). While there were no outright restrictions surrounding immigration until 1882, the social contexts of race, class, and religion have always played a role in who is deemed desirable or not. This perception of desirability stays prevalent to this day.

Before jumping into the landscape of immigration within one of America’s most densely populated enclaves, it is important to elucidate the forgotten history of free Black New Yorkers, a history that has more recently been highlighted at the Tenement Museum. Black individuals resided in the neighborhood long before the era of immigration we think of today. In the 1640s, the Dutch West India Company, after colonizing what is now known as Manhattan to create New Amsterdam, faced backlash from Native Americans that were resisting colonial violence (Haddad, 2013).

During this time of unrest, enslaved Black Dutchmen were forced to fight in the conflict to provide protection and act as a wall against the Native population in the area. In 1644, General Kieft granted the Black militia their freedom and gave plots of land which were called “The Land of the Blacks,” North America’s first freed Black settlement that was located in what is now Manhattan and partly in the Lower East Side, to act as a barrier of protection between the white Dutchman and the Native Americans living in the area (Haddad, 2013). This settlement

marks the beginning of the rich history of Black New Yorkers that helped create and sustain the cultural makeup of the New York City we see today.

Despite their freedom, these New Yorkers struggled under the shadow of slavery. The Tenement Museum tells the story of the Moore family, a free Black couple, who lived in the Lower East Side. While this couple was legally free, they suffered under the shadow of slavery that was still legal in Southern states which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Two. This tour shares the complex history of Black New Yorkers who experience racism and abuse. While seemingly distinct and physical, borders function more as figurative boundaries that constitute difference (DeChain, 2009; Ono, 2012). In a country founded on white supremacy, for Black New Yorkers like Joseph and Rachel Moore, their skin functioned as a border that labeled them as different or non-neighborly.

Years later in the late 19th century, after the Civil War, New York City saw a wave of immigration predominantly from Northern and Western Europe (Ireland and Germany). German immigrants were typically seen as desirable by the American people, as their customs were more closely aligned with “American life” (Tenement Museum, 2024). However, the Irish were not as readily accepted. Hatred towards Irish immigrants, grounded in anti-Catholic sentiments, dominated American life for much of the mid-nineteenth century (Jacobson, 1999; Tempo and Diner, 2022). Protestants believed that Catholicism was fundamentally incompatible with “American ideals of democracy, liberty, and individualism” (p. 91). During this era, “Catholic” became synonymous with “Irish” and much of the strife between the British and Irish was brought over to America. According to the Tempo and Diner (2022), “Americans associated Irish immigrants and their enclaves with disease, bred primarily by the filthy conditions in which they chose to live” (p. 92). This sentiments toward Irish immigrants made it difficult to find work

and increased violence as seen with mob killings like The Philadelphia Nativist Riots (Schrag, 2021). Philip Hone, former mayor of New York City during the mid 1800s, wrote in his diary in 1832 “that our country is an asylum for the oppressed in other parts of the world is very philanthropic and sentimental, but I fear that we shall before long derive little comfort from being made the almshouse and refuge for the poor of other countries” (Hone, 1927, p. 64). This idea of wanting to refrain from being an “almshouse” for undesirable immigrants stays prevalent in modern day immigration discourse.

While New York City mostly experienced an influx in immigration from Europe, the Western side of the United States was receiving a large portion of their immigration population from China, marking an increased concern of immigration issues on the basis of race. Chinese immigrants migrated to California during the 1848 Goldrush and were initially received with little hostility, however “their presence exposed anew what had never been hidden – namely, an obsessive concern with color as a line sharply demarcating good and bad peoples” (Tempo and Diner, 2022, p. 107). Due to their inability to become naturalized, Chinese workers were subjected to increased taxes on their earnings. According to Tempo and Diner (2022):

Over the course of the next decades, white revulsion toward Chinese workers, whether laboring on railroads, in agriculture, or in cigar, shoe, or garment making, erupted in violence as white workers fought for their primacy. They fought, lobbied, and agitated in the name of whiteness, some forming in 1877 the Order of Caucasians (p. 107).

Sentiments did not get better for Chinese workers in the late 1800s, where they were excluded from the opportunity for naturalization, a right afforded to individuals of African descent when it was redrafted in the 1870s (Tempo and Diner, 2022). Then, the Page Act of 1875 marked a beginning of anti-immigration legislation being “the first piece of prohibitive immigration law at the federal level,” using the word *undesirable* on the basis of race (p. 108). This racist legislation led to violence against Chinese immigrant communities as seen with the Los Angeles Chinese

Massacre of 1871, one of the largest mass lynchings in United States history leaving at least 18 Chinese immigrants dead (Zesch, 2012). Then finally, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, marked a new era of American immigration policy focused on the advisability of their admittance (Tenement Museum, 2024; Yung, 2018; Tempo and Diner, 2022). According to Tempo and Diner (2022):

The American discourse on immigration shifted from one that assumed that immigrants would somehow integrate and, more important, perform productive labor to one that defined immigration as a deep problem that was based on the fundamental character of those immigrating, their putative inability to integrate, and the degree to which they harmed the United States, draining it of its economic strength and threatening its cultural essence (p. 109-110).

The anti-Asian sentiments on the West Coast brought the issue of race to the forefront of the conversation surrounding immigration, affecting not just immigration on the West Coast but across the United States.

At the end of the 19th and early 20th century, Congress began to enact stricter regulations for immigration as seen with the Immigration Act of 1891 that implemented inspection stations such as Ellis Island, Angel Island, and various locations on the Mexican and Canadian border, and the Immigration Act of 1917 that implemented literacy tests and barred entry from the Asian-Pacific zone. During this era of immigration history in New York, we see a shift from Northern and Western Europeans to Southern and Eastern Europeans, and this changed the cultural makeup of the Lower East Side. Germans, who already had more wealth and social standing than other immigrant classes, move out of the Lower East Side to more affluent neighborhoods. The Irish, despite their experience with poverty and discrimination, climbed the socioeconomic ladder and also left the Lower East Side (Anbinder, Gradá, & Wegge, 2022). This movement in turn changed the cultural makeup of the neighborhood to be predominantly Jewish and Italian in the early 20th century. These two groups were seen as less desirable than groups

that previously occupied the Lower East Side. According to Jacobson (1999), “as races are invented categories – designations coined for the sake of grouping and separating peoples along lines of presumed difference – Caucasians are made and not born” (p. 4). For Southern Italians who made their way through Ellis Island, their “whiteness” was often contested and deemed not pure enough to be protected (Jacobson, 1999). This lack of desirability led to increased violence. In March 1891, 11 Southern Italians were lynched in New Orleans due to their “values” that were deemed incompatible to American life (Seguin & Nardin, 2021). Jewish immigrants, as a result of eugenics that permeated Europe and America, were categorized as non-white and believed to ruin the American gene pool (Painter, 2010). This led to increased levels of antisemitism that led to violence and discrimination that is still lasting today as seen with the mob violence enacted against Leo Frank in 1915, who was lynched due to rampant antisemitism that was sustained by increased Ku Klux Klan activity (Frey, 1987; Reich, 2021).

After WWI and WWII, immigration policy surrounding race starts to fluctuate due to labor constraints as seen with the Jones-Shafroth Act that gave Puerto Ricans citizenship, leading to an influx of migration to New York, as well as the Bracero program that allowed Mexican citizens to temporarily work in the United States within agriculture (Mora, Dávila, Rodriguez, 2017; Tempo and Diner, 2022; Flores, 2019). This influx ultimately started changing the demographic makeup of immigration across the country. Specifically for the Lower East Side, Puerto Ricans started filtering into the neighborhood, along with Chinese immigrants after their restrictions lifted (Tempo and Diner, 2022). While the racial demographics of immigrants during this era until now have become more diverse, this discourse of immigration at large was still riddled with xenophobia.

Communication and Xenophobia

Few issues occupy U.S. political, social, and cultural discourse like immigration (Flores, 2018, Lechuga, 2020). Since the earliest days of the U.S. as a nation, immigration has been a subject of contention and an important point of public discussion (Flores, 2018). Popular rhetoric about immigration works to exacerbate xenophobia and present immigrants as the antithesis of American values. Scholars like Anne Demo (2005), Hugh Mehan (1997), Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop (2002), and David Cisneros (2008), have unpacked the effects of American discourse about immigration, pointing to the ways it has shifted public perceptions of immigrants at large. According to Susan Sontag (1990) the United States government has a vested interest in strengthening xenophobic tendencies and promoting fear of foreigners by discursively connecting them to epidemics. She states, “epidemic diseases usually elicit a call to ban the entry of foreigners, immigrants. And xenophobic propaganda has always depicted immigrants as bearers of disease” (p. 149-50). I examine how the Tenement Museum counteracts the pervasive rhetoric of xenophobia that paints immigrants as “pollutants,” “alien,” or “inhuman” (Lakeoff & Ferguson, 2006; Ono & Sloop 2002; Cisneros, 2008).

In a Presidential debate, President Donald Trump, when discussing immigrants in this country stated, “they’re eating the dogs, the people that came in, they’re eating the cats. They’re eating the pets of the people that live there, and this is what’s happening in our country, and it’s a shame” (*Wall Street Journal*, 2024). At a rally on April 2nd, 2024, in Michigan, Trump utilized dehumanizing language to discuss immigrants, asserting that, “the Democrats say, ‘Please don’t call them animals. They’re humans.’ I said, ‘No, they’re not humans, they’re not humans. They’re animals’” (*Reuters*, 2024). This kind of discourse is not new; from 2015 to 2024, President Trump has labeled immigrants as criminals, rapists, and impure. Like Adolf Hitler and other eugenicists who labeled immigrants as contaminants to our bloodline, at a rally in New

Hampshire, Trump stated that immigrants “are poisoning the blood of our country” (*POLITICO*, 2023; Jacobson, 1999). While this inflammatory language permeates Donald Trump’s rhetoric, these xenophobic sentiments have been the foundation of immigration discourse since the United States’ inception.

While the United States has been historically regarded as a melting pot that welcomed immigrants, the discursive history is far more complex. According to Erika Lee (2019) “even as this story has obscured a violent history of invasion, native dispossession, and slavery, defining the United States as a nation of immigrants continues to be a popular way of reaffirming America’s acceptance of racial and ethnic diversity... but the United States is also a nation of xenophobia” (p. 3). It is impossible to talk about the history of immigration or to illuminate the impact of an immigration museum without discussing the rhetoric that is still being utilized to constitute immigrants as non-neighbors and inhuman. President Trump’s comments at the Michigan rally highlight the explicit dehumanizing rhetoric that permeates American discourse from even the highest office. While the lack of community, resources, and social support made life difficult for this county’s newcomers, these problems were exacerbated by the hierarchy of desirability and a foundation of xenophobia.

Post 1800s immigrants were sorted into categories centered around distinct racial groups (Jacobson, 1999; Tempo and Diner, 2022). Northern and western Europeans (Anglo-Saxons) were the most “desirable” form of immigrant while the other races and ethnicities were deemed lazy, immoral, and criminal (Tempo and Diner, 2022). While southern and eastern Europeans faced violence and isolation upon their arrival to America, they were still placed higher on the social hierarchy than immigrants of color. According to Tempo and Diner (2022), “each group could be understood in terms not only of its own distinctive physical characteristics, but also and

equal importance of its inherent mental and moral ones. These fixed traits included their intelligence levels, criminal proclivities, sexual passions, and basic temperaments, impulsive and emotional or sober and rational, and could not be altered” (p. 141). Through socialization these hierarchies were created and sustained leading to increased levels of ostracization.

As illustrated, xenophobia is a defining feature of American life and ultimately has become an American tradition (Lee, 2019). Shortly after the turn of the 20th century, President Theodore Roosevelt gave his 1916 speech “America for Americans” which argued how immigrants should fully assimilate and abandon loyalty to their former homelands, a sentiment shared by the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in their 1920s pamphlet of the same name and eugenicist Madison Grant (Lee, 2019; Tempo and Diner, 2022). This discourse exemplifies an era that historians deem a pivotal point in America’s history of xenophobia (Lee, 2019). The era solidified the idea that “immigrants are a threat to the United States, white Americans are the only “true Americans,” and the only solutions are increased restrictions to immigration (Lee, 2019, p. 7). These sentiments carried long into the 21st century as seen with the media’s use of language like “pollution,’ infection,’ and ‘infestation”” when discussing immigration restrictions (Ono & Sloop, 2002; Cisneros, 2008). According to Cisneros (2008), “these clusters created images of biological invasion or contamination that structured discourse about immigration and fueled [anti-immigration discourse]” (p. 572). Any show of connection to home countries of signal of a lack of assimilation sparks “blatantly racist, nationalistic, and xenophobic discourse” that works to mark these immigrants as non-belonging (Ono & Sloop, 2002, p. 52). This anti-immigration discourse not only influenced how we continue to speak and treat immigrants throughout the 20th and 21st century, but also has lasting effects on public memory and public perception as seen with Donald Trump’s remarks in his 2024 campaign. Anti-immigration discourse is not caused by individual ideological failings but pervasive structural foundations.

Xenophobia and racism are ingrained in the systems that control every way of life. According to Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (1997), “economic, political, social, and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or race,” highlighting the consequences of the hierarchy of desirability that I have outlined above (p. 469). Race and racism are learned and socialized at an individual level but sustained and materialized within our structural foundations that effect things like the allocation of resources, economic and social opportunity, and power (Omi & Winant, 1994; Bonilla-Silva, 1997). The xenophobic sentiments shared by Grant, Roosevelt, and the Klan were not isolated to their individual circles but imbedded into the systems of the United States as a nation, creating lasting racialized hierarchies.

Despite the pervasive anti-immigrant rhetoric imbedded in our political and social systems, places of public memory can work to combat xenophobia which I will further unpack in Chapter Two and Chapter Three. While the museum’s recreated tenement homes were home to predominantly what we now see as white immigrants until the late 20th century when they welcomed Chinese and Puerto Rican families, the museum utilizes the family’s stories to make connections to immigration broadly. As a result, the subject of race matters to the larger immigration landscape and gives visitors a chance to negotiate tensions created by feelings of difference, brought on by an unspecified “immigrant,” thus shaping the public memory of American immigration. The museum utilizes the combination of materiality and storytelling to invite the embodiment of neighborliness, thus working to create an idealized immigrant for visitors to identify with, one that combats the discourse listed above. This idealization allows the museum to disrupt the idea of immigrants as non-neighbors and non-belonging and to center the notion of immigrants being pillars of community and exemplars of the American spirit. As visitors move through the spaces, educators connect the stories of these idealized immigrants

represented and connect it to the larger systemic issues that immigrants are facing in modern times. However, while this idealization creates feelings of belonging with immigrants of nuclear families, the prioritization of heteronormative exemplars isolates non-normative immigrants.

Public Memory

Public memory works to establish identity and constitute community. Like I outlined above, immigration and migration has been at the forefront of American discourse, thus making it a central feature of our nation's public memory. Therefore it is important to look at the public memory of American immigration to elucidate the implications of a museum dedicated to immigrant stories. In this section I am looking at three key features of public memory. First, I outline the importance of places for public memory. Second, I discuss the utility of public memory for identity construction. Third, I look at how public memory is both usable and active.

Memory is grounded in material and symbolic supports that act as tethers to the past (Blair, Dickinson, & Ott, 2010). According to Zeilzer (1995), "from a house to a neighborhood to a nation, space has always helped define the boundaries of memory" (p. 223). Sites of memory or *lieux de mémoire* (Nora, 1989) are the foundation of memorial culture and it is important for scholars and museum goers to tend to significance of place for sites of memory to take in the ways in which the material environment is acting on them and in turn the larger perceptions of the public. Specifically, places of public memory are A) intentional and B) have a complex relationship to temporality.

Sites of memory are often intentionally grounded in traces of the past. Blair, Dickinson, and Ott (2010) contend that while "most of what passes for public memory bears at least some arguable resemblance to or some trace of a 'real' past event" these creations act as rhetorical inventions designed to commemorate partial accounts of memory. One way for memory to be

grounded and made tangible is through the creation of sites of memory. Many of these sites are located in historical landmarks or relics of the past. Patricia Davis (2022) explores the weaving of Memphis and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, as do Hasian, Maldonado, and Ono (2015) as they write about Parque EcoAlberto and its weekly *La Caminata Nocturna*, in El Alberto, Hidalgo, Mexico. The material features of these sites act as proof of the past, allowing visitors to act as a witness to history – a history that is highly controlled and rhetorically invented. Therefore, within sites of memory like museums, there are choices that must be made to act as a buttress for our public identity (Nora, 1989). Until Ruth Abrams stumbled upon 97 Orchard Street, the building was not part of the memorial landscape. It had to be called into being. However, the relationship between memory, space, and time, complicates memory's lack of spontaneity (Nora, 1989). If memory has to be deliberately concretized to keep it in the forefront of public thought, how do people and scholars doing memory work make those decisions. What drew Abram and Jacobson to 97 Orchard in the first place?

Places of public memory have a complex relationship to temporality. Space and place scholarship highlight the layers of life that get imbedded in the site highlighting its relationship to the past outside of the specific era it was erected. If most memorial spaces have connections to the 'real' past event as Blair, Dickinson, and Ott (2010) contend, then these creations act as rhetorical inventions designed to stabilize and clarify memory (Zelizer, 1995). These scholars highlight the connection between space/place scholarship and the work on public memory, pointing to the ways material environments influence the memorial landscape and thus public perceptions, but these networks are complex. Space and place scholars have found that space is a product of interrelations "constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny" (Massey, 2006, p. 9). These nonlinear interactions between the material

features of environments are “thrown together” to reorient individuals’ bodies in the space (Massey, 2006).

The cultural context of public memory shifts and changes over time depending on the collective’s lived experience and how we communicate with each other. A museum that opened in the 1980s will function differently than it would in 2025 due to the nature of time passing and historical context changing. The Tenement Museum functions within the context of the Lower East Side as a living landscape. There is a lack of fixed temporal boundaries of this landscape of memory, tapping into both the past and present in its preservation. This lack of boundaries in turn tells the multifaceted story of this vibrant immigrant enclave, ultimately including visitors into the complex web inviting the embodiment of neighborliness. Simultaneously, visitors engage with the public memory of immigrants in the 1860s, 1910s, 1950s, 1970s, etc., while hearing the stories of present-day visitors’ immigration past, and walking past immigrants who are a part of the present-day landscape of the Lower East Side. This complex system is always shifting and changing as people move in and out of the memoryscape, ultimately highlighting how the actual process of memory construction is what creates spaces for identification because it includes visitors in the museum, a process that is essential to their engagement.

These complex material networks are one of the facets of memory that act as a powerful buttress for communal identity (Nora, 1989). Through narratives of shared identity and the facilitated evocation of communal belonging, sites of memory like museums can act as a tool for identity construction (Blair, Dickinson, Ott, 2010). Places of public memory function as representations of shared identity by highlighting and uplifting the values that are universally deemed important—freedom, bravery, community, hard work, etc. These sites are curated and preserved to share the story of our communities past to bolster us in the present. The Tenement

Museum works to create an idealized Immigrant for visitors to identify with, regardless of their own immigration stories. This idealized community, that is hardworking, altruistic, and resilient, works to simultaneously foster mutual respect while celebrating difference. However, beyond just highlighting these values, places of public memory utilize tools like affect and dialogue/storytelling to instill these values within visitors—ultimately shaping the overall character of our communities. According to Whittenburg (2023), “the material features of a [site of memory] can be so deeply moving that they intensify the act of identification” (Whittenburg, 2023, p. 4; Robinson, 2021). For museums, sensory-laden exhibition features such as spatial recreations, oral histories, storytelling, or controlled movement allow visitors to become one with the memories represented (Whittenburg, 2023; Drozdowski, De Nardi, & Waterton, 2016; Robinson, 2021; Witcomb, 2010). The Tenement Museum invite visitors to adopt the persona of neighbor to create networks of support and belonging by centering community within their values and pushing visitors to embody these values through their immersive design and engagement practices – acting as a rhetorical tool.

Public memory is usable and active (Zelizer, 1995; Sturken, 2007). Memory works “to shape belonging, exclusivity, social order, and community” becoming “a marker that signals social existence and all that such existence invokes” (Sturken, 2007, p. 227). This idea of memory being an active pillar of society works under the assumption that groups “do not have memory; they “make” one” (Assmann, 2006, p. 216). Scholars have outlined this usability pointing to the ways sites of public memory are working towards changing their overall utility to prioritize inclusivity and social change as seen with work on specific museums like The Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama (Hasian & Paliewicz, 2021; Sodaro, 2023; Keeling, Seay-

Howard, O'Shea, 2023), or museums broadly as seen with Elizabeth Weiser (2017) and Marita Sturken's (2022) work on new museology and memory activism.

Since public memory is something that is constructed or made, it can act as an intervention responding to present day social concerns surrounding issues related to power imbalances and othering. The museum responds to present day anxieties surrounding immigration by inviting moments of identification through the rhetoric of neighborliness to dismantle xenophobia and constitute togetherness. One of the reoccurring critiques within the museum field is the passiveness of sites of memory, and this museum directly responds to that concern (Lonetree; 2012; Onciul, 2015; Helmbrecht, 2019; Wintle, 2016; Buttner, 2022; Kreps, 2012; Nelson; 2021). Ruth Abram and Anita Jacobson wanted this museum to be an active place of education that could create space for difficult conversations surrounding immigration (Tenement Museum, 2024). They utilize educators that challenge visitors, ask questions, and combat misinformation. Additionally, their engagement efforts are centered around education and intervention. These features of the museum can be used to dismantle this country's deep-rooted history of xenophobia.

Engagement

The museums engagement practices function similarly to their design practices, inviting the embodiment of neighborliness. Through their ongoing relationship with community members, their use of dialogue within their tours, and their engagement series *Your Story, Our Story*, the Tenement Museum invites visitors to become part of the framework of the museum. However, traditional museum engagement often invites perspective taking without requiring perspective giving, which hinders participants' ability to truly learn from one another and establish community networks. I argue that the added feature of mutual exchange gives

participants the opportunity to truly embody the role of neighbor by engaging in communal identity creation through storytelling that fosters mutual respect and responsibility. Through co-creation of stories and community, visitors get to be part of the process of public memory rather than it happening outside of them.

Engagement within Museums

The origin of museum spaces come encased in a colonial and imperialist past dedicated to housing the artifacts stolen from conquered cultures. These spaces started out as private or semi-private institutions that went by a variety of names—“studioli, cahinets des curieux, Wunderkammern, Kunstkammern”—and had various uses ranging from demonstrations of power and status, or functioning as conduits for education (Bennett, 2013). In the 17th century spaces primarily housed private collections of artifacts found from noblemen’s travels. It was not until the 18th century that public museums became commonplace in countries across Europe and open to the public sphere (Bennett, 2013). These private collections turned public spaces “embedded the values of viewing other cultures through a western cultural lens, as wonders and curiosities” (Onciul, 2015). While museum’s have a legacy of education and civic reform, their role as “state sponsored educational authority on truth” has been widely criticized (Onciul, 2015).

The State of Museums. The purpose of museums, i.e., what and who they are for, is still an ongoing and contentious debate (Rivard, 1984; Davis, 1999; Onciul, 2015). In the late 20th century, museums began experiencing a shift in their overall mission, moving away from passive cultural institutions to be more active pillars of community life. However, Museums have acted as inherently colonial institutions used to define national identity (Onciul, 2015). According to Emily Duthie, “museum building in Britain in the nineteenth century was a direct consequence of war, colonialism, and missionary expeditions, which returned with ‘exotic’ objects” (Duthie,

2011, p. 16). Museums have leveraged marginalized identities as Other and not belonging, to affirm western ideals as “civilized” and “elite” (Cheverette & Hess, 2015).

Historically, museums have contributed to a culture of white supremacy sustained by practices of Othering directly tied into concepts of culture, identity, and racialization. Museums have been used as ideological tools to maintain the colonial status quo – white heteronormativity. According to Fanon (1952), colonial power worked to erase people of color and to uplift whiteness as virtuous. In relation to race, Asante, Sekimoto, and Brown (2016) build off Fanon’s (1952) notion of the colonizer denying people of color their own articulation of reality while simultaneously telling a thousand anecdotes “about Blackness told and imposed by Whites” (Fanon, 1953; Asante, Sekimoto, & Brown, 2016, p. 369). If you step foot into a museum like The British Museum, you typically see incomplete representations of public memory that uphold white, heteronormative values. While museums have made strides in programing and other forms of engagement, many of these institutions continue to display stolen goods and colonized depictions of history with a lack of contextualization (Duthie, 2011; Bennett, 2013; Onciul, 2015). These display practices, in turn, create incomplete renderings of the human condition.

Building off Lisa Flores’ (2016) work on racial rhetorical criticism, not all museum’s missions need to be centered around race, gender, sexuality, or socioeconomic status, but all museums should be cognizant of these issues in order to understand the ideological power they might hold and in turn the barriers they are uplifting that make these spaces unwelcoming. While decolonization focuses particularly on issues of displacement of indigenous peoples and their lifeways, the fact that colonialism worked to ingrain white supremacy within every facet of life influences all forms of marginalization. Museums have often been discussed as inaccessible for a multitude of reasons. Scholars have found that minority populations (in particular African

Americans, Asians, and Hispanics) are under-represented in museum attendance (Chang, 2006; Falk, 1998a; Olivares & Piatak, 2022). This absence is caused by myriad of reasons as seen with segregation, lack of bilingual services, and lack of culturally relevant exhibitions and programming (DiMaggio & Ostrower, 1990; Khan, 2000; Stein et. al, 2008; Olivares & Piatak, 2022). Olivares and Piatak (2022) found that “cultural heritage is a significant motivation for Black and Latinx groups to participate in the arts” (p. 127). These findings highlight the need for museums to prioritize creating programming opportunities that center marginalized identities.

Over the last few decades, museums have been facing an identity crisis surrounding issues of representation, diversity, and the necessity of source community collaboration brought on by an era of “new museology” (Weiser, 2017; Ross, 2004). According to professional history museologist Max Ross (2003), new museology is the “transformation of museums from being exclusive socially divisive institutions” to those that “represent not just the world views of the ruling classes, but also popular culture and the histories of the non-elite social strata” (pp. 84-85). The Tenement is utilizing both its design and engagement practices to uplift the forgotten voices of our nation’s past – poor working-class immigrants. By centering these stories, and inviting visitors to embody neighborliness, the museum is working to dismantle barriers for participation.

Community Engagement. Community engagement within museums is focused primarily on how they can practically support their source communities, providing space to center community voices (Peers & Brown, 2007; Oncuil, 2015). For museums, co-collaboration can create space for cultural production that pushes for self-determination and cultural sovereignty (Lonetree, 2013). Anzaldúa and Keating (2015) argue that “the museum, if it is daring and takes risk, can be a kind of ‘borderlands’ where cultures coexist in the same site” (p. 49). This idea of coexisting shifts the role of museum professionals from experts to more

mediators “between peoples, objects, and knowledges to facilitate public understanding of the past and present” (Onciul, 2015, p. 7). According to Virgil Wildrich (2019), “museums need to participate in society: museums and libraries, as they stand today, are not prepared for the developments coming next. If they want to be more than a place of leisure for children and tourists, they also must participate in discourses affecting society” (p. 62). In other words, museums need to do the work to foster equitable interactions across power.

Museums have been working through various ways they can “decolonize” engagement practices to promote community connections as a means to negotiate tensions within power structures. Bryony Onciul (2015) outlines decolonial engagement practices in her book, *Museums, Heritage, and Indigenous Voice: Decolonizing Engagement*, where she maps out best practices and drawbacks of this form of co-collaborative community work. She coins the term Engagement Zones building off James Clifford’s (1997) work on museums as contact zones. These are “conceptual, physical and temporal spaces in which participants interact in an unpredictable process of power negotiations... [that] often produce results such as co-produced exhibits, museum programming, employment of community members, collection loans and/or repatriations, community inclusion on museum boards and changes to museum practices” (Onciul, 2015, p. 72). Onciul pushes for engagement practices that invite museums to work hand-in-hand with community members to create more participatory practices and less exploitive practices grounded in tokenism (Onciul, 2015; Galla, 1997). She outlines ethical engagement as a living process that should always be open to change and focused on community control. It is imperative that in situations of co-collaboration, museum professionals need to meet community members where they are, spend time fostering trust and connections, and be open to relinquishing control of their vision (Lonetree, 2013).

Despite this push not all engagement is mutually beneficial, even when taking the steps to practice co-ownership. Due to perceptions surrounding community connections, museums often assume engagement is good for both parties. This assumption, in turn, can undermine the potential negative consequences for community members. Co-collaborative engagement, separate from community museums, can put immense pressure on community participants and employees in the form of emotional/intellectual labor and potentially harm their reputation (Onciul, 2015). According to Onciul, “community members reputations are put at stake through their engagement with museums and they have to live with the consequences as, after engagement ends, they have to return to the community they represented and continue to live in” (p. 236). Therefore, it is important that museums are actively listening to community members goals/needs and share power in the creation of these spaces and create community events that give back to community members rather than only prioritize the mission of the museum. The Tenement Museum works to focus on co-creation within their engagement frameworks to center the voices of the families represented in the space. People like Josephine Baldizzi, Bella Epstein, and the Wongs who lived in 97 and 103 Orchard, work with the museum to create the recreation of their apartments and provided oral histories of their experience immigrating from Italy, Germany, and Hong Kong. This relationship does not stop when the apartment tour is up and running, educators discuss how many of the families represented and their decedents frequently come back to the museum for events, recording new oral histories, or reunions.

Methodological Overview

As a white woman whose family immigrated to this country prior to the Civil War, it is important to acknowledge that the way I engage with this specific space might be different from immigrants of color or immigrants that are non-native English speakers. As a result of my

positionality, I took a mixed-methodological approach to my dissertation to both engage how the museum is rhetorically moving visitors and to center the voices of immigrants and migrants from a diverse array of backgrounds. Through a rhetorical and qualitative framework, I examine the steps museums are taking to deconstruct xenophobia that is constituting immigrants as immoral and non-neighbors. Dwight Conquergood began researching communities he was a stranger to, as a “way of knowing and deeply sensing the other” (Conquergood, 1985, p. 4). I worked to come from a place of genuine inquiry and active understanding rather than passive engagement, to produce something similar to Conquergood’s concept of dialogical performance that works “to bring together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so that they can have a conversation with one another” (Conquergood, 1985, p. 9). Methodologically I chose to weave my personal experience with the rhetorical invitation of the exhibit and center the voices of immigrants and migrants in my event that I will discuss in future sections.

In this dissertation I take a mixed methodological approach combining both rhetorical criticism and qualitative engaged methods to encompass how the Tenement Museum moves visitors. I look at how the museum utilizes storytelling from both an embodied rhetorical perspective as well as from their online engagement practices. I then incorporated the online framework of *Your Story, Our Story* to create my own engagement practice to help understand how museums can use dialogue to foster mutual connections and shared understanding. This mixed methodological approach allows me to analyze the multifaceted communicative features of this museum as well as museums broadly.

As a scholar who researches materiality, space, and place as it relates to sites of public memory like museums, I look at the complex networks and context of these material environments. I focus on both the way I individually am being moved by a painting or exhibit

and the way that coexists with the cityscape or national landscape the museum is housed in. As a methodological framework I emphasize the importance of Dickinson and Aiello's (2016) concept of being through there that builds off Carole Blair's (2001) notion of being there. Dickinson and Aiello argue "given that being there is always imbricated in here and there, now and then, urban communication scholars must understand both their own material bodies and the material bodies with which they interact as nodal points for communication that stretches across time and place" (p. 1301). I look at the material ways the museum is positioning immigrants at home and how this process pushes visitors to assume the role of neighbor. This works to counteract the pervasive discourse that has labeled immigrants as out of place or homeless by allowing visitors to voyeuristically peak into their lives and walk through their neighborhoods. However, design is not the only way museums move visitors or this museum evokes neighborliness. In Chapter Two I will dive deeper into how I utilized the act of being through there to attend to the complex networks I have mapped out above.

In Chapter Three, I utilize qualitative engaged methods to look at the various ways the Tenement Museum has prioritized community engagement within both their design process and their programming, specifically looking at their community ties as well as their online engagement series, *Your Story, Our Story*. I accomplish this by looking at the asynchronous storytelling happening on the website and I created an event based on the museum's program *Your Story, Our Story* that includes everyday people in the commemorative process. Through this civic participation, visitors are invited to build community with other immigrant and migrants, adopting a persona of neighbor that works to establish responsibility. I brought the engagement series to Fort Collins in the form of a dialogic process that modifies the programming to include synchronous facilitated conversations. This event not only shed light on

issues of accessibility but also elucidated the effects of a synchronous facilitated dialogue on community storytelling related to immigration.

Ultimately, in this dissertation I look at how the Tenement Museum combines both design practices and engagement series to dismantle the xenophobic scaffolding that upholds United States discourse on immigration. I wanted to analyze how a vibrant neighborhood like the Lower East Side, intricately recreated homes, and stories from everyday people could reframe who gets to be our neighbors. With the increase of hatred and vitriol brought on by the second Trump presidency, it is important to bring attention to museums that are working against these harmful discourses.

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CHAPTER TWO: CRAFTING HOME: A RHETORIC OF NEIGHBORLINESS

Museums have a long history of concretizing our past, constructing what is to be valued and cherished. The Tenement Museum works to expand who gets included in this process, prioritizing the forgotten history of poor working-class immigrants and migrants who called the Lower East Side their home. By utilizing stories, recreated homes, and movement through the Lower East Side neighborhood, the museum rhetorically immerses visitors in the everyday lives of immigrants and migrants from the 1860s to 1980s. This combination of these rhetorical features influences visitors understanding of the public memory of American immigration.

I argue that the Tenement Museum works to dismantle xenophobia through the rhetoric of neighborliness. The museum interpolates visitors into neighbors through their recreated homes, walking the neighborhood, and storytelling. This identity of the neighbor is grounded in respect, and responsibility. However, while this identity is focused on shared substance, it uplifts heteronormative family structures as an idealized figure to emulate, failing to include non-normative immigrant stories in their narrative. This process of neighborliness first combines materially recreated dwellings and the neighborhood to invite visitors to embody neighborliness by stepping into lived environments. Second, the museum utilizes storytelling to constitute an idealized immigrant for visitors to identify with, highlighting similarities while still celebrating difference. Third, the museum asks visitors to solidify this embodiment of neighborliness that is created by the material environment and sustained by the storytelling, by inviting them to bring immigrants into their community assuming responsibility for their well-being through policy change and establishing networks of support.

This Chapter proceeds in five parts. First, I overview the relevant literature on everydayness, the home, and neighborhoods. Second, I unpack my methodological approach of being through there. Third, I discuss the recreated dwellings, pointing to the ways visitors step back in time to peek into the lives of immigrants on the Lower East Side. Fourth, I examine the blurred borders of the space that expands the museum boundaries to include the entire Lower East Side neighborhood, pointing to the importance of movement through the city. Fifth, I discuss the use of storytelling that works to constitute an idealized immigrant through the themes of cultural practices, the value of work, and examples of resiliency.

Embodied Neighborliness

Everydayness

While seemingly mundane and unimportant, everyday life is essential to being human. Paul Leuilliot argues that “everyday life is what we are given every day (or what is willed to us), what presses us, or even oppresses us, because there does exist an oppression of the present... everyday life is what holds us intimately, from the inside” (p. xi-xii). While extravagance and grandeur are important to preserve and historicize, because everydayness is essential to being human, it is of equal importance to study and preserve, and is presently something that is missing in museums at large.

Traditional museums are designed for prestige. They keep their objects behind velvet ropes and thick glass, have security guards present to keep visitors quiet and respectful, and uplift the experience as special. The very act of visiting a museum as a tourist is special. Tourism as an industry is grounded in the act of traveling. Blair, Dickinson, and Ott (2010) contend that, “memory places are destinations; they typically require visitors to travel to them. Thus [creating] a unique context for understanding the past, one that is rooted in touristic practices” (p. 26). The labor of travel adds a layer to how visitors are invited to perform as a tourist. The touristic

context surrounding memory sites invites a “desired departure from the ordinary,” shifting visitors’ expectations (Blair, Dickinson, Ott, 2010). The act of engaging in touristic behaviors is somewhat sacred, as it positions various activities as of heightened importance (Urry, 1992). Rhetoric of memory places predisposes visitors to view these sites as “worthy of attention, investment, and effort” (Blair, Dickinson, Ott, 2010; Urry, 1992). The Tenement Museum disrupts these traditional museum practices to center mundane everyday stories by recreating the homes of everyday people and breaking down the boundaries of the museum to include the neighborhood they called home. For Lefebvre (1991) and Certeau (1984), everyday practices and space are co-constitutive, influencing both the creation of spaces like cities or the movement and life within these cities. The museum preserves everydayness by inviting visitors into the homes of everyday New York immigrants that made up a majority of New York City’s population, and out into the streets where they built community and survived displacement.

Coming from a non-walkable community in West Texas, the act of walking through the Lower East Side of Manhattan was a viscerally moving experience. While taking a walking tour sponsored by the museum, I walked up and down the streets of the Lower East Side, dodging puddles and pedestrians off to work, smelling the food wafting from the corner stores, imagining what life would be like to experience this every day. The museum cultivates this experience to paint the picture of everyday life in this neighborhood throughout its history – inviting visitors to become neighbors themselves. While many scholars of everyday life study the commodification of urban spaces, arguing how they serve the needs of capitalism, the act of walking, smelling, and breathing in the city life privileges the forgotten stories of people rather than products (Lefebvre, 1991). Everyday activities “establish the plural language of stratified histories, of multiple relationships between enjoyment and manipulation, of fundamental languages spelled

out in everyday details” (Certeau, 1984, p. 3). Embodying everyday living allows visitors to step into the shoes of the immigrant families that called the Lower East Side their home by symbolically becoming their neighbors. Additionally, while labor was a part of the average immigrant identity, the complex relationship between the public and private that is tied to dwellings and neighborhoods is unique in densely populated urban cities like New York.

The Home

The museum invites visitors to adopt the persona of neighbor by recreating the home, challenging xenophobia, and working to debunk the notion of the immigrant as non-belonging or out of place. Due to the museum’s central exhibition being recreated tenement apartments, the concept of the home is essential to the rhetorical consequences of the space. While not thoroughly theorized in the field of communication studies, home studies, geography, anthropology, and cultural studies have outlined various tensions brought on by the concept of the home, three of which I will be expanding on within my dissertation: tensions between the material and symbolic features of the home, tensions between private and public life, and tensions between the personal and political.

Material and Symbolic

The concept of the home is complex. We can examine the material structure and location of a house or dwelling or the social connections between relationships over space and time (Blunt and Dowling, 2022). For many people, the home invites feelings of comfort and goodness (Dickinson, 2015). According to Blunt and Dowling (2022), “some experiences of home are bound up with a sense of security, familiarity, and comfort, whilst for other people home is a place of insecurity, exclusion, and alienation” (p. 1). These experiences are bound up in our memories or dreams of the future, “relat[ing] to where one lives and/or where one feels an attachment to people and places much farther away” (p. 1). The museum’s recreated homes give

visitors a voyeuristic glimpse into the lives of im/migrant families from the 1860s-1980s. The home is a place where people can withdraw, have peace, and be themselves (Certeau, 1998). While it might not have actual firm boundaries, it has felt boundaries that influence the dwellers and in turn the visitors who are peaking into their lives. Blunt and Dowling (2006) challenge the notion of the home being understood as solely material as “home is a place/site, a set of feelings/cultural meanings, and the relations between the two. (Blunt & Dowling, 2022, p. 9).

The combination of the material and symbolic make the home rhetorical. On a material level, the home is bound by the physical elements of a place “or any other assemblage of building materials on a particular site” (Blunt & Dowling, 2022, p. 10). However, many scholars have critiqued the notion of ‘house’ being conflated with the concept of the ‘home’ (Samanani and Lenhard 2019; O’Mahoney 2012; Blunt & Dowling, 2022). Scholars have argued that the “home is both a place/physical location and a set of feelings” (Blunt & Dowling, 2022, p. 28; see also Chambers 2020; Handel 2019). Dwellers spend time “homemaking” to feel a sense of belonging within the communities they are a part of. Specifically, regarding immigrant populations, this duality of being home but out of place is intertwined with home making in immigrant enclaves. Borders are often carried on the body of immigrants regardless of their physical location (Ono, 2012). According to Inge Maria Daniels (2001), ‘the material culture of the home is expressive of the changing social relationships of its inhabitants [and illustrates] the complexities, conflicts and compromises involved in creating a home’ (p. 205). On a symbolic level, this idea of home is created through imaginative text like books, movies, television, and memory of our individual notion of safety and comfort (Dickinson, 2015).

The “home [is] relational across space and time, [is] often shaped by memories of past homes as well as dreams of future homes, and bring[s] together both material and imaginative

geographies of residence and belonging, departure and return” (Blunt & Dowling, 2022, p. 250). Homes cannot just be one or the other – imaginative or material – they are made up by the complexities of our lived history, our relationship between home and homeland, and “the intersections of memory, identity, and belonging” brought on by material culture and memorialization (Blunt & Dowling, 2022, p. 250). People rely on their lived experience to constitute what the “home” is. These lived experiences tap into films or other imaginative texts that “engage, construct, and are constructed by spatiality” (Blunt & Dowling, 2022, p. 40). These spatial imaginaries are intertwined with the material features of the built environment and are in turn interlaced with our vision of being home or finding belonging and safety (Dickinson, 2015). In other words, the home is a product of what we have come to understand the home to be and the actual felt physical boundaries and aesthetics we put into place to make home unique to us. This idea of the home – at least from a Western perspective – is grounded in heteronormativity (Dickinson, 2015). The framework creates the ideal home as a space with a mother and a father who make sacrifices to take care of their children. The home is where they retreat, spend time with their children, and cultivate belonging within the confines of their physical dwellings. While the Tenement Museum breaks down some of the gender dynamics of these roles, they uphold and idolize many symbolic features of the “ideal” American homelife.

The homemaking process highlights the symbolic expectations of the home and emphasizes the complex temporal features of material space. According to Certeau, “a place inhabited by the same person for a certain duration draws a portrait that resembles this person based on objects (present or absent) and the habits that they imply” functioning as a life narrative through everyday living (p. 145). The home becomes imbued with the essence of its past and present inhabitation, taking in the smells of food or the patterns of movement brought on by a

pace mother, concretizing the public memory of the building. Scholars have argued that the home is a site of memory as shown with research on material culture within objects and photography and work on collective memory of home and homeland within immigrant diasporas (Rose, 2010; Tolia-Kelly, 2004a, 2004b; Fortier, 2000; Blunt, 2005). If memory is grounded in material supports that function outside of the boundaries of temporality, the recreation of the home and inclusion of mundane everyday objects allows visitors to interact with the lives of the families represented, thus stepping into the role of neighbor.

The museum utilizes the lived experiences of the past to humanize immigrant and migrants when modern day discourse has been actively working to dehumanize them. The creation of the everyday brings life to the stories of our nation's past allowing visitors to feel the richness of urban life through the public memory of immigrant and migrant families. Homes are steeped in memory and are "marked by nostalgia" (Dickinson, 2015, p. 67). Regarding memory and the home Dickinson (2015) argues:

It is possible that no space is as heavily laden with the materiality of memory as the home. Rooted in our deep past, linked to essential cultural conversations that connect the personal, familial, and national, the home brings the past into the present in fully embodied, fully material ways. The home spatializes memory, materializes bodies, and places individuals, families, and communities in time and geography. It is in this sense that home is affectively rhetorical. The home connects our present to our past, offers the hope of comfort, and places our memories of ourselves and our most intimately connected others into meaningful concrete relations (pp. 69-70).

The home's connection to individual memory and symbolic understanding of what it means to be home, and the museum's connection to public memory, work to tell the story of American immigrant and migrants by working through the tensions between the material and symbolic supports of the home. The museum asks visitors to step into the physical homes of former tenants, moving in and out of their "life narrative" made up of various things like "the reflection of a mirror, an open book, a newspaper lying around" and other objects. (Certeau, 1998, p. 145).

This act of movement highlights the rhetorical influence of the recreation of the home by telling the material story of a dweller's everyday life. This movement allows visitors to combat the discourse of immigrants as homeless and nonbelonging by having them physically step into their homes and engage with their mundane material objects and situate this experience in with their spatial imaginaries of what homelife is. However, while it is seemingly private spaces that visitors are voyeuristically engaging with, the home is neither entirely private or public.

Private and Public Life

Privacy is reserved for the elite. While the concept of the home is grounded in the feeling of privacy, buildings like tenement homes were not able to have that luxury due to both the physical and psychological constraints put on tenement dwellers. Scholars have pushed back against the notion that private and public life are distinct from one another (Davidoff and Hall, 2002). For Doreen Massey (1992), the identity of the home “derived precisely from the fact that it had always in one way or another been open—constructed out of movement, communication, social relations which always stretched beyond it’ (Massey 1992, p. 14). For dwellers, especially the poor working-class inhabitants of the Lower East Side, the concept of the home is created and sustained by the negotiation of the tension between private and public life.

Much of the stories of families in the Tenement Museum are focused on working class women. According to Blunt & Dowling (2022) “the humanistic notion of home as haven, as a sanctuary from society into which one retreats, may describe the lives of men for whom home is a refuge from work, but certainly doesn’t describe the lives of women for whom home is a workplace” (p. 20). The home for working class immigrant families is both a workplace and a site of perceived comfort and retreat. In addition, many of these families rented space out to individuals outside of their blood relations to make additional money. This duality of the space complicates the boundaries of the home highlighting the publicness of space and the museum

inviting visitors to rely on their individual memories of the home while inviting tension within our understanding of this notion of space, further blurring the boundaries of private and public life. Through this embodiment of neighborliness and the negotiation of tension, the act of physically stepping into the homes of immigrants works to combat the discourse of immigrant as nonbelonging or out of place.

Personal and Political

The material recreation of tenement homes works to combat xenophobic discourse that labels immigrants as alien or out of place. The concept of the home means many different things to people on an individual level. It is where people can retreat and be themselves, it is where people unwind from the work week, and it is where people have found comfort from community. However, the home is neither entirely personal or apolitical and “geographers have in recent years argued that the home is an intrinsically political site, not only passively affected and shaped by governance practices and sociopolitical trends, but that one that itself actively impacts wider politics” (Brickell, 2012a; Nowicki, 2017, p. 652). According to Blunt & Dowling (2022), the concept of the home and the feeling of belonging is a point of tension for many immigrants and migrants “as shown by being asked questions such as ‘where are you from?’ – often followed by ‘but where are you really from?’ – that imply that home is somewhere else; by racist and anti-immigrant violence, harassment, and discrimination; and by legislation and border controls that shore up a ‘hostile environment’ for migrants” (p. 272). While the home means a great deal to individuals who have worked hard to carve out a sense of belonging within hostile environments, it is inextricably intertwined with political discourse labeling who gets to call the United States home.

The discourse of immigrants as non-belonging has been the point of research for many scholars both within Communication Studies and beyond (Lakeoff & Ferguson, 2006; Ono &

Sloop 2002; Cisneros, 2008; Flores, 2020; Lechuga, 2020). Therefore, the concept of the home is inherently political because there are symbolic features that make up what counts as home. For immigrants, the phrase “go back to your country” is often used to signify their otherness and non-neighborliness. Therefore, the public memory of American immigrants is oftentimes one of homelessness. However, the tenement museum leans into the tension of the personal and political nature of the home, inviting visitors to tap into their personal memory of being at home while simultaneously breaking down the political nature of immigrants not being home. This tension between the personal and political allows visitors to reconceptualize both the public memory of immigration through the symbolic dimensions of the home, while physically working through the material features of recreated neighborhoods and dwellings.

Neighborhoods

Beyond the home, the museum invites visitors to symbolically become neighbors with the families represented in the space by inviting them to move through the actual neighborhood. The home is entirely bound up with the urban life and therefore the city and in turn neighborhoods act as extensions of the home itself, inviting visitors to continue their journey exploring the intricacies of domestic life for Lower East Side immigrants. Scholars like Blunt and Sheringham (2019) and Blunt & Dowling (2022) argue that “academics should extend the study of the home to extend beyond the interior and dwelling to include the cityscape such as streets and neighborhood contending that the study of home is crucial to understand what it means to live in the city” (Blunt & Dowling, 2022, p. 141). The separation of home life and city life relies on the distinction between the private and public, which I have outlined above is flawed (Sparke 2008; Kaika 2004; Blunt & Dowling, 2022). In their study of the home, Blunt & Dowling (2022) “explore the ways in which material and imaginative geographies of home are

intertwined in lived experiences and understandings of the city, and the power relations and multi-scalarity of home over simultaneously domestic and urban scales” (p. 143). By traversing the neighborhood, visitors are asked to embody neighborliness and therefore identify with immigrant dwellers. This rhetoric of neighborliness is sustained through the recreation of life in the Lower East Side. Amin and Thrift (2017) discuss urbanicity and the idea of cities being living things not that different from humans. I am looking at neighborhoods based on two features of Amin and Thrift’s work; cities are interconnected assemblages and are iterative and agentic.

First, cities are complex networks of *stuff* or “complex adaptive assemblage[s]” (Dovey, 2010; 2012). For Amin and Thrift these complex networks are “governed by the balance of force between many authority structures – corporate and institutional, technical and infrastructural, computational and cartographic, social and symbolic, codified and informal” (p. 16). In other words, cities are made up of stuff that is thrown together creating complex layered environments that are grounded in multiplicity (Amin and Thrift, 2017). Cities “are spatial radiations that gather worlds of atoms, atmospheres, symbols, bodies, buildings, plants, animals, technologies, infrastructures, and institutions, each with its own mixes, mooring and motilities, each with its own means of training living, and dying” (p. 2). This urbanicity creates these complex assemblages that are both shaped by humans as seen with the Anthropocene (human impact on the planet), and in turn shape humans through their agentic nature.

Second, cities are grounded in their multiplicity and are agentic. Their networks of systems, animals, traffic, and other parts of urban life create a material environment that somewhat constitutes its own existence overlapping with the human experience. While they can never be completely independent from human beings, the complex network of neighborhoods

creates a snowball effect, establishing cities as living things – or in regard to the museum, as a part of the home. As a result of these complex webs of interrelations, the city acts as its own living being that moves other people into action. This relationship between city and human, in turn, can act as a cycle of co-creation. In the realm of the Tenement Museum, the people who have existed in this neighborhood since its inception, are part of the fabric of the city itself and have had a hand in the production of the city as a living thing. What we see as the Lower East Side now carries every iteration of its existence. The families that move in and out of the tenements, the shop owners that come and go, the tourist that visit historic delis, and the tenants that live in the renovated buildings are all part of this living infrastructure that make up the Lower East Side. Therefore, visitors of the museum are both shaped by the intersecting past and present, and by default become a part of the iterative system. This form of consubstantiality invites visitors to identify with immigrants broadly thus dismantling xenophobia by becoming closer to the immigrant represented in the museum.

The process of identifying with dwellers is a vital practice of the museum and the act of moving through a neighborhood is essential to this process. Certeau argues that “the neighborhood is a dynamic notion requiring a progressive apprenticeship that grows with the repetition of the dweller’s body’s engagement in public space until it exercises a sort of appropriation of this space. The everyday banality of this process, shared among all urbanites, renders invisible its complexity as a cultural practice and its urgency in satisfying the urban desire of dwellers in the city” (p. 11). The neighborhood connects private dwellings with public life, and the act of traversing these spaces is something that can connect people across time and space. According to Lefebvre (1991), “public areas (the spaces of social relationships and actions) are connected up with private areas (spaces for contemplation, isolation, and retreat) via

‘mixed’ areas (linking thoroughfares, etc.)” (p. 153). While public and private life seem distinct from each other, the lines between them are blurred through the mixture of material boundaries. The combination of apartment tours with the walking tour materially recreates this relationship and allows visitors to reenact the social intricacies of life in the Lower East Side and in turn engage in a rhetoric of neighborliness.

Methodology

To understand the intricacies of how the Tenement Museum invites visitors to embody the rhetoric of neighborliness I look at the combination of the museum design, the Lower East Side neighborhood, and the entirety of Manhattan – physically visiting the space. I went to the museum two separate times. The first visit was a one-day trip, attending one apartment tour and a walking tour. The second visit, I spent three days at the museum, going on all but two of the tours they offered, took a total of 11 pages of notes single-spaced and additional photos, collected materials like informational bookmarks and pamphlets, and spent additional time at coffee shops and restaurants in the Lower East Side. As I moved through these tours and spent time in the neighborhood, I adopted the methodological framework of “being through there.”

Rhetorical Criticism: Being Through There

As a scholar who researches materiality, space, and place as it relates to sites of public memory like museums, I attend to the complex networks and context of these material environments. I focus on both the way I individually am being moved by a painting or exhibit and the way that coexists with the cityscape or national landscape the museum is housed in. As a methodological framework I emphasize the importance of Dickinson and Aiello’s (2016) concept of “being through there” that builds off Carole Blair’s (2001) notion of “being there.” Dickinson and Aiello argue “given that being there is always imbricated in here and there, now

and then, urban communication scholars must understand both their own material bodies and the material bodies with which they interact as nodal points for communication that stretches across time and place” (p. 1301). I specifically use the act of being through there to attend to the complex networks I have mapped out above. To outline this methodological approach, “the sensorimotor understanding that is perception is an always embodied being through there and is... fundamental to the urban experience and urban communication” (p. 1303). This methodological approach of using my moving body to engage with the built environment of a city “is a method that attempts to empirically map the actual ways in which the city and the human weave together” (p. 1303). I utilize the act of being through there to help me attend to the complex networks of the individual and the global. For my dissertation, I physically moved through both the neighborhood and the museum, attending to the complexities of their unique environments.

Moving Through the Tenements

In this section I argue that the Tenement Museum works to dismantle xenophobia through the rhetoric of neighborliness. The museum interpolates visitors into neighbors through recreated homes, walking the neighborhood, and storytelling. This analysis section has three subsections: Recreated Dwellings, Walking the Neighborhood, and Storytelling that centers the themes of cultural practices, the value of work, and resilience.

Recreated Dwellings

The museum has two historically recreated tenement buildings from the 19th and 20th century, 97 and 103 Orchard Street. Each building has both recreated apartments and keeps portions of the building’s dilapidated structure, which the museum calls ruin spaces, to call both

to the past occupants while still telling the building's history. The creation of the home is both a material and symbolic practice that relies on the built environment and discursive practices. In this section I will focus on the material felt boundaries of the home by analyzing the movement through the buildings and the effects of stepping into the recreated dwellings, and the symbolic process of home making that focuses on the museum's use of curation to mediate life narratives through mundane everyday objects that visitors will recognize (Certeau, 1998).

The process of getting to the museum invites visitors to step into the lives of dwellers over the years by inviting visitors to meld their lived experience with physical space. Before visitors start their journey in the space, they first begin outside in front of the museum visitor center. As a group they make their way to either the front or back of the buildings, depending on the tour they are on. In "After the Famine," which follows the life of Irish couple Bridget and Joseph Moore, visitors walk down Delancy street and make their way into the back courtyard of the building where they begin their tour, taking in the physical felt boundaries of this specific home (Figure 1). During this portion of the tour, the educator highlights the utility of the courtyard during Bridget and Joseph's stay at 97 Orchard. This courtyard was where the outhouses were located and where women did laundry, gathered water and coal, and socialized with other dwellers.



Figure 1 Outside courtyard. Photograph by Author

These tenement homes blurred the lines of private and public life by forcing close proximity and the courtyard acted as an extension of a parlor or living room. The building itself pushes visitors to engage as neighbors because they are forced into these public areas. This space was where tenants found community and mingled with their neighbors. Visitors are asked to step into the lives of immigrants during this time by moving around the socializing area of the building. The act of moving around the courtyard gives visitors the opportunity to imagine life at 97 Orchard by taking in the physical boundaries of the space which meld with their preconceived understanding of *their home* or the general concept of *a home*. Space carries every iteration of the past in the bones of the building and visitors become part of that story as they move through the space. However, spaces like cities, and in turn the home, are iterative beings that influence and are influenced. The building itself acts on dwellers and by default neighbors pushing them to perform as community members through the actual structure of the building that carries the essences of the past and present. The dual nature of lived experience and felt boundaries invites

visitors to become part of the buildings story and step into the role of neighbor by envisioning immigrant life in the building.

In “100 years Apart,” which is centered on the Rogarshevskys and the Baldizzis, visitors take a different route on their tour and walk about half a block down Orchard Street, through the hustle and bustle of the city. They arrive at the tenement home, walk up the steps, into the building, and stop in the entryway. This movement paints a picture of the lived experience of tenement dwellers during various eras of the building’s occupancy, allowing visitors to embody life in the neighborhood. The entryway is dark, crowded, and dilapidated from daily living acting as one of the ruin spaces I mentioned above and will unpack in subsequent sections.



Figure 2 & 3 Entryway and staircase. Photograph by Author

During my visit, visitors were asked to make their way up the large wooden staircase with a worn-down banister from the years of continuous use between the 1860s-1930s, and into a recreated tenement apartments of the Rogarshevskys, a Jewish family that lived in this building

in the 1910s, and the Baldizzis, an Italian family that lived in the building in the 1930s (Figures 2 & 3). Movement, whether they enter in the back side of the building or front, begins the story for visitors to step into. The museum invites visitors to identify with these immigrant, migrant, and refugee families by asking them to move through their everyday lived experiences which symbolically and materially connect them to the dwellers. The Rogarshevskys, Baldizzis, and Moores all made the same trek down the street, up the stairs, and into the building multiple times a day, just like we do in our own homes. The recreation of mundane activities like walking down the street, waving at pedestrians as they pass by, trekking up a stairwell to get to an apartment all invite the feeling of sameness within visitors. These mundane, everyday activities are a common lived experience and this process of embodiment and envisioning reduces the feeling of difference between our nation's immigrant past and therefore works to dismantle xenophobia.

Beyond just movement in and out of the dwellings, the museum invites visitors to step into the homes of various immigrant families, further moving them into the role of neighbor. In 97 Orchard Street, each apartment has a bedroom, kitchen, and a parlor much like an average one-bedroom apartment we see in present time without the restroom. 103 Orchard Street has slightly larger apartments with added restrooms. Visitor's pile into these apartments and weave their way in and out of these rooms, bumping into each other, stepping into the role of a neighbor that has been invited into the space. While visitors are not allowed to touch the walls or historic appliances, they are allowed to sit on certain pieces of furniture and bedding (Figure 4).



Figure 4 Apartment bedroom. Photograph by Author

The recreated portion of the dwelling asks visitors to feel the tension of private and public life. Visitors' prior understanding of the home as something private and separate from public life mixes with the voyeuristic experience of stepping into the physical space of home for an immigrant family. This act of being in a private space asks visitors to form a connection between visitor and dweller, inviting visitors into the story of these immigrant families.

The museum educators act as proxy for the families represented in the museum. From information gathered from census records, other documents, and oral histories the educators speak for the occupants of the home. For the Baldizzis, these stories centered around Rosaria's documentation status, Adolfo Baldizzi's unemployment, and the children's memories of playing in and around the building. Southern Italians like the Baldizzi's immigrated to the United States due to the political unrest and economic instability that lingered from Italy's unification, searching for financial opportunity but often faced economic struggles after settling in the United States (Levi, 1945). In an interview for the museum's oral history archive, Josephine Baldizzi shares her memories as a child in her family's apartment on 97 Orchard Street. She discusses life

in the Great Depression and her experience living in a building with families with different ethnicities and religions. This combination of oral histories and educators fill in the gaps and acts as a proxy for the families living in these homes. This mediation provides an entity for visitors to identify with, something that I will discuss in more detail in future sections, thus stepping into the role of neighbor. Neighbors are not part of the dwelling but are part of the overall larger community that worked to provide support and care for the dwellers.

While the museum invites visitors to engage with the material felt boundaries of the home, navigating the built structure of the space and their prior understanding of the home, the museum also invites visitors to engage with mediate examples of immigrant home making. This process utilizes mundane, everyday objects that can be found in many homes across the world and uses them to invite visitors to find commonalities with the families represented, while also acknowledging the family's uniqueness. Like I argued in earlier sections, the homemaking process highlights the symbolic expectations of the home and emphasizes the complex temporal features of material space. According to Certeau, prolonged habits of continuous living function as a life narrative. Each recreated apartment in the museum has a mixture of objects used to recreate the time-period/tenement life and objects from the families themselves, working as an example of how immigrant families carved out home in these small apartments. The tour "Meet Victoria" gives visitors the chance to pick up these objects and ask questions about their purpose and story. Meet Victoria is an immersive tour with an actor playing Victoria Confino, a teenager who immigrated to the Lower East Side in 1913 from Kastoria (modern day Greece). The Confinos' immigrated to the United States to flee economic instability in the Ottoman Empire. They were Sephardic Jews which are, "descendants of Spanish Jews who had darker skin, spoke a different language (Ladino not Yiddish) and had a different diet. So, in addition to the typical

challenges and discrimination faced by immigrants in America, Sephardic Jews like the Confinos were shunned by some in the existing Jewish community” (The Stories of 97 Orchard Street, n.d.). During this tour visitors are taken to a room where they are given this background of the Confino family before making their way to the Confino apartment.

The educator knocks on the door and asks Victoria if her friends could come in and ask her a few questions. Once visitors are let into the home they sit on chairs around the room and the bed that is found in the parlor. During this tour Victoria shows visitors various objects such as her brothers’ and father’s hats and fez, the scrub board she uses to wash her family’s clothes along with the mini one she lets her little brother use so he won’t get in the way, and a spice mixture that visitors can smell. During this experience visitors can touch and smell the objects in the home painting a picture of life during this time. These objects, specifically the fez and spice mixture are products of the Confino’s life in Kastoria that they carried with them to the United States. They used these objects to carve out a home in New York that carries pieces of their past lives. Rather than highlighting the differences of immigrants in this time, these mundane everyday objects work to highlight similarities. Visitors are asked to reflect on their own trinkets, clothing, and other objects that they use to make their homes *their* homes. This act of homemaking is a universal experience that the museum uses to invite visitors to find commonalities with the Confino family. In “After the Famine,” the Moore’s recreated home is filled with trinkets and wall decorations that paint the story of their Irish background. On the wall is a portrait of political leader Daniel O’Connell and on their mantle is a jar of dried shamrock clovers and a rosary (Figure 5).

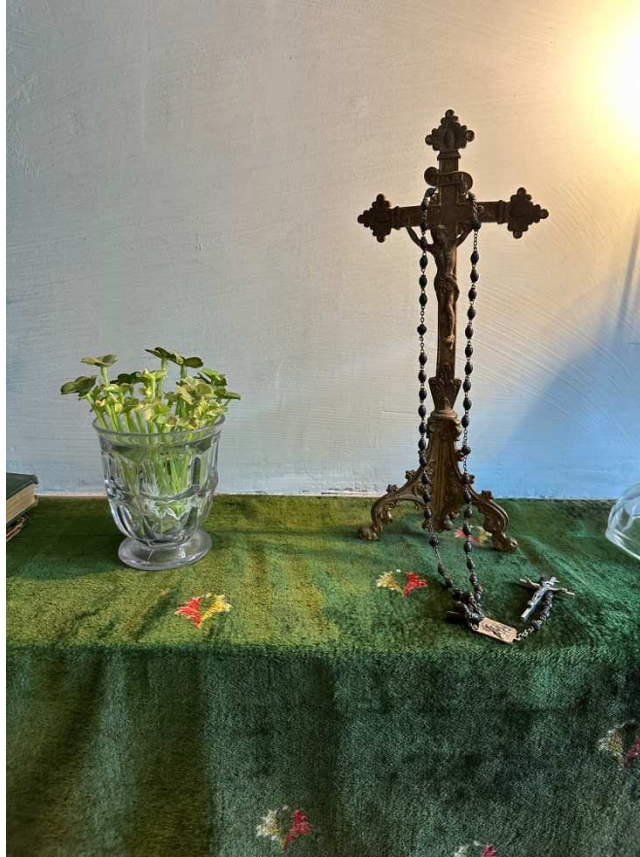


Figure 5 The Moore's recreated mantle. Photograph by Author

This practice of curation, works to mediate the practice of home making for immigrant families, melding their past lives with their present ones. This curation works to symbolically place immigrants as *at home*, fighting the prevalent discourse that their home is elsewhere.

In "Finding Home," one of the central pieces of the Saez apartment is the plastic covered couch. Visitors can sit on this couch and feel the crinkling plastic that tells the story of Ramonita Saez.



Figure 6 Saez family living room. Photograph by Author

According to the museum “this furniture serves as a paean to this sociable Puerto Rican garment worker” (Tenement Museum, 2018). Across many of the various tours that go through the Saez apartment, many visitors discuss how this plastic couch brought back memories. This plastic covered piece of furniture “resonates for Puerto Ricans, Jews, and African Americans, as it does for Americans of Chinese, Irish, and Italian origin” in the 1960s and 1970s. This piece of furniture was something the Saez family took care of and was an object of pride and a symbol of their hard work to create a home in this country” (*Ode to the Plastic Covered Couch*, n.d.). The museum uses it to highlight the homemaking process and how essential it is to carve out a sense of belonging. Visitors can relate to these home making practices and are asked by educators to recall how they have previously made spaces their own. Some discussing flags they hang on their walls or photos of family members. Others discuss how they had a plastic couch of their own growing up. These objects work to materially connect visitors to the community of this building, interpolating them into the Confino, Moore, or Saez’s neighbors. However, what happens when the objects are missing, and erosion is at the forefront of design.

Outside of the recreation of homes and inclusion of the Lower East Side neighborhood, the Tenement Museum utilizes what they call ruin spaces within their design practices to preserve the history of the building. Before visitors look at the recreated tenement homes they are taken through these spaces “showing how the building looked when it was rediscovered in the 1980s, after it had been left alone, more or less forgotten, since 1935” (Solomons, n.d.). These spaces show peeling wallpaper, soot covered walls from kerosene lamps, and chipped paint highlighting the years of life in this building (Figures 6 & 7).



Figure 6 Peeling wallpaper & Figure 7 Soot covered wall art. Photograph by Author

Scholars have argued how ruins evoke feelings of nostalgia while calling to the future (Kuftinec, 1998; DeSilvey and Edensor, 2013; High and Lewis, 2007; Storm, 2008). In the case of the Tenement Museums, ruins are used to invite visitors to contend with the layered memory of the building itself and the story of the immigrants who lived there, while imagining the future of immigrants as a whole.

Absence plays as important of a role as presence within the Tenement Museum's design structure. They use the absence of curated life to invite visitors to feel the lack of dwellers while contending with their haunting presence. According to Wood, "the eye is drawn toward deeper reservoirs of understanding, though not always by its own accord. We recognize efforts by the curators of traditional memory sites to deploy technologies arranged to guide the gaze of onlookers" (p. 444). This absence of restoration invites visitors to gaze at erosion of history. The ruin is a representation of every iteration of the past as seen through the chipped paint and tattered wallpaper, contrasting the carefully recreated homes found in the rest of the museum.

While spaces of memory challenge traditional temporal boundaries, ruins are material representations of this disruption. According to Kathleen Stewart (1996), ruins are an "embodiment of the process of remembering itself" (p. 93). According to DeSilvey and Edensor (2013) "as sites characterized by multiple temporalities, ruins offer opportunities for constructing alternative versions of the past, and for recouping untold and marginalized stories" (p. 471). Ruins often represent multiple iterations of different times all bound up in one material structure that is erodible much like memory itself (Bădescu, 2019). In the case of the Tenement Museum, due to this multiplicity of disjointed fragments, "ruins therefore cannot be seen as depositories of monolithic collective memories which engender similar, homogenous reactions in the viewers (Bădescu, 2019). These ruins allow visitors to fill in the blanks of life in the tenement homes.

These ruin spaces are filled with hauntings of past inhabitants. Haunting "affectively engages in a relationship between presence and (seemingly) absence, present and (seemingly) past" (Dickinson, Aoki, and Ott, 2024, p. 77). This feeling of a presence in the foundation of the building invites visitors to "remember which was lost and to knit it together with the presence" (p. 78). While the recreated homes paint the story of the families who lived in 97 and 103

Orchard Street, the ruins capture the essence of loss within the building. As you walk through the Baldizzi's home you could imagine them coming home to greet you. However, the ruins signify that they are not here anymore, but their haunting essence remain. This presence and absence mingle together to evoke the affective feelings of nostalgia and melancholy. This melancholy allows visitors to stay attached to what was lost, families pushed out by changing times and gentrification, while being called into action for the future. Gordon and Radway (2008) describes haunting as "seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities" (p. 8). While the residence of 97 and 103 Orchard Street are gone, and many Lower East Side residence are being pushed out from gentrification and high rent costs, these haunting ruin spaces invite visitors to confront the harsh realities New York immigrants are facing. By confronting these realities visitors are invited to empathize and identify with Lower East Side immigrants. Through this act of empathizing, identifying, and assuming the role of neighbor, brought on by moving in and out of immigrant homes, the museum is working to dismantle xenophobia.

Walking the Neighborhood

Moving past the recreated dwellings and ruin spaces, the immigrant experience extends past the home to include the neighborhood that encompassed their various communities. The museum works to tell the story of immigrant life by including the Lower East Side in the story. Often museums are contained within a single building, or a clearly defined museum complex. However, the Tenement Museum breaks down the traditional barriers of the museum by encompassing the Lower East Side into the memorial structure, welcoming visitors into the neighborhood – its own agentic space. As visitors line up outside next to the museums, they are invited to take in the hustle and bustle of the Lower East Side. This movement outside of the space blurs the boundaries of the museum to welcome visitors into the neighborhood. This

invitation is accomplished through the museum's three regular walking tours, "Outside the Home" that tells the story of community life in the Lower East side, "Reclaiming Black Spaces" that highlights the forgotten stories of Black New Yorkers that shaped Lower Manhattan, and "Building of the Lower East Side" that shares the unique stories of the buildings that made the neighborhood what it is today.

Scholars have argued that the neighborhood is its own living organism (Amin and Thrift, 2017). As I stated in the theoretical section on neighborhoods, the urbanicity of cities are the products of prolonged life that bridges human existence, animals, traffic, and built structures that lack temporal boundaries. They are both assemblages of various iterations of life and are iterative and agentic. Like a snowball rolling down a hill, a city picks up new features while keeping the old ones until it is moving entirely on its own while continuously acting on the humans residing in it. By opening the boundaries of the museum, visitors are able to engage with every iteration of the neighborhood, becoming part of the ecosystem and therefore a neighbor for a short time.

During the walking tours, visitors weave their way in and out of everyday city life mixing up the material boundaries of sites of memory. The museum utilizes the city as a complex co-constructed network of humans and things to blur the boundaries of the families represented and visitors. Visitors walk the paths that these families walked every day, brush past pedestrians on their way to work or are running errands like these families did and are asked to take in the metaphorical snowball. This assemblage does not have a beginning or end but acts on the visitor simultaneously. The visitor takes some form of transportation to get to the museum either moving them through the streets or the subway system. They are invited to take in the assemblages of people, animals, and built infrastructure that paints the picture of New York City

life. They see the pavement and stairs worn-down from continuous walking and hear the car horns of taxis. Footprints from various generations leave their mark on the ground that carries into present times through their haunting essence much like the ruin spaces. This palimpsest creates an affective assemblage that acts on visitors' bodies, connecting the city, neighborhood, and home through this lived experience. This embodiment carries on within the museum itself as visitors move through the recreated home and hear the city life through the open windows, much like residence would have heard throughout various iterations of tenement dwelling. In addition to real time assemblages of urbanicity, time plays an additional role in the recreation of immigrant stories through material environment. Visitors are invited to negotiate the connection between the city and human on both an individual and global scale by allowing movement to help them engage with the textures and sensations of the neighborhood. This movement in turn, allows them to potentially perform as a New Yorker for a short time – assuming they are visiting. This complex rhetorical process is always ongoing and evolving but both impacts the visitor and is impacted by the visitor. The act of being through the Lower East Side allow visitors to take in the complex networks of the city and contend with the history of immigration in this neighborhood. The city, neighborhood, and dwellings have had an iterative relationship with human beings since its inception, humans acting on the city and the city acting on humans, creating a palimpsest of past and present lived experience that is imbedded in the figurative bones of the material environment. This invites visitors to both simulate being a Lower East Sider for a short time but also a neighbor to every iteration of dweller.

In “Outside the Home,” educators paint the story of the Lower East Side by playing on visitors' senses. Orchard Street was one of the most crowded streets in Manhattan during the late 1800s to mid 1900s, mostly due to push carts which were one of the main sources of labor for

various demographics of immigrants up until the 1930s when they were banned when Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia wanted to “revamp” Lower Manhattan (Tenement Museum, 2024).

Educators share that the streets were stuffed full of people bartering for goods, shouting at vendors, and meeting friends. These pushcarts had various foods that smells wafted through the streets. What would typically be felt but not explicitly acknowledged is brought to the forefront of visitors’ minds by educators who tell the story of the Lower East Side’s urban environment. As they paint the picture of the street combining the story of shouting, smells, and crowds, visitors are invited to step back into time and envision Orchard Street during this era of history. While the push carts are gone, transforming into shops rather than street vendors, and the crowd have diminished, their essence is still there. Visitors are bumping into pedestrians and dodging loading trucks, adding to the experience of the tour. The vibration of the wooden wheels of the pushcarts carries on through the streets all the way into the present through the palimpsest of lived city life. The echoes of their rumbling movement still in the haunted environment. The history of the Lower East Side is ingrained in the foundations of the neighborhood which invites visitors to become part of the history and ultimately embody neighborliness. Inviting visitors to become part of the framework of the neighborhood additionally invites them to embody being a neighbor itself. The combination of recreated dwellings and utilizing the city, allows visitors to engage with New York’s material environment, inviting them to begin the process of stepping into the role of neighbor. After visitors begin the process of materially embodying the everyday lives of Lower East Siders, the museum utilizes storytelling to create an idealized immigrant for visitors to identify with.

Storytelling

The Tenement Museum utilizes storytelling as one of their main features of curation, giving people a framework to understand the lived experiences of Lower East Side immigrants (Ryfe, 2006; Black, 2008). I will outline the theoretical grounding of storytelling in more detail in Chapter Three, but it is important to note how the museum utilizes storytelling both in their design *and* programs. While I am discussing storytelling in both chapters, they are functioning in different ways. Storytelling within the design of the tour-based structures works to invite visitors to identify with dwellers and promote empathy, a practice that is essential to establishing mutual connection (Fisher, 1984; Arnett, 1992; Black, 2008; Gergen et al., 2002; Black, 2008). Storytelling as I discuss in Chapter Three within the dialogic nature of the event works in a similar fashion but with the added iterative back and forth of dialogue that invites the co-creations of meaning (Black, 2008; Arnett et al., 2009).

Within the recreated homes and neighborhood educators use the history of the families that lived in these buildings to tell the story of immigration within the Lower East Side. The material features of the museum such as the recreated dwellings and walking the neighborhood invite visitors to embody being a neighbor to the immigrant families represented in the museum. The stories of the family create an idealized immigrant for visitors to identify and bring into their community. This act of storytelling acts as a proxy for Levinas' face-to-face interaction with the other. Through this encounter, visitors are invited to confront a mediated version of the face. While this acts differently than Levinas' understanding of neighborliness, it takes features to function within a museum setting. Stories work to give order to shared experiences "to establish ways of living in common" (Fisher, 1999, p. 271). Neighborliness shares features of consubstantiality, respect, and responsibility which is created and sustained by material and symbolic storytelling. While the stories themselves are important to the rhetorical process of the

museum, the act of physically being in the recreated home while the stories are being told intensifies the identification process and in turn works to dismantle xenophobia through this embodiment of neighborliness. The museum utilizes three specific themes to create the idealized immigrant: stories of cultural practices, the value of work, and depictions of resilience.

Cultural Practices

In “Under One Roof,” focusing on the Rogarshevskys and Baldizzis, the celebration of religious practices was an important feature of the tour that connected these families in unexpected ways. Jewish immigrants from Russia or eastern Europe, like the Rogarshevskys, migrated during this era predominantly due to economic hardships, persecution, and mob violence against the Jewish minority called pogroms that stifled religious freedom (Grosfeld, Sakalli, & Zhuravskaya, 2018). The Rogarshevskys struggled navigating their Jewish faith through a progressive decade of the labor movement (*Apartment Tours*, n.d.). Like many immigrants that moved to America during this period, all of the members of the Rogarshevsky family had to work to sustain their daily life, making observing the Sabbath nearly impossible. This tour highlights the challenges immigrants faced when trying to acclimate to American life and the pressure brought on by the intense labor practices of this time. As visitors walk around the apartment and sit on chairs next to the recreated Shabbat Dinner table that has the display of a traditional meal, the educator outlines how the Rogarshevskys found ways to work around their labor schedules to put together a Shabbat Dinner. They came together after their busy work weeks and spent time as a family, a pastime many visitors can identify with.

In addition to their meals, Fanny Rogarshevskys had to work around laboring on the Sabbath which ended up connecting her to the Baldizzis. To keep her apartment and support herself after the death of her husband Abraham, “Fanny took the job of janitress, cleaning the building and its apartments. She held this job until the building was condemned and was 97

Orchard's last resident, leaving in 1941" (*The Stories of 97 Orchard Street*, n.d.). During this time, she asked a young Josephine Baldizzi to do small tasks for her around the building so she could keep the Sabbath. This story highlights the importance of community within tenement buildings, which provided space for the melding of cultures and supporting each other across difference, highlighting the good nature of these immigrant families. This example of family and community connection works to create the idealized immigrant for visitors to identify with.

Another example of melding cultures, "Finding Home" discusses the importance of music across generations. While there are many different Jewish families represented in 97 and 103 Orchard Street, each family came to the United States under different contexts as seen with the Confino's and Rogarshevskys. After WWII millions of Jewish Europeans were residing in Displaced Persons camps (*103 Orchard*, n.d.). As a response to the atrocities of the Holocaust, Truman's 1945 Directive shifted immigration quotas to allow a small number of refugees to be allowed asylum in the United States before the Displaced Persons Act increased the number admitted (*103 Orchard*, n.d.). The Epstein's came to the United States in the first wave of refugees, arriving in New York on April 22, 1947 (*103 Orchard*, n.d.). As visitors move in and out of the Epstein apartment, they take in a teenage girls recreated room. This room included a record player and visitors are asked to either sit on her bed or in various chairs around the room and listen to a recording of an oral history.



Figure 8 Bella Epstein's portable record player. Photograph by Author

Bella Epstein discussed her most prized possession, a portable record player (Figure 8).

According to the recording, her father got the record player to hear “the great cantors Moishe Oysher and Josef “Yossele” Rosenblatt” (*103 Orchard*, n.d.). However, when he was not using the record player, she would listen to “Diana” by Paul Anka. According to Bella, “that was the song... I mean that was it... That’s what made me an American” (*103 Orchard*, n.d.). During this portion of the tour, the educator used this story to highlight this era of cultural melding.

Many of these children came from various backgrounds and were intersecting with other immigrant families as well as American culture which created a hybrid of cultural identities.

However, one thing is clear within this section of the tour, enjoying music can be a universal experience. This evocation of finding connection through music invites visitors to identify with Bella Epstein and thus envision her within their community.

Lastly, in “After the Famine,” a tour following Irish couple Joseph and Bridget Moore, educators spend a large portion of the tour focusing on the annual St. Patrick’s Day parade. Irish immigrant during this era came to the United States fleeing the Great Potato Famine and the search for political independence and religious freedom that was being stifled under British rule (Gribben, 1999). However, during the late 1800s in America Irish immigrants faced discrimination and stereotyping, seen as an undesirable class. On this tour educators discuss how St. Patrick’s Day gave Irish immigrants the opportunity to celebrate their heritage, acknowledge the role Irish people played in making New York City what it is today, and affirm their place in the United States. A day filled with the celebration of Irish customs, St. Patrick’s Day gave the Irish, like Joseph and Bridget, a chance to celebrate their culture and resiliency. The museum utilizes this tour to discuss how individuals like Joseph and Bridget used the parade to cope with the increased tension brought on by discrimination, pointing to the window seal where Bridget would sit and watch the parade pass by. Many visitors can relate to the experience of using cultural celebrations to exemplify pride in the face of adversity. We see this with Pride Parades across the United States, Black History Month celebrations, and so many other cultural pastimes. The museum uses the example of cultural pastimes to invite visitors to see the similarities they share across culture.

The Value of Work

Like the bonds created through cultural practices, the museum utilizes the stories of work to construct an idealized immigrant for visitors to identify with. In “100 Years Apart,” the museum highlights the value of working hard to support one’s family. In this tour visitors are invited to explore a recreated garment factory where immigrants like Mrs. Wong worked every day (Figure 9). Chinese families like the Wong’s immigrated to the United States after the Immigration Act of 1965 lifted restrictions to provide better opportunities for their children but

faced racism and discrimination upon their arrival such as low wages and social discrimination (*103 Orchard*, n.d.; Tempo & Diner, 2022). Visitors are invited to move through their workspaces, asked to sit down at the sewing machine and physically touch it to hear recorded testimonies that build Mrs. Wong's story, physically becoming part of the narrative (Figure 10).



Figure 9 Recreated garment factory. Photograph by Author



Figure 10 Sewing machine set up to show videos. Photograph by Author

When Mrs. Wong moved to the United States from China in the 1965 her whole life changed. She went from being a homemaker to operating a sewing machine in a Lower East Side Garment Factory. In a video sharing her experience, Mrs. Wong discussed why she wanted to share her story with the museum, highlighting how her work life was essential to her identity.

Garment workers during this era not only worked grueling hours due to the piece rate style of labor (getting paid for the amount your sewed), but they also had to juggle their responsibilities at home and the newfound family tensions brought on by this new imbalance of power. An audio at one of the sewing machines highlights how gender dynamics shifted from China to America. Women were now working and earning their own paychecks, reducing the power imbalance between them and their husbands. For many garment workers, learning how to operate a sewing machine created a newfound independence. According to Mrs. Wong, “It was my first time learning how to sew because I didn’t know how to sew. Some people didn’t like it, but that factory didn’t mind me learning. So, I was learning and finally could learn myself. After

that, I made three dollars, and I was so happy! I think it was just a few cents per piece. I don't remember exactly how much. But it was very, very little. This made me very happy. I was happy because I learned, because I learned how to do it by myself" (*Garment Shop: Story Mode*, n.d.). However, this did not stop many husbands from taking their paychecks. Despite this struggle these women were the catalyst for the growing prevalence of unions that "could provide their families with health care, English classes, citizenship classes, retirement savings funds, and social events," things that their husbands could not provide with their work in restaurants and laundromats (*Garment Shop Advocates*, n.d.). In a video in the tour and on the museum website, retired garment worker and labor organizer Connie Ling states, "union is good, you know? Everything is getting together, you know, solidarity. You know, you cannot get in if you're not [in] solidarity, you're alone, no good. You're single, alone, nobody helps you, no good. So, you must be [in] solidarity. You must be together" (*Garment Shop: Story Mode*, n.d.). Their fight for unionization not only made their experience at work more tolerable, but it also highlighted their tenacity to provide for their families. This story creates an idealized immigrant who demonstrated bravery and hard work to provide for their family, inviting visitors to view individuals like Mrs. Wong with admiration and respect.

Mrs. Wong shares that after nearly 30 years of working in this industry, only retiring after 9/11 when many garment factories closed, she no longer had fingerprints. She stated, "People were like that... Everyone, once they got to work, all of the workers, everyone sewed garments like their lives depended on it" (*Garment Shop: Story Mode*, n.d.). As I mentioned above, to hear this oral history of Mrs. Wong, visitors must sit at a garment table and put their hand on a sewing machine. The combination of sitting at the recreated source of labor and hearing the oral history of Mrs. Wong in her native language, the museum both constructs an idealized immigrant that

would give up anything to support their family and invites visitors to envision Mrs. Wong's grueling labor of 30 years. This construction of an idealized immigrant in turn invites visitors to become one with the Wong family and foster feelings of respect.

In the same tour, visitors hear a similar story about Natalie Gumpertz who faced similar struggles to Mrs. Wong. Natalie Gumpertz immigrated to New York in 1858 from Prussia with her husband Julius. Natalie and Julius lived through the Panic of 1873, a major economic depression, which led to economic hardship for the family. In 1874 Julius left for work one morning and never returned, leaving Natalie alone with their four children (*The Stories of 97 Orchard Street*, n.d.). To cope with her husband's disappearance, Natalie started operating a dressmaking business right out of her apartment. During this time, she was able to juggle her business while caring for her children until in 1883 her husband was declared dead, and she received a \$600 dollar inheritance which prompted her to close her business and move to a tenement home in what is now known as the Upper East Side. After her death in 1894, she left her children a \$1,000 inheritance which highlights her example of upward mobility. While many immigrants did not have the same experience of upward mobility as Natalie Gumpertz, her story is used to construct an idealized immigrant that demonstrates tenacity, hard work, and sacrifice for family, traits that many visitors hold with high regard. This tour is used to highlight the powerful women who immigrated to this country to give their family's a better life, fostering feelings of respect and admiration for their resiliency.

Resilience

Resiliency is a common theme throughout all the tours of the museum, working to create an idealized immigrant for visitors to identify with. In the tour "A Union of Hope," the concept of resiliency is prominent within the Moore family who navigated life as Black New Yorkers living in the shadow of slavery. This tour follows the history of Joseph and Rachel Moore who

moved to the Lower Manhattan in 1857, tracing Joseph's history from his time in the free Black community of Belvidere, New Jersey (Tenement Museum, 2024). While New York city has a long history of Black residence, during this time they were still experiencing racism, prejudices, and fear of Southern slavery. Educators highlight the tensions Black New Yorkers faced trying to find work and lodging in a city that was largely populated by Jewish, German, and Irish immigrants. New Yorkers like Joseph and Rachel lived in a rear tenement in today's SoHo – most likely not being welcome in 97 Orchard. Rear tenement homes received little to no light and shared a courtyard with various families in the area. This tour focuses on the extensive history of Black New Yorkers while emphasizing the discrimination they faced, the stress brought on by the shadow of slavery, and the extra work it continuously takes to preserve and uplift their stories. This emphasis on discrimination and erasure highlights the resiliency of Black New Yorkers during this time, inviting visitors to reconceptualize what they envision the demographic of migrants in this area and foster feelings of respect for individuals who were required to demonstrate resiliency.

Another demonstration of resiliency found within many of the tours of the museum is resiliency in the face of isolation. In “100 Years Apart,” “After the Famine,” and “Finding Home,” educators highlight the isolation tenants felt due to language barriers. Mrs. Wong and Ramonita Rivera Saez experience increased isolation as they only spoke Mandarin and Spanish respectively upon their arrival. This early arrival level of localized language limitations led to feelings of isolation brought on by the inability to navigate the city. Both women's children learned English from the public school system which highlights the tensions of language between generations. However, Ramonita's son Jose and his wife Migdalia, understanding the struggle many Lower East Siders faced due to language barriers, got involved with Solidaridad

Humana, “a grass-roots, community-based, comprehensive bilingual education program based in an abandoned public elementary school on Norfolk Street... By 1980, Solidaridad had taught English to 4,500 Lower East Siders” (*103 Orchard*, n.d.).

In contrast to the language barrier brought on by the inability to speak English, Bridget Moore felt isolation due to the cultural makeup of 97 Orchard Street during the late 1800s. During this time, the Lower East Side was mostly made up of German speaking immigrants. Educators highlight how Bridget would gather in the courtyard to do laundry/collect water and coal surrounded by her neighbors who were chatting and laughing, all while she was isolated because she did not speak German. This story highlights how immigrants throughout American history had to overcome challenges brought on by language to find community and connections.

Despite the tensions brought on by difference, people demonstrated resiliency by overcoming these challenges to form connections with their neighbors. The museum highlights these connections emphasizing the connections neighbors made throughout the history of these buildings. According to *Ode to a Plastic Covered Couch*, “Kevin Wong speaks admiringly of Ramonita, who moved beyond her Spanish-language comfort zone to use English and made welcoming conversation in the halls with Chinese families. As well, the Velez brothers recall how neighbors brought them red envelopes and pastries on the Chinese New Year” (*Tenement Museum*, 2018). The museum utilizes the story of language to highlight immigrant resiliency in the face of isolation, pointing to the ways these family’s found connection across cultural divides. These stories create an idealized immigrant community for visitors to identify with, ultimately inviting feelings of respect.

The combination of stories of Women navigating the challenges brought on by traditional gender norms, moving forward after the disappearance of a husband, and other examples of

resiliency work to highlight the bravery and tenacity of immigrants throughout American history. This framing invites visitors to view immigrants with respect and reverence. Additionally, the consistent evocation of community paired with feelings of responsibility evoked by the identity of a neighbor, the museum invites visitors to bring immigrants into their community and ultimately accept responsibility for their care and well-being. The museum utilizes storytelling to create an idealized immigrant for visitors to identify with and this process of identification allows visitors to embody the role of neighbor and as a result assume responsibility for immigrants in their communities. This rhetoric of neighborliness works to dismantle pervasive xenophobia by labeling immigrants as home, of the same substance, and a “good” neighbor.

In Chapter One I outlined how the ideological features of a “good” neighbor, altruistic, hardworking, resilient, and community oriented, were strengthened by labeling immigrants as “bad” neighbors who are pollutants, leaches, lazy, immoral, and criminal. The museum utilizes themes of hard work, resiliency, and family values to reconstitute immigrants as “good” neighbors. However, these reoccurring themes within the museum, and the representation of families present uplift heteronormative family structures that exclude non-normative immigrants from the classification of “good” neighbor.

Throughout each storytelling theme I have listed above, the notion of heteronormative family is at the center. Within cultural practices, the Rogarshevsky family found ways to spend time together as a family. The family dynamic is at the center. Within the value of hard work, each story represented highlights an immigrant who made sacrifices and worked harder for their family. Natalie Gumpertz and Mrs. Wong both took up garment work to support their family. Across many of the stories represented both within the museum and about immigration broadly, the idea of immigrants leaving their countries to give their children better lives is foundational

across various identities and within these stories these family structure typically has nuclear family including a mother, father, and their various children as seen with the Wongs', Baldizzi's, Confino's, and Epstein's. Even the families who have single mothers like Natalie Gumpertz and Ramonita Saez or couples without children like the Moore's were still discussed from heteronormative frameworks.

While the museum highlights stories of actual families residing in 97 and 103 Orchard in an era where queerness would have likely not been accepted, the exclusion of these stories' centers heteronormativity in the framework of "good" neighbor. This classification is not isolated to the museum, the notion of "good" neighbor has a long history of centering heteronormativity (Dickinson, 2015). For immigrants to be accepted when they came to the United States, they were forced to appeal to this notion of "good" neighbor by exemplifying hard work, resiliency, and heteronormative family values within their daily lives. Therefore, the families represented in this museum represent these values. As a result, the cycle of who gets to be include as a "good" immigrant or "good" neighbor continues to exclude queer immigrants from that classification.

Conclusion

The Tenement Museum combines the material structures of the home and Lower East Side neighborhood, and stories of family togetherness, hard work, and resilience to dismantle xenophobia through a rhetoric of neighborliness. The museum invites visitors to step into the role of neighbor of working-class families who were the backbone on American history by giving them a voyeuristic look into immigrant homes, walking the same path in the neighborhood that each generation of immigrant walked, and sharing stories of the inspiring character of these immigrant families who demonstrated great resilience to support their families.

The recreation of immigrant homes allows visitors to contend with the three tensions I outlined in my literature section: tensions between the material and symbolic features of the home, tensions between private and public life, and tensions between the personal and political. The combination of the material environment and the symbolic features of curated home making invited visitors to both physically embody moving through these recreated spaces while calling on their personal experience of their own acts of home making. This tension between the actual material environment of the tenement building and the symbolic personal experience allow visitors to envision immigrants as home and in-place by imagining their lives in the building and making connections through shared experience. They are invited to engage with the everyday lived experience of moving through the neighborhood that has the past lives of immigrants imbedded in the streets and walkways. This act of engagement is strengthened through the tension of private and public life. For poor working-class tenement dwellers of the Lower East Side, the concept of the home is created and sustained by the negotiation of the tension between private and public life. As I highlighted in the storytelling subsection of my analysis, the line between private and public life was blurred for tenement dwellers who often lived where they worked as seen with Natalie Gumpertz and Josephine Baldizzi. This act of living while you work complicated the boundaries of the home by blurring the boundaries of private and public life. The museum utilizes these tensions to invite visitors to call on their individual memories of the home, engaging with the blurred boundaries of privacy.

Lastly, as stated in my literature section, the home is neither entirely personal or apolitical. The discourse of immigrants is one of non-belonging, therefore, the concept of the home is inherently political because there are symbolic features that make up what counts as home and who gets to be *at* home. Through the recreation of homemaking, sitting on

immigrants' beds, listening to the textures of Bella Epstein's voice as she discusses what being an American means to her, the Tenement Museum leans into the tension of the personal and political nature of the home. The museum invites visitors to tap into their personal memory of being at home while simultaneously breaking down the political nature of immigrants not being home.

However, while the museum works to dismantle the pervasive xenophobia and racism, it also reaffirms heteronormative family structures and normative expectations of U.S. values. The museum highlights stories of heteronormative families with typically two cis-gendered parents and a handful of children, and the families that were a single parent household were seen as resilient in the face of tragedy. This emphasis on heteronormativity in turn uplifts the American dream as something for traditional family structures, erasing the stories of queer or nonconforming immigrants. Additionally, by centering hard work and resiliency within their overall themes, the museum has the potential of uplifting traditional power structures and could reinforce dominant ideologies of who can and cannot be accepted as a "good" neighbor, particularly in relation to ability. Focusing on immigrants as a hard-working labor source could reduce these individuals as economic units and erase their larger social contributions. However, the museum's inclusion of themes depicting cultural pastimes helps broaden the scope of the immigrant experience.

Despite these drawbacks, this museum highlights the ability to incorporate a tour-based structure with reimagined spaces to foster togetherness and mutual respect. While traditional museums typically invite visitors to move through the space independently, the added feature of a guided tour makes visitors active participants in the space and become part of the museum's story as they add pieces of their own migration story. They move through the space as a group,

continually bumping into one another and commenting on each other's discussion, working to constitute community through physical togetherness. This community, paired with the embodiment of neighborliness invites visitors to bring immigrants into their networks when they leave the museum. Rather than seeing these communities as faceless threats, visitors have engaged in diverse stories of families who share similarities with their own and add to the unique fabric of our past.

Lastly, this Chapter highlights the importance of museums dedicated to preserving the forgotten history of poor families from marginalized backgrounds. Immigrants' makeup of over 14% of the United States population and one-fifth of the world's international migrants (Pew Research Center, 2024). Specifically, when discussing home preservation, estates like Monticello or Mount Vernon are the establishments that are at the forefront of the conversation. However, the working class are by far more representative of the average American and it is important to tell their stories. This country was built, maintained, and brought to life by immigrants who came to this country for a better life and the Tenement Museum's mission is to bring light to their forgotten stories that contributed to the vibrant culture of cities like New York.

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CHAPTER THREE:
WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR: CREATING COMMUNITY WHILE CELEBRATING
DIFFERENCE

On March 6, 1989, Gina Manuel, wrote to curator Ruth J. Abrams on behalf of her family. She asked Abrams to not forget about her family who were African Americans with a long history of living in New York. Here is a copy of this letter:

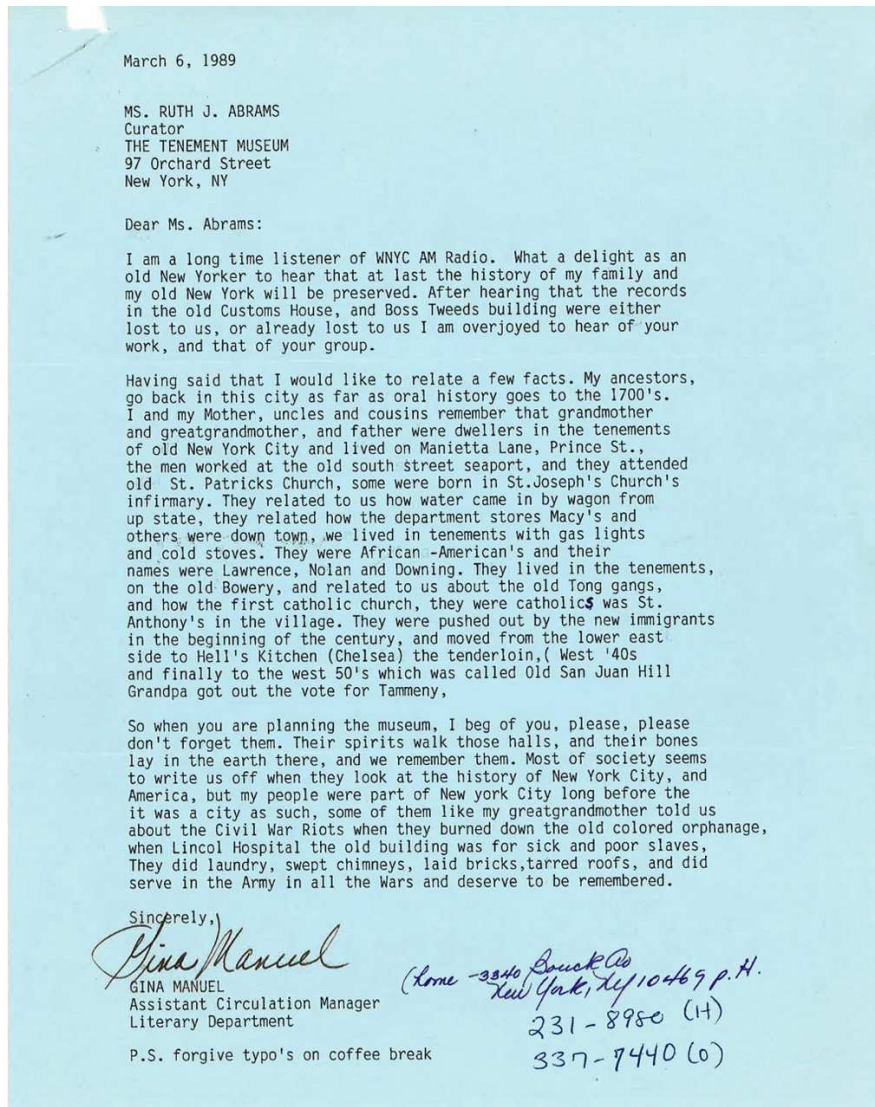


Figure 11 Gina Manuel's Letter to the Tenement Museum. Photograph by Tenement Museum (n.d.).

Despite taking almost twenty years to heed Manuel's request, in 2018 the Tenement Museum opened their new apartment tour, "A Union of Hope: 1869," dedicated to preserving the history of Black New Yorkers who lived in the tenements in the Lower East Side. While I was on this tour, the educator discussed the creation of this exhibit. Between the increasing focus on the importance of racial justice and representation in the larger museum industry, the comments from visitors responding to the lack of focus on black stories on the tours, and the letter from Manuel, the museum recognized a gap in their tours and started the process of filling it. The educator stated that for years visitors would comment about their missing history or the lack of representation in the space. Responding to visitor concerns is just one of the many ways museums can engage with the public, centering the voices of their source communities, this one being dwellers in the Lower East Side.

While there are many different forms of engagement (invitation, contribution, consultation, and collaboration) this engagement example highlights the effects of consultation-based engagement practices (Igoe & Roosa, 2002; McMullen, 2008; Schreiber, Goeke, Bequette, 2023). The new tour allowed historically underrepresented communities members to become part of the story of the museum working to dismantle barriers to entry. Black patrons and other historically excluded populations still are under-represented in museum attendance, often due to lack of representation in their stories and experiences, and consultation-based engagement practice are one of the ways museums can reduce these barriers (Chang, 2006). However, it also highlights how long it took to make the changes necessary and why there needs to be widespread engagement within their outreach structure (Chang, 2006; Olivares and Piatak, 2022).

Other than connecting and responding the public, the Tenement Museum has demonstrated a strong commitment to engagement both with their tour design and online

engagement practices. The dialogic nature of the tour invites visitors to become part of the museum and in turn the larger narrative of America's immigration and migration story. Rather than a traditional system that privileges passive viewing that gives visitors space to engage with history outside of themselves, the Tenement Museum uses their tours to inspire connections both with those represented and the immigrant and migrant community at large, inviting visitors to become neighbors with immigrants and migrants. Through this embodied neighborliness, the museum works to dismantle xenophobia and promote long term community connections.

In addition to the in-person experience, the museum has a wide reach with their extensive online programming like their digital exhibits, online school group visits, free lesson planning, professional learning workshops, their engagement series that connects immigrant language learners to the history of New York's newcomers, and the *Your Story, Our Story* project. These examples of online programming highlight an attempt to connect with a wider audience. Rather than centering their reach to just New York City, they expand their reach to include the rest of the United States.

Your Story, Our Story highlights the utility of online programming at museums for widespread community engagement that pushes past barriers to participation by breaking down the boundaries of museums through online digital spaces and programming (Buffington, 2008; Hume & Mills, 2011; Russo et al., 2006, 2008). This series invites visitor to find a material object that has strong ties to their immigration or migration history, take a picture of it, and upload that photo along with a written story about the object to the museum's website. This site contains thousands of images and stories of immigrants and migrants all across the United States, breaking down barriers to participation like accessibility. This database allows people to tell their personal story of immigration or migration, helping them negotiate their own identity and their

identity in relation to the broader narrative of immigration and migration. However, I argue that this engagement series is focused more on widespread inclusion and could be expanded to center community engagement initiatives. While it provides a space for immigrants and migrants across the United States to engage in perspective-giving and reduces barriers to participation with its online format, its structure offers little room for the co-creation of narrative through dialogue or perspective-taking. To expand the series' engagement efforts, I took the framework of *Your Story, Our Story* and collaborated with the Avenir Museum of Design and Merchandising, a historical apparel and textiles museum in Fort Collins, Colorado, to create an event with a facilitated dialogue to answer the following question: how can facilitated dialogue within museum settings promote community building?

This Chapter proceeds in three parts. First, I review literature on dialogue and storytelling, pointing to the ways they inform my analysis. Second, I outline my methodological approach and unpack participants' experiences with the negotiation of the self, other, and community building. Third, I elucidate the broader implications of my study's findings.

Engaged Neighborliness

Much like the museum's interpolation of visitors into neighbors, the Tenement Museum's engagement practices invite a similar effect. Through their ongoing relationship with community members, their use of dialogue within their tours, and their engagement series *Your Story, Our Story*, the Tenement Museum invites visitors to become part of the framework of the museum. Traditional museum engagement often invites perspective-taking without requiring perspective-giving, which hinders participants' ability to truly learn from one another and establish community networks. According to museum scholars, these spaces are not simply "object oriented environment[s]" but also have "people oriented social contexts" where people can

“come together around the content of the site they visit and share opportunities of gaining ‘mutual benefits’ from each other’s presence (Simon, 2010; Taheri & Jafari, 2012; Jafari, Taheri, Lehn, 2013, p. 1738). I argue that the added feature of shared learning gives participants the opportunity to truly embody the role of neighbor by engaging in communal identity creation through storytelling that fosters mutual respect and responsibility. Through co-creation of stories and community, visitors get to be part of the process of public memory rather than it happening outside of them.

Dialogue

Responding to the shift towards memory activism, museums have adopted dialogue as a method of engagement to foster community connections through facilitated social interaction (Sturken, 2022). This newfound focus on sociality and fostering mutual connections pushes museums past their primary focus of curation and centers community building within their engagement frameworks (Hooper- Greenhill, 1994a, 1999; Jafari, Taheri, Lehn, 2013). These moments of mutual connection can occur in two ways: internally and externally. According to Robert E. Goodin (2000) in his work on deliberation from within, the process of perspective-taking is an inherently internal process that opens the opportunity for moments of transformation. His work on deliberation from within responded to the growing challenge of arranging face-to-face deliberations across entire communities (Goodin, 2000). In contrast, he proposed taking the deliberative process and shifting it from “the ‘external-collective’ to the ‘internal-reflective’ mode, moving much of the work of democratic deliberation back inside the head of each individual” (p. 83). This shift works to make participants “imaginatively present” and consciously empathetic (Goodin, 2000). Museum dialogues are designed to function in similar

ways, especially traditional museums that are designed to act as representatives or the mouthpiece of various groups.

Art, literature, and storytelling have a long history of “expanding peoples’ sensibilities to “make sense of the others mind,” as seen with autobiographical accounts of slave narratives and other forms of transformative storytelling (Goodin, 2000, p. 93; Nussbaum, 1997). Through storytelling and anecdotes, dialogue from within allows participants to envision themselves more easily in the place of others, thus creating opportunities for dialogic moments. However, according to Goodin (2000), “internal dialogues can never wholly substitute for public ones” (p. 98). We make sense of the world relationally so for dialogue to be entirely internal stunts participants ability to co-create meaning together – a key feature of the dialogic process (Black, 2008). Despite the utility of internal reflection and “however well-informed our imaginings, we will always need to cross check the views we attribute to others against those views they actually profess themselves holding” (Goodin, 2000, p. 98). Relying solely on imagination can lead to blind spots within the stories represented (Goodin, 2000). While museums can utilize features of internal dialogue seen with traditional curation styles or engagement series and programming like *Your Story, Our Story*, that functions entirely as asynchronous dialogue, the added feature of facilitated conversations changes the nature of the museum’s outreach and their use of storytelling.

The Tenement Museum is particularly unique because their design structure is grounded in dialogic engagement. While most museums allow visitors to move through their space independently, within the Tenement Museum visitors experience the museum through facilitated guided tours in recreated tenement apartments and the Lower East Side neighborhood. Educators facilitate conversations surrounding the families that lived in these spaces, connecting visitor

experience to the stories being preserved. Similar to this new era of museums, dialogue seeks to build mutual understanding through open communication, human connection, and the co-creation of meaning (Abram, 2007; Black, 2008; Black & Weiderhold, 2014; Bächtiger & Beauvais, 2020). Implementing dialogue at museums can give visitors the opportunity to foster community connections and establish networks of support. Through the evocation of mutual understanding and human connection, participants are in community with one another and therefore enacting support which shows the effects of dialogue. Museums, utilizing objects and vehicles for intervention, enable visitors to explore issues pertaining to fear, loss, and death as seen with research pertaining to health and wellbeing within cancer patients and other vulnerable populations (Lanceley et. al, 2011). For the Tenement Museum this process of dialogue invites visitors to embody the role of neighbor which is grounded in respect and responsibility. In turn, this allows participants to partake in dialogic moments through the act of perspective giving (sharing stories and experiences) and perspective taking (stepping in the shoes of someone else) (Bruneau & Saxe, 2012). Within this dissertation I analyze four features of dialogue as they appear in the Tenement Museum: storytelling, perspective giving and taking, dialogic moments and mutuality, and the intersection of materiality and dialogue.

Storytelling

Storytelling gives people a framework to help them understand the world, make decisions, and create community. Stories act as scripts to help respond to everyday decisions that often happen unconsciously (Ryfe, 2006; Black, 2008). For example, Walter Fisher (1999) suggests that stories “give order to human experience and ... induce others to dwell in them to establish ways of living in common, in communities ...” (p. 271). It is through the act of storytelling that community members find common ground, establish their values, and create a script for living. According to Ryfe (2006), “in storytelling, participants not only convey their

individual points of view, they also stake claims to, and invite others to inhabit, moral communities” (p. 80). Storytelling can be both personal and public. According to Ochs and Capps (1996) “personal narrative simultaneously is born out of experience and gives shape to experience. In this sense, narrative and self are inseparable... We come to know ourselves as we use narrative to apprehend experiences and navigate relationships with others” (pp. 20-21). This tension of personal and collective allows participants to negotiate the tension of the self and other.

Storytelling is as an essential feature of dialogue because of its ability to facilitate identity negotiation and invite empathetic perspective-taking (Arnett, 1992; Black, 2008; Gergen et al., 2006; Black, 2008). Dialogue allows participants to work through differences within group dynamics with “its emphasis on co-construction and relational selfhood, which allows group members to negotiate their individual identities and relationships to others” (Gergen et al., 2006; Hammond, Anderson, & Cissna, 2003; Taylor, 2004; Black, 2008, p. 97). Storytelling helps the dialogic process along by providing frameworks for human connection to arise. If dialogue is centered around confronting the complexities of others through an emphasis on “multivocality, open-endedness, human connection, and the co-creation of meaning” then storytelling works to strengthen this process through the embodiment of other’s lived experience (Black, 2008, p. 94).

The Tenement Museum allows participants to share their immigrant and migrant stories to create meaning pertaining to their personal narrative, and in turn these stories become part of a larger collective. While traditional museum’s utilize storytelling within their design, it is rare to include patrons so explicitly in this process. Traditionally, the museum holds control over the stories represented and acts as a source for visitors to engage with but not actively share control. However, many of these institutions went from a focus on collections and research to focus on

service and socially orientated education (Chang, 2006; Hume & Mills, 2011; Munro, 2013; Kim, You, Park, 2016). Community engagement became part of that change with contribution-based engagement enacted through community-specific events or inclusion in online archives (Ander et al., 2011; Schreiber, Goeke, Bequette, 2023). This allowed community members voices to be heard and to participate in knowledge construction on a small scale but did not fully share the storytelling power. However, the Tenement Museum relies heavily on storytelling and testimonials as they relate to the co-constitutive dialogic practices.

Educators on tenement tours consistently ask visitors to make connections to the stories of the families that lived in the tenement homes, co-creating the story of American immigration. Moreover, the series *Your Story, Our Story* utilizes the process of testimonials/storytelling to allow participant to engage in perspective-giving which potentially can foster trust through the simple act of being heard (Bruneau and Saxe, 2012). Many scholars (e.g., Bruner, 1990; Gergen & Gergen, 1983; Linde, 1993) argue that narrative and storytelling are essential to identity construction. Pushing past individual identity construction, other scholars (e.g., Gergen et al., 2002; Ochs & Capps, 1996; Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997; Stewart & Zediker, 2000; Black, 2008) have found that this process works in connection and negotiated with others. However, as shown with the Tenement Museum's online series *Your Story, Our Story*, this act of narrative and storytelling can happen asynchronously. Traditionally museum visitors interact with *other's* stories within the space, but the use of perspective-giving through storytelling and testimonials creates the opportunity for visitors to co-create meaning and "manifest their identities" in relation to others and foster a sense of togetherness by imagining others' perspectives (Black, 2008). Traditionally museums do not create spaces for a cyclical dialogue that creates moments for visitors to respond to one another which limits the storytelling potential.

Perspective Taking and Giving

Dialogue and storytelling give participants the chance to see the world from other's perspectives, inciting empathy and identification (Black, 2008). For Fisher (1984) this process of educated empathy is called resonance, where pieces of the story allow listeners to empathize with the storytelling through their use of characters and plot. For Green (2004, 2006; Green & Brock, 2000) this process is called transportation, where listeners are so deeply engaged in a story that they become transported into the world and in turn empathize and identify with the storyteller. This act of perspective-taking creates moments of togetherness that work to foster stronger community connections through empathy and goodwill (Bruneau and Saxe, 2012). According to Bruneau and Saxe, such "perspective-taking activities generally ask participants to 'step in the shoes' of a representative member of a different group in order to induce empathy for that outgroup as a whole" (p. 855). Despite their promotion of distance, museums are particularly ripe for the process of perspective-taking and empathetic viewing because of their focus on storytelling. However, while perspective-taking is important to the process of dialogue, perspective-giving is also essential.

Research on testimonials and storytelling look at the utility of sharing personal experiences however, the act of perspective-giving, as it relates to self-expression, has been undertheorized. Perspective-giving gives participants the opportunity to feel seen and heard in group discussions, especially for group members from non-dominate groups (Bruneau and Saxe, 2012). It is a unique process that shares similarities with storytelling and testimonials but functions more in community with other group members and gives participants the space to craft and share their stories in relation to other participants, often sparking feelings of comfort, belonging, and acceptance through the act of "being heard" (Bruneau and Saxe, 2012). While the act of sharing your perspective or individual story creates the space for being heard, without a

group or facilitated conversation, the catharsis brought on by feedback from the dialogic moment is missing. In other words, perspective-giving requires active listening from other participants (Bruneau and Saxe, 2012).

The process of dialogue “is not about ‘me’ or ‘you’; it is about a co-constituted communicative benchmark or standard that calls both parties to accountability for something that defines interpersonal communication—the relationship” (Arnett et al., 2009, 120). This highlights the place perspective-giving has in the dialogic process. For people to properly feel seen and heard they must engage in ethical dialogue. According to Elizabeth Parks (2019), “effective dialogic listening requires a person to listen to self as well as the other. It requires critical thinking and protection of oneself while being radically inclusive of multiple perspectives that others embrace” (p. 4). This process of feeling seen in the larger conversation fosters the feeling of agency in the process of co-creation (Black, 2008). This feeling of agency in turn increases feelings of responsibility for the group and in turn the community at large.

Your Story, Our Story invites participants to share their personal immigrant story and submit it to an online repository where others can browse America’s larger immigrant narrative. While this can promote dialogue from within through asynchronous design as seen with its prioritization of “multivocality, open-endedness... and the co-creation of meaning” (Black, 2008, p. 94). The one-sided storytelling and reflection prevent iterative human connection. Without the back and forth promoted in dialogue, participants are unable to foster feelings of togetherness that physically being there can provide. I argue the act of perspective-giving, as discussed by Bruneau and Saxe (2012), is unique to the dialogic process that creates a conversational back and forth – sharing your perspective in relation to a group.

Dialogic Moments

Dialogic moments “are fleeting, typically unplanned, instances where partners experience being both present and open to the other’s experience,” building off Martin Buber’s perception of the “authentic self” that privileges openness and trust (Black, 2008, p. 98; Buber, 1998).

Dialogic moments happen when participants turn toward each other and embrace each other’s differences and uniqueness (Black, 2008; Cissna & Anderson, 1998; Hammond et al., 2003), functioning similarly to the concept of neighborliness outlined in Chapter One. These moments are what create the iterative cycle of togetherness that pushes participants into the role of neighbor, allowing them to experience and be there for one another as they participate in the co-creation of meaning. This emphasis on uniqueness, discussed primarily by Hammond et. al. (2003), highlights the importance of celebrating difference in dialogic spaces. Part of what it means to be a neighbor is to celebrate the uniqueness of our communities and these dialogic moments provide space to engage in this difference. Participants unique stories allow them to be part of a whole, rather than having them blend into one being. It is the heterogenous stories, the difference or uniqueness, that allow participants to embody neighborliness as it relates to our nation’s immigration history. The Tenement Museum’s engagement practices offer the opportunity for participants to become part of the museum, like individual immigrant’s became part of the larger fabric of public memory. The added feature of facilitated dialogue more deeply invites the opportunity to co-create meaning and experience one another.

According to Black & Weiderhold (2014), “public dialogues are often open-ended in the sense that they are focused on helping groups of people explore ideas deeply and build shared understanding of a common concern” (p. 287). This form of engagement allows participants to work through difference through mutual understanding, acting as a form of resistance towards harmful power structures (Wolfe, 2018). As I discussed in Chapter One, xenophobia is ingrained

in the bones of the United States, as seen with our current immigration discourse (Lakeoff & Ferguson, 2006; Ono & Sloop 2002; Cisneros, 2008). The Tenement Museum is working to dismantle these harmful power structures. Dialogue can be a useful tool to allow visitors to work through what sustains these harmful ideologies, the fear of difference. While dialogic practices cannot fully change peoples' ideologies, world views, or perceptions of self, if done correctly dialogue can create "opportunities for reciprocal recognition between participants, which directly challenges authoritarianism's insular, atomistic conceptions of collective identity fueling hostile inter-group relations" (Wolfe, 2018, p. 8). Therefore, this can create moments of healing for historically excluded groups by validating their experiences and affirming identities (Ramasubramanian & Wolfe, 2020). I am looking at the ways my event, which expanded on *Your Story, Our Story*, works to dismantle xenophobia through the creation of dialogic moments, inviting visitors to experience moments of understanding and togetherness through the embodiment of neighborliness. This rhetoric of neighborliness is sustained by the act of perspective giving and taking that is first sparked by dialogue from within but enriched by the facilitated in person conversation that allows visitors to engage in each other's material presence.

Being There

As I argued from a rhetorical perspective, attending to matter is important. However, the importance of matter does not stop with rhetoric. As a space and place scholar I would be remiss not to discuss the space in which dialogue functions. How do the textures of the table or the echoing sounds of the room influence us? What more, how do the textures of voices and the "loud" hand gestures bind us together? Dialogue is not just discursive but acts on our bodies. Carole Blair (2001) discussed the importance of "being there" when studying public spaces, and I argue that "being there" is equally important when doing dialogue. While the online engagement series was effective in archiving the United States' diverse array of immigrant and

migrant stories, it is less successful in the act of building community. In person dialogue gives participants the opportunity to physically turn towards one another and engage with the material features of the dialogue. Like Blair (2001) argues in her discussion of reproductions of famous paintings, computer mediated dialogue only shows a flattened, two-dimensional rendering of the dialogic experience that fails to make matter matter. According to Parks (2018) in her work on listening, “embodied and sensory experiences... affect our cognitive frameworks and the ways we consider who listeners are and what listening does” (p. 146). Listening is as much about the environment, space, and spatial relations as it is the act of taking in the information (Peake, 2012).

Listening is relational/polymodal act that is expressed in and through our bodies and is a key feature of dialogue that is essential in the process of fostering dialogic moments (Parks, 2018; Scaperlanda and Scaperlanda, 2014; Schur, 2013; Lacey, 2013; Gehrke, 2009; Lipari, 2014). However, dialogue scholars have spent less time theorizing the importance of researching the embodied nature of this communicative act. I argue that the act of sitting next to one another potentially bumping shoulders, hearing the textures of other participants voices and various accents, and looking in each other’s eyes is essential to the dialogic process. While not all museums are designed to be welcoming or foster connections, spaces like the Avenir Museum or the Tenement Museum *are*. These spaces highlight the importance of space and place within the embodiment of dialogue and in this case neighborliness. People are much more likely to identify with one another and foster feelings of mutual respect if they are asked to be in physical community with one another (Parks, 2018).

Ultimately when I set out to do this project, I wanted to look at the ways facilitated dialogue could promote neighborliness and help historically excluded groups find networks of

support. Museums are designed to center storytelling and reflection within their design, so the added features of dialogue which creates space for iterative conversations that allow people to co-create meaning and foster mutual respect can enrich the overall utility of these spaces. How can museums utilize dialogue within their engagement frameworks to foster neighborliness? As a result, I am interested in seeing if a program like "Your Story, Our Story" can be adapted to create a safe space for in-person discussions about immigration in Fort Collins.

Methodological Overview

To evaluate how an in-person facilitated dialogue impacts museum patrons, I designed a two-hour event in collaboration with the Avenir Museum of Design and Merchandising in Fort Collins, Colorado, titled, "Keepsake Conversations." The Avenir "tells stories of dress and textiles that inspire respectful curiosity and connection across peoples, places, and culture" (About us, n.d.). They work to preserve everyday life through the clothes and textiles we wear and keep with us, aligning closely with the theme of my dissertation and the Tenement Museum's commitment to everyday people. The museum is affiliated with Colorado State University so many of its patrons are student who use the space within their classes or other educational pursuits. However, despite it being a university affiliated museum, their programs and events like their "Make and Mend" or "Show-and-Tell" events attracts patrons of all ages across Fort Collins.

Participants

Participants who attended the event were a mixture of students from Colorado State University, some of whom were offered extra credit to participate, and museum patrons who frequently attended events hosted by the Avenir. Colorado State University's general demographics are 74.2% White, 14.7% Hispanic/Latino, two or more races 4.7%, 2.4%

Black/African American, 3.3% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.5% American Indian/Alaska Native (Colorado State University, 2022). Fort Collins, Colorado demographics are 81.7% White, 12.3% Hispanic/Latino, 10.5% two or more races, 1.4% Black/African American, 3.3% Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.8% American Indian/Alaska Native, and 0.1% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). The recruitment flyer stated that “this event will give [participants] the opportunity to share [their] family’s story, connect with others, and find a sense of community.” Anyone who was above the age of 18 and had a migration or immigration history was eligible to participate. A total of 18 individuals participated in this study. A total of two men (11%), 14 women (78%), and two non-binary or unspecified individuals (11%) agreed to participate in this study. Participants ages ranged from 18 to 74 (66% within the range of 18-24). Seven identified as Caucasian/White (39%), four identified as Hispanic or Latino (22%), three identified as Asian (17%), one middle eastern (6%), and one identified as Black or African (6%).

Procedures

I distributed a self-administered worksheet to participants upon arrival at the event (Appendix A). This worksheet consisted of two parts. The first featured a blank space for participants to write a brief story about the object (or photo of their object) they brought as it relates to their immigrant history. The second part included a series of pre-defined reflection questions designed to prompt participant reflection on the facilitated discussion. Participants were instructed to complete the open-ended narrative section at the beginning of the event and the reflection questions towards the end of the event. These reflection questions asked about their overall experience sharing their story and listening to other’s stories. Participants engaged in a two-hour dialogue run by facilitators trained by the Center for Public Deliberation who guided a

conversation pertaining to the various stories and experiences shared during each section of the event (the agenda can be found in Appendix B). The worksheets and dialogue were part of the programming for the event itself which took place outside of my research. At the beginning of the event, I asked each person if they would like to participate in my research study, obtained consent, and collected their worksheets at the end of the event. In addition to the worksheets, there were note-takers at each table who took notes on general themes of each conversation, and I took observation notes.

Data Collection/Data Analysis

I collected data predominantly through participants' stories that were gathered during the event through reflection prompts built into the dialogic process in the form of a worksheet. After gathering the data, I used thematic analysis from a phonetic iterative approach to code the information for themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Tracy, 2020). During this process I went back and forth between the worksheets and literature letting both inform my initial assessments. During the coding process, I went through the six phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). I began by familiarizing myself with the data looking at both the participants' stories and their answers to the reflection prompts completing a round of open coding (Braun & Clarke, 2019). After initially reviewing the worksheets, I realized that my findings mirrored Bruneau and Saxe's (2012) work on perspective giving and taking which informed my next steps in the coding process. I then collapsed the open codes into three processual themes as they related to dialogic literature: negotiating the self, negotiating the other, and constituting community, following Owen's (1984) criterion of recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness to ensure validity of the results. During this process I also used Charmaz's (2014) constant comparative method to create codes to best suit the data. For example, the initial code "excitement from others" turned

into “celebrating difference” which was more reflective of participants experiences, especially as it relates to literature on dialogue. After collapsing the open codes and finding the three themes, I went through an additional round of coding.

Facilitated Intervention

Negotiating the Self

The first portion of the event was designed to mirror the structure of the Tenement Museum’s *Your Story, Our Story* series, which gave participants the space to craft their individual story surrounding their immigrant and migrant identity – perspective-giving. This section of the event was designed to give participants the opportunity to give their perspective/story of their immigration/migration history. Participants expressed how they had positive feelings towards sharing their story. In addition to the positive experience of being seen and heard, during this section of the event participants used their story to situate themselves in the larger narrative. The nature of this section of the event allowed participants to feel part of the conversation and in turn construct their own identity through storytelling and situate it within the context of the larger group narrative.

Power of Being Heard

Participants consistently expressed how good they felt having the opportunity to share their story, an experience that typically is not prioritized in museum setting due to their exclusionary design practices that I have discussed in earlier sections and the nature of their overall structure (Chang, 2006; Schreiber, Goeke, Bequette, 2023). As I referenced in previous sections, perspective-giving gives participants the opportunity to feel seen and heard in group discussions, which ultimately fosters stronger connections to the larger narrative because they are now part of the larger conversation (Bruneau and Saxe, 2012). Frequently within museum settings groups members have a history of being left out of dialogic moments so providing space

for them to be able to exercise their voice increases feelings of ownership of the larger conversation and in turn fosters responsibility for the immigrant and migrant community at large. Describing their experience one participant stated, “I felt proud, I felt seen and heard. I think it was also a privileged, it felt good because it is not as common for us to share our story to give people a chance to know us.” This emphasis on words like “proud,” “privilege,” and “felt good” highlight the value of providing space for self-expression. Bruneau and Saxe (2012) focus on the act of being “heard” within dialogic moments. While self-expression is frequently studied across dialogic programs, feeling “heard” is often understudied. Being “seen and heard,” like the participant stated, relies on an open environment that prioritizes empathetic listening. Other group members created an environment where they engaged in active listening that *made* participants feel “seen and heard.”

Another participant shared a similar experience expressing “I felt a sense of joy and self-empowerment. I love to tell people about my story just as much as I love to hear about others story. I am far from home and talking about my story brought a sense of home and comfort to me.” The “sense of home and comfort” highlight the utility of the power of being heard within this dialogic process. By creating a space where a participant feels that others are respecting and listening to them (outlined by the feeling of comfort), they are invited to view the dialogue from a more open framework because they found a sense of “home.” In turn, this portion of the event allowed participant to feel like they are part of the conversation.

Dialogue focuses on the act of co-creation and mutual understanding, and this portion of the event opens the door and sets the tone for the following conversation – participants are being asked to contribute, which increases agency and responsibility brought on by feelings of “comfort.” According to one participant, “I like to share in a comfortable space, like this event. I

don't like it if I feel like I won't be respected or welcomed. When I share my story, I feel proud of my culture and my identity. I believe my story contributes to a more inclusive diverse conversation, which contributes to a better world." This act of contribution gives participants agency over their community story, allowing them to exist within the narrative not outside of it. Through the process of feeling "seen and heard" they are invited to feel part of the conversation and therefor have increased agency over the community story through their participation which can increase their feeling of responsibility towards the others involved. This begins the embodiment of the persona of neighbor by situating the participants within the community they are actually going to be asked to identify with, much like a neighbor is situated in the neighborhood. As I discussed in Chapter One, the neighbor functions within the liminal space of private and public life. Neighbors have individual stories and experiences but an ethical responsibility towards one another. This first portion of the event that allows participants to feel heard primes participants to be situated within the larger narrative or "neighborhood" by allowing them to craft their individual stories that were originally private and now placed in the public in relation to other community members.

Crafting identity and situating it in the larger narrative

In addition to feeling seen and heard within the broader conversation, storytelling helps participants craft their unique and individual identity while relating it to others within the larger narrative. Like I discussed in the previous sections, narrative is an essential feature of creating and maintaining identity (Black, 2008). This process is negotiated through communication and in the relation to others. Describing this negotiation of the self and other, one participant states:

I hope people can learn the nuanced cultural texture from my culture, learn to appreciate and respect different cultures. I also hope people feel the way I feel. Share the values I cherish, find common humanity, feel connection. I hope people feel encouraging and hopeful from my story, even if we are in a hard time. People in my life give me hope. I want others to feel hope from my story.

The first portion of the event allowed participants to use storytelling to craft their identity and establish their values (Ryfe, 2006; Black, 2008). After crafting a “nuanced” textual narrative they place this in context with the others in the room “inviting other to inhabit” their lived experience (Ryfe, 2006, p. 80). In this participant’s response the repeated phrases of “I also hope people feel the way I feel” and “share the values I cherish” signify the relationship this process created with the others in the room, allowing participants to negotiate their identity in relation to the other participants. This relational element not only highlights how they hope their story can contribute to the larger narrative of cultural identities in Fort Collins, but it also signifies the important features of their identity that they hope others will emulate – respect for others, connection, and perseverance. Another participant expressed similar ideal qualities stating, “perseverance, sacrifice, growth. I hope people learn how no matter our age we have made sacrifices and from that stems perseverance and growth.” The themes of perseverance, sacrifice, growth, and hard work were reoccurring throughout many of the participants stories as seen with phrases like “my parents had to work ten times harder,” “my grandmother was a single mother working three jobs,” “we persevered and survived,” and “it [their object] shows their values in hard work and building yourself up from less to more.” Much like the storytelling fostered by educators I discussed in Chapter Two, the process of individual identity construction works to create an idealized immigrant and migrant who demonstrated virtuous qualities like hard work and perseverance. Further, placing this idealized identity in relation with the larger group (e.g., stating phrases like “I hope people can learn”) works to canonize these features in the co-created story of immigrants and migrants created by the negotiation of self and other that I will discuss more in subsequent sections. The relationship between dialogue and storytelling is grounded in the co-construction and relational elements of trying stories together and co-creating larger

narratives in conjunction with our individual ones (Gergen et al., 2002; Hammond, Anderson, & Cissna, 2003; Taylor, 2004; Black, 2008). The values that are established within our individual stories are canonized through the dialogic piece of the event, as seen with the common themes of perseverance, sacrifice, growth, and hard work. Participants hope others take the features of their stories and connect them within their own lives.

Negotiating the Other

This second portion of the facilitated conversation asked participants to engage in perspective-taking which asked them to engage with each other's stories and communicate across difference. Participants were asked questions like: How did the other stories relate to your own story? What story made you think differently about something? What was the most valuable lesson you learned from listening to others' stories? During this portion of the event, participants consistently celebrated the uniqueness of other group members stories while finding commonalities that fostered mutual respect. These feelings of mutual respect are examples of dialogic moments and mutuality. As previously stated, dialogic moments are instants where participants are present and open to other's experiences and perspectives and engage in empathy through the celebration of difference (Black, 2008; Cissna & Anderson, 1998; Hammond et al., 2003; Wolfe, 2018). This process works to dismantle xenophobia by reducing the fear of difference.

One participant described this experience of mutuality stating, "everyone had a unique story. Although all of our stories connect back to family, they all had difference perceptions, understandings, and memories attached to them. Hearing other people be vulnerable reminded me that we were all human. Other people are not just emotionless." By engaging in active listening participants were asked to be aware of the uniqueness of the other group members at their table.

Participants engaged in perspective-taking which fostered feelings of mutual respect through the reference back to the common threads of family and memories while celebrating each participants uniqueness. Another participant shared similar feelings of mutual respect stating, “I just think it is fascinating that we all have different stories. And seeing the passion that everyone holds to their heritage and history is so refreshing and inspirational. These discussions further reassured the point that America is a big melting pot...” These participants experiences demonstrate the power of dialogue and storytelling’s ability to create moments of mutual understanding to imagine the reality of other group members. This mutual understanding is shown through the consistent reference towards the other as it relates to the collective, “we all share feelings of isolation,” “we all go through the same things,” “we all have stories.”

While each story was unique to the storyteller, many participants shared how the celebration of this uniqueness actually brought them together. One participant stated:

Everyone has amazing immigration [or migration] stor[ies]. They are different but share many common grounds. We can relate to each other’s specific but similar experience, share similar feeling. Everybody is not just an individual from nowhere. We all have rich cultural heritage and want to explore our history and broader identity.

This dialogic moment gives participants the opportunity to imagine the reality of the other and “turns toward” the other and both mutually perceive the impact of each other’s turning. It is a brief interlude of focused awareness and acceptance of otherness and difference that somehow simultaneously transcends the perception of difference itself” (Cissna & Anderson, 1998, p. 74).

While there are similar themes of hard work and perseverance as I discussed above, the consistent reference to uniqueness and celebration of difference as shown with the phrase “they are different but share many common grounds” and describing each other’s stories as “rich,” highlights the importance of heterogenous stories. They combination of different perspectives and experiences are what create the larger narrative or a metaphorical neighborhood. As I

discussed in Chapter One, being a neighbor does not require outright sameness, it is a “proximate figure who is not kin” (Thiranagama, 2019, p. 274). Neighborliness it is the acceptance of others difference and then assuming responsibility anyway. Similar to the process of Chapter Two, through the negotiation of self and other brought on by perspective giving and taking, an idealized immigrant and migrant (or neighbor) has been created and participants are asked to identify with it. This in turn fosters feelings of responsibility and connection through mutual care and respect, all while celebrating difference.

Constituting Community

Constituting Community

This third portion of the event asks participants to reflect on their feeling towards their community. Prior to this point in the event visitors reference their community as their place of origin before they migrated to Colorado. However, during this section of the event, they redefined who their community is now referencing the people around them and as a result Fort Collins as a whole. One participant stated:

This made me appreciate my community and the sacrifices people in my community have made. Additionally, I think the mention of building community was a really good reminder for me, I sometimes feel like an outsider of my community in Colorado but in reality, I am just building it along with everyone else and that gives me a more optimistic approach to relations with others.

Like I discussed in the section on negotiating the self, the process of dialogue situated participants in the larger community, therefor strengthening their feeling of responsibility because it is *their* community. This is highlighted in the phrase “I am building it along with everyone else.” In a conversation during one portion of the dialogue, a participant shared a similar sentiment stating “if you want community you have to build it” highlighting the agentic nature of community building that happens in relation to others. These various community members are who create or constitute the communities they are part of, discursively building it

with the people around them. Similarly, another participant discussed how their conversation and experience of perspective giving and taking resituated their perception of community. This participant stated, “this session made me a little more motivated to connect with others in this community including those who were not in this room.” This call to others not present aligns with Levinas (1979) notion of the third party. The neighbor extends past who is physically present. The event created a space for participants to discursively create the neighborhood and step into the role of neighbor and this extends to the third party.

The first section of the event focuses predominantly on the self, the second focused on the other, and this portion of the event focused on the relation of the self and other on community building. Participants moved away from talking about their community of origin and now situated themselves and their group into the larger community. This was established through the facilitated dialogue and the act of physically being there. Underwood and Frey (2007) have argued that the term community has become a word that has been used so much that it has lost meaning. However, by sitting down and providing space for participants to intentionally think about community within the context of this event allowed participants to reconceptualize what community meant to them. I argue adding an in-person dialogue created a more dynamic dialogic experience. Participants discussed this connection stating “this conversation strengthen my sense of community because it made me feel more connected even if we are from difference backgrounds. I believe having a conversation in community is meaningful. It helps build community in concrete ways.” Similarly, another participant stated how it brought them closer to other community members stating, “it shaped how I view our community because it shows how similar we truly are and how many differences can be solved through conversation and trying to understand from others’ point of view. How community can be drawn close and become

comfortable by talking about who we are.” This discussion of concrete community building and being drawn together highlights the connection between the discursive act of community building and the physical feeling of closeness and comfortability. According to Underwood and Frey (2007), “psychological belonging and social bonding can help to achieve feelings of safety and protection and relate to community members providing emotional aid to one another” (p. 382). These feelings of comfortability, safety, and protection help create networks of support that strengthen community ties.

Materializing the Neighborhood

The addition of in-person discussion gives space for participants to engage with each other’s bodies and voices, strengthening the process of identification and community building. This process of togetherness creates feelings of comfort and a sense of home that we see in the previous participant quote. A participant shared a similar experience of comfortability and being “at home” expressing “I am far from home and talking about my story brought a sense of home and comfort to me.” This in turn, makes the community more concrete by materially creating a sense of homeness. In Chapter Two I outlined the ideal experience of the home as “bound up with a sense of security, familiarity, and comfort” (Blunt and Dowling, 2006, p. 1). The act of physically/literally being close to people in an environment that has privileged openness and empathy invites participants to feel at home as outlined in previous responses. The people at the table are literally neighboring each other and the table acts as the neighborhood. Looking at someone in the eye, bumping shoulders with each other, and smiling while someone shares their vulnerabilities invite visitors to more deeply empathize with one another and feel more comfortable in the space. Touching back on a participant comment outlined above, the space is important. They shared, “I like to share in a comfortable space, like this event. I don’t like it if I feel like I won’t be respected or welcomed.” As I discussed throughout Chapter One and Chapter

Two immigrants and migrants are often coded as non-belonging or unwelcome, so it is important to cultivate a space that creates feelings of comfort, hominess, and neighborliness. The act of being there, combined with the openness of perspective giving and taking, invite this comfortability or feeling of neighborliness.

Conclusion

Public discourse surrounding immigration has invited increased sentiments of xenophobia and violence towards marginalized communities and the concept of supporting our neighbors has never been more important (Lakeoff & Ferguson, 2006; Ono & Sloop 2002; Cisneros, 2008). This event highlights the power museums can have on dismantling this harmful rhetoric by providing space for the embodiment of neighborliness through mutual respect. Museums have the power to act as tools for communities who have often been excluded from public representation, but for museums to be pillars for community engagement, it is important to understand the intricacies of the work. Like the story of Gina Manuel's family, there were many forgotten stories that were not represented in the museum and while they ended up rectifying this gap, it took decades to see that reflected within the exhibition design. However, the museum's series *Your Story, Our Story* bridged this gap from a different perspective. The online repository of stories allows people all across the United States to have their immigration and migration stories heard, centering voices like Gina Manuel. Ultimately, there are many ways museum can do engagement and support community building, all serving different but important purposes. However, this study worked to illuminate the importance of in-person dialogue for community building. As I discussed throughout this chapter, without a dialogue to accompany a series like *Your Story, Our Story*, the museum cannot guarantee that participants engage in perspective-taking, and traditional museum settings are not designed for perspective-giving.

Therefore, without the representation of historically excluded stories within the actual design of the museum and an in person facilitated dialogue to accompany *Your Story, Our Story*, Gina Manuel's family story and others represented online would not reach their full potential.

Dialogue within museums as a method of community engagement can function as a tool to foster equitable interactions across power if done correctly. As I found with this event, providing a space for participants to make sense of their own stories allows them to feel part of the larger community. This feeling of connection to the larger community in turn helps them communicate across difference and find commonalities of those around them. The mutual connection and established community networks allow participants to embody the role of neighbor and assume the roles commitment to responsibility that I have outlined in Chapter One.

Museums do not have to continue to be exclusive institutions for the socially elite but can become change-making community centers. This event highlights the utility of using programming to help these institutions become imbedded in their communities. Many of the participants of the event had never been to the Avenir before or been given the space to tell their stories. However, this event brought their own lived experience into the museum and used it to constitute community. While museums can help create connections in virtual/mediated environments, physically *being there* adds a richness that cannot be replicated both for the participants and for researchers. To accomplish true community work we must be imbedded in the communities we are serving and provide a physical space that is designed to foster these connections. Museums' have a history of exclusion but also can be centers for change. Like I have outlined in Chapter Two and earlier in this chapter, we must take the things we have learned from the communities we visited or been exposed to and let that inform the way we add to the communities we are a part of. From China to Colorado or Mexico to Texas, how have the

places we have been and the people we have connected with, influence the work we do and the communities we are now a part of?

Meaningful engagement “takes courage, strength, and commitment, but it has the potential to enrich museums and communities and contribute to improving the lives of [historically excluded] people through building platforms for voice and action” (Onciul, 2015, p. 244-245). In person events can work to redefine what museums can actually do for community members by providing space for community networking and organizing. Participants were able to move through the process of the negotiation of self and other to co-construct their community’s immigration and migration story, working to establish the “neighborhood” with them as neighbors.

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CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION: NEIGHBORLINESS IN OUR LIVES

As I was writing this dissertation, there was a shift in the larger perception of immigrants as we entered a second Trump presidency. While xenophobia has been the foundation of the United States' immigration discourse and policy, we have reverted to a heightened level of vitriol that is spreading across the United States. For example, on February 18th, 2025, The White House shared a video on their X social media page showing detained immigrants in chains preparing to board a flight. The caption read, "ASMR: Illegal Alien Deportation Flight." ASMR, which stands for autonomous sensory meridian response, is a type of social media content that induces pleasurable feelings and promotes relaxation. This video synthesizes The White House's view of immigrants, equating their pain, suffering, and humiliation to relaxation and pleasure. As Levina (2018) argues in her work on the intersections of cruelty, joy, and power, "cruelty is the joy with which whiteness asserts itself" (p. 76). That is the America we are currently living in—one that revels in the pain and suffering of others.

Donald Trump began his second presidency with a "crack down" on immigration, enacting mass deportations and expanding the Migrant Operations Center at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay. The first migrant detainees who arrived at Guantanamo Bay were described as hardened criminals by the Trump administration—"the worst of the worst" (Fox News, 2025). However, "in response to a lawsuit, the administration later conceded that nearly 30% of the Venezuelan migrants sent to Guantánamo were considered "low-threat illegal aliens," and did not have serious criminal records" (Rose, 2025). While results of this "crack down" are dubious, the messages they carry have lasting effects. According to Joel Rose (2025), "a recent NPR/Ipsos poll found that significant numbers of Americans believe false and misleading claims about

immigration — particularly those who get their news from Fox and conservative outlets” (Rose, 2025). Communication and political science professor, Donnagal Young, found that while it is important to not read too much into a single poll, there is still a rhetorical effect. She states, “it’s not about learning this false information as much as it is having that false information sewn into your identity, becoming more and more of a part of who you are and how you see the world” (Rose, 2025). While academics, politicians, popular culture figures, and others have made strides in ripping through the seams of our past discourse, the hateful rhetoric currently utilized by the Trump administration is being resewn into our national identity. The joy brought on by reveling in the cruelty enacted by the Trump administration is reaffirming whiteness and increasing violence from Othering (Levina, 2018). Therefore, it is vital we combat this new age of xenophobia.

Museums, with their social influence and trust, can work to combat this xenophobic perception of immigrants that places them as pollutants and non-belonging. While museums are rooted in colonial history and white supremacist values that contribute to Othering, as I discussed in Chapter One, scholars have found that museums are moving away from being institutions that were designed to affirm dominant values and have become tools for social intervention and change (Weiser, 2017; Ross, 2004; Sturken, 2022). For example, recently completed museums like The Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama (Hasian & Paliewicz, 2021; Sodaro, 2023; Keeling, Seay-Howard, O’Shea, 2023) now prioritize inclusivity and social justice, highlighting a new era of memory activism (Sturken, 2022). Museums have the power to shift perceptions and promote empathy within visitors; in an era where false information about marginalized people is being sewn into the fabric of our nation, there must be institutions doing the work to undo this harmful rhetoric.

Museums have a unique role within national culture because they are seen as pillars of truth and importance. Blair, Dickinson, and Ott (2010) contend that, “memory places are destinations” inviting a “desired departure from the ordinary,” shifting visitors’ expectations (Blair, Dickinson, Ott, 2010). The act of engaging in touristic behaviors is somewhat sacred, as it positions various activities as of heightened importance (Urry, 1992). Blair, Dickinson, and Ott (2010) contend that the rhetoric of memory places predisposes visitors to view these sites as “worthy of attention, investment, and effort” (Blair, Dickinson, Ott, 2010; Urry, 1992). While film, television, and other cultural texts work to dismantle harmful rhetoric, museums are seen as more credible and trustworthy by the public (Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998). In an era with so much tension, apathy, and division, it is incredibly important that there are spaces dedicated to empathy, inclusion, and care.

The Tenement Museum works to dismantle xenophobia through a rhetoric of neighborliness that promotes responsibility and empathy for community members. The museum utilizes their recreated spaces, walking tours, and extensive programming to combat the type of rhetoric seeping out of The White House. Ruth Abrams and Anita Jacobson’s set out to “forge meaningful connections to current social issues and create a wider sense of empathy” through storytelling (Tenement Museum, 1999). By preserving the stories of everyday working-class people, the museum situates immigrants as “good” neighbors and asks visitors to accept responsibility for their well-being. This framework works to combat the harmful rhetoric that American’s are so easily accepting making museums with a social justice framework incredibly important during this divisive era. However, these institutions are now in danger.

On January 20th, 2025 Donald Trump issued an executive order seeking to terminate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programming, labeling them “illegal and immoral” (The White

House, 2025). This has had widespread consequences for institutions across the United States, including the arts. After this executive order, museums like the Smithsonian and the National Gallery of Art have eliminated DEI initiatives, closed their diversity offices, and are freezing federal hiring (Ulaby, 2025). The National Endowment for the Humanities released a response to the executive order, stating how they will be excluding applications pertaining to “promotion of gender ideology; promotion of discriminatory equity ideology; support for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) or diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) initiatives or activities; or environmental justice initiatives or activities” (National Endowment for the Humanities, n.d.). The Tenement Museum and so many other cultural centers rely on NEH funding to support their mission. Recently, the Tenement Museum used NEH funding to create their new exhibit “A Union of Hope: 1869” which responded to the unequal representation of stories within the museum. This funding, under this new executive order, would be rejected. Museums presently have the opportunity to act as centers for change, working to combat the dehumanization of marginalized people all across the United States; but they are being withheld funding necessary for them to be tools for their communities effectively censoring whose stories get imbedded in our national memory. We can actively combat the challenges caused by these new executive orders by both advocating for these institutions and consistently bringing attention to the positive lasting effects they have on community members. It is imperative that we are visiting and supporting cultural centers during this tumultuous time.

Neighborliness at the Tenement Museum

Throughout this dissertation, I turn to neighborliness as critical tool to analyze how the Lower East Side Tenement Museum fosters an ethic of responsibility and positions immigrants as “good” neighbors. I argue that the museum dismantles xenophobia through this rhetoric of

neighborliness that combines ideologies of mutual respect and social responsibility that in turn work to negotiate the tension of difference and create networks of support.

In Chapter One I conceptualize the rhetoric of neighborliness by outlining both the literature on neighbors and the historical contexts of immigrants in United States history. First, I elucidate features of Emanuel Levinas' concept of neighborliness that focuses on our ethical responsibility towards the Other, or neighbor. Levinas argues that as we move through the world we are confronted by the Other's differences and through that confrontation we are held hostage to them. I argue that the museum takes features of Levinas's neighborliness and mediates the process of confrontation through design practices and use of educators. Second, I outlined how the history and discourse about immigration in the United States has worked to discursively label immigrants as non-neighbors and non-belonging. Within this section, I unpack how the Levinasian concept of neighbor that focuses on difference and the ideological concept of neighbor that focuses on similarities are acting on visitors simultaneously—together, they work to provide language to unpack how the museum holds space for the negotiation of both shared experience and celebration of difference. Third, I outlined literature on public memory focusing on three key features: the importance of places for public memory, the utility of public memory for identity construction, and how it is both usable and active. Fourth, I set up my analysis of the shifting trends within museum engagement by briefly outlining the state of the museum industry before outlining the role of community engagement within the industry.

Analyzing the rhetorical efficacy of recreated homes and urban walking tours, Chapter Two demonstrates how the museum interpolates visitors into neighbors through features of identification established by recreated homes, walking the neighborhood, and storytelling. I opened this Chapter outlining the literature on everydayness, the home, and neighborhoods

pointing to the ways they inform my understanding of the material invitations. Then, I moved to my analysis focusing on the intersections of the material environment and the dialogic features of the tours has on the rhetoric of neighborliness. I found that this process functions in three stages. First, the museum combines the materially recreated dwellings and the Lower East Side neighborhood to invite visitors to embody neighborliness through the act of stepping into lived environments that have a palimpsest of past and present immigrant dwellers. Second, through the stories conveyed in the tours and conversations had between museum patrons facilitated by educators, the museum uses common themes to create an idealized immigrant for visitors to identify with. However, I found that while the museum fosters mutual connection through this act of storytelling, they also provided space for visitors to celebrate the differences between themselves and others represented. This celebration of difference creates space for immigrants to find community while resisting assimilation. Third, through the call to action proposed by educators throughout each tour, the museum asks visitors to solidify this embodiment of neighborliness that is created by the material environment and sustained by the storytelling by inviting them to bring immigrants into their community assuming responsibility for their well-being through policy change and establishing networks of support.

Lastly, in Chapter Three I took the Tenement Museum's online program *Your Story, Our Story*, that worked to promote inclusivity and reduce barriers to participation and adapted an event with the same features that added a facilitated dialogue. I argued that the added feature dialogue and shared learning gives participants the opportunity to truly embody the role of neighbor by engaging in communal identity creation through storytelling that fosters mutual respect and responsibility. This Chapter proceeded in three parts. First, I outlined literature on dialogue and storytelling. Second, I reviewed my methodological framework. Third, I outlined

my results. This study found three key themes that promoted community engagement: negotiating the self, negotiating the other, and constituting community.

The first portion of the event mirrored *Your Story, Our Story's* framework of storytelling which invited participants to engage in perspective-giving by sharing their immigration or migration story. This portion of the event allowed participants to negotiate their individual identity in relation to others. I outlined two subthemes, “the power of being heard” and “crafting identity and situating it in the larger narrative.” Participants stated that the act of storytelling was a positive experience because they felt seen and heard and gave others a chance to engage with their individual story. An experience not often prioritized in museums. The process of individual storytelling also allowed participants to negotiate their identity in relation to others. By carefully crafting their story they situated what they wanted others to learn from them, “inviting others to inhabit” their lived experience (Ryfe, 2006, p. 80). Through this process of identity negotiation, idealized qualities of immigration and migration were canonized within the larger story. The second portion of the event created space for individual to negotiate the Other allowing participants engage with each other’s stories and communicate across difference. During this portion of the event participants found commonalities across the stories shared but still celebrated the difference that were present. This highlighted the conflicting essence of neighborliness within the museum that carried into the event, the tension created by the promotion of shared understanding while still celebrating difference. Finally, the last portion of the event focused on community building. Participants moved from discussing their community of origin as their sole community to now referencing Fort Collins and the people around them. The first section of the event focuses predominantly on the self, the second focused on the other, and this portion of the event focused on the relation of the self and other on community building.

I found that this process of togetherness was facilitated by physically being there, neighboring community members.

Mapping Methodological Considerations

As I discussed in Chapter One, museums have a long history of elitism and exclusion due to their colonial history. For years I was researching these spaces, finding the harmful structures that were sustaining colonial and white supremacist values and I started to become dissatisfied with my research. While I found rhetoric to be a useful tool to explain the intricacies of sites of memory, pointing to the ways these institutions made lasting impacts on their patrons, I wanted to take my work a step further. I wanted to find a way to imbed my work in the communities I was part of. Therefore, I took a mix methodological approach for my dissertation as demonstrated in my two analytical Chapters. I found three key considerations about the possibilities of a mix methodological approach.

First, my methodological framework of being-through-there in Chapter Two informed my other methodological approaches. After traveling to New York City and visiting the Lower East Side on two separate occasions over multiple days, I expanded my understanding of immigrant and migrant stories. I took 11 pages of notes single-spaced, took additional photos, and kept any materials such as informational bookmarks and pamphlets. As I stated in Chapter Two, cities act on people, and we in turn act on cities creating an iterative experience that leaves each of us changed. I carried the Lower East Side back with me to Fort Collins, influencing my work here. Additionally, moving through Fort Collins as a city for the many years I have lived here also has changed me. Being through these two very different cities influenced how I created the event with the Avenir and how I engaged with the people who were present at the event. I

believe that to do thoughtful and effective community work, scholars have to go where the community is and see how that has influenced the spaces they inhabit.

Second, qualitative methods gave me the opportunity to center the voices of people within my work. Before my dissertation, I spent a large portion of my scholarship centering the physical museums within my study. I pointed to the ways the combination of context and the site itself could move and change visitors. However, I did not have the opportunity to center the voices of visitors within my research. Other scholars in the field have taken up this methodological challenge, looking at the various ways rhetoricians can do mixed methodological work to center marginalized voices. Middleton, Senda-Cook, and Endres (2011) utilized rhetorical field methods to center historically excluded voices. They argue “by accessing embodied and “live” elements of rhetoric suppressed in textual representation, and by focusing on communities often excluded from critical analysis (e.g., the mundane, the oppressed, the oppositional) rhetorical field methods both challenge who counts as a rhetorical community worth studying, and what counts as a form of rhetorical action worthy of scrutiny” (Middleton, Senda-Cook, and Endress, 2011, p. 389; see also Ono & Sloop, 1995; Sloop & Ono, 1997). The interdisciplinary nature of rhetorical field methods offers a deeper understanding of rhetoric as it unfolds in real-world contexts by attending to the everyday lived experiences of rhetoric, including peoples’ experiences.

Moving beyond the more relaxed boundaries of rhetorical field methods, qualitative methods allowed me to hear from the people that came to my event which helped expose the pervasive dominant discourse prevalent within museums by analyzing how people shared their stories and experiences (Hodder, 1998; Saukko, 2005; Tilley, 2001; Middleton, Senda-Cook, and Endress, 2011). My results were gathered from their words and experiences highlighting a

different way I could engage with museums. I believe that mixing qualitative and rhetorical methods provides a richer understanding of spaces like museums who have such a long history of excluding marginalized voices.

Third, engaged methods can expand the horizons of what humanities scholarship can accomplish. Due to the colonial nature of museums, I personally found traditional rhetorical criticism to be missing a collaborative framework. Engagement gives researchers the space to “recognize our biases, our limitations, and our collective potential,” actions that are essential for decolonial work (Duncan & Oliver, 2019). While I historically used my scholarship to outline how power exist within these institutions both for better and for worse, through engaged research I was able to take this work and create lasting change through collaboration.

This idea of lasting change is essential in our current national climate. Humanities institutions are being attacked by the current administration which will have devastating consequences for our communities, especially for those at the margins. Despite the hardships we are facing now, we cannot stand idly by while museums, libraries, universities, and other institutions are under threat and collective action is a way forward. Engaged scholarship allows academics and industry workers to come together to enact change in their communities. Scholars have found that engaged research works to center collaboration across disciplines, fields, and institutions to build human relationships that work to create systemic change through partnership. According to Duncan and Oliver (2019), “as researchers, participants, collaborators and practitioners who come together because they care about high-quality research that draws on a range of perspectives and insights and contributes to improved social outcomes, they recognize that human relationships sit at the core” (p. 127). It is through the relational process that promotes collaboration that true change can be enacted through social capital that promotes

improved social outcomes (Johnston & Taylor, 2018; Johnston, Lane, Hurst, and Beatson, 2018). I believe that museums are the cultural pillars of community and have the potential to be true community centers and engaged scholarship gave me the tools to take the things I have learned through my scholarship and use it to do actual community building. To make a difference in the world academics must become invested in humanities institutions and share resources as a way to enact change.

Public Memory

One of the key theoretical frameworks for my dissertation is public memory. I looked at its relationship to places, its utility for identity construction, and how it is both usable and active. Traditionally, public memory has been used in various humanities fields like rhetoric, intercultural studies, memory studies, and other specialties. However, my dissertation highlights how it can be utilized within the social sciences, especially in dialogic and community engaged research.

As I stated in Chapter One, through narratives of shared identity and the facilitated evocation of communal belonging, sites of memory like museums can act as a tool for identity construction (Blair, Dickinson, Ott, 2010). Our collective recollections of the past help situate our shared identity. Identity construction is a key feature of dialogue and storytelling relying on public memory as a foundation of this process. According to Black (2008), “storytelling helps participants cocreate and manifest their identities in relation to one another and also enables them to imagine and appreciate each other’s perspectives,” ultimately allowing group members to negotiate tensions brought on by difference (p. 95). My dissertation highlights how public memory plays a role in how we construct stories and how we hope they can influence others. Participants created their stories in response to the larger public memory of immigration to

counteract the negative discourses I have discussed in previous Chapters. They emphasized hard work and sacrifice to highlight what they want others to learn from their stories. Then, through the cyclical features of dialogue, participants were able to shift the public memory of immigration on a small scale. The museum additionally utilizes dialogue to shift public memory through the conversations they promote between visitors, humanizing the immigrant experience. Public memory can help dialogic scholars analyze the relationship participants have toward a topic and how the conversation might shift their perceptions and in turn public memory.

In addition to acting as a tool for identity construction, public memory is usable and active (Zelizer, 1995; Sturken, 2007). Memory works “to shape belonging, exclusivity, social order, and community” becoming “a marker that signals social existence and all that such existence invokes” (Sturken, 2007, p. 227). According to Black & Weiderhold (2014), “public dialogues are often open-ended in the sense that they are focused on helping groups of people explore ideas deeply and build shared understanding of a common concern” (p. 287). This form of engagement allows participants to work through difference through mutual understanding, acting as a form of resistance towards harmful power structures (Wolfe, 2018). Public memory and dialogue can work together to push museums to become active tools for social change and promote civic participation.

By promoting shared understanding, public memory can be a catalyst for civic participation. Civic participation refers to activities outside of one’s family and close friends and “in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community’s future” (Ekman & Amanå, 2012; Adler & Goggin, 2005, p. 241). Scholars have found that civic participation both improves peoples’ health and quality of life while simultaneously strengthening their communities (Gonzales, Matz-Costa, & Morrow-Howell,

2015; Serrat, Scharf, Villar, Gómez, 2020). Through the evocation of shared understanding, public memory works to find commonalities as a force of social good and community building.

Martia Sturken (2022) argues that we have left an era of public memory that was grounded in American exceptionalism and traditional memorialization and into an era of memory activism as seen with the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. This era was brought on by a push for social justice caused by events like the murder of George Floyd. However, during the short time between Sturken's argument in 2022 and now, we have reverted back to ideological frameworks of conservatism that has labeled diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts as harmful and even illegal. However, small acts of civic participation fit within Sturken's concept of memory activism that centers the voices of historically excluded groups. While these institutions are facing challenges in the future, public memory can be the catalyst for a way forward by pushing visitors and participants into more active roles in society. Public memory is usable and active, but it does not just act on visitors, visitors also can participate in the memorial landscape as seen with community engaged programming like the Tenement Museum's series *Your Story, Our Story*. By allowing everyday people to share their story and become active participants in creating and maintaining public memory, they are invited to feel increased levels of agency in their communities and in turn increased levels of responsibility. Therefore, public memory that is established by the people and is reflective of the people, promotes neighborliness and civic responsibility.

Neighborliness

Lastly, neighborliness is a critical framework that can help scholars unpack modern immigration rhetoric. This dissertation mapped the Levinasian framework of neighborliness as it relates to religion and the ethical responsibility of the neighbor and the ideological framework as

it relates to our shared understanding of what makes for a “good” neighbor. Outside of the museum, these two frameworks are at odds as seen with the cognitive dissonance surrounding the rhetoric of immigrations in our present time. Despite the pervasive rhetoric that discursively places immigrants as non-neighbors, there is little research discussing this phenomenon. One of the foundational ideologies of the new Trump administration is Christianity. In his address to congress Donald Trump stated, “I was saved by God to make America great again” (Trump, 2025). If this new administration and its followers so readily accept Christian values, then why is the commandment of love thy neighbor so readily forgotten? As I have discussed through this dissertation, the rhetoric of immigration has so thoroughly situated immigrants as non-neighbors allowing the harmful rhetoric of immigration to function outside of their religious framework. Therefore, it would be helpful for scholars to look at the relationship between immigration rhetoric and the notion of neighborliness to elucidate how this phenomenon is affecting discourse beyond the Tenement Museum.

The act of embodying neighborliness cannot stop at the doors of the Tenement Museum’s recreated apartments, we must carry it with us into the world. As Sara Ahmed (2004) argued, “in fear, the world presses against the body; the body shrinks back from the world in the desire to avoid the object of fear” (p. 69). However, we must push past the feeling of fear and discomfort to protect our neighbors. There have been other instances of the call towards neighborliness in the conversation surrounding immigration. Bishop Budde, in her sermon at the 2025 Inauguration Prayer Service stated,

They may not be citizens or have the proper documentation, but the vast majority of immigrants are not criminals. They pay taxes and are good neighbors. They are faithful members of our churches and mosques, synagogues, and temples. I ask you to have mercy, Mr. President, on those in our communities whose children fear that their parents will be taken away and that you help those who are fleeing war zones and persecution in their own lands, to find compassion and welcome here.

Despite the challenges brought on by cuts to funding, academic persecution, or any other pressure by this new administration, scholars and people working in various industries need to adopt Levinas' notion of neighborliness like Bishop Budde did in her sermon. My dissertation taught me that I could resist this new era of harmful rhetoric by calling attention to museums that are making lasting change, by creating space for historically excluded community members to make community connections, and by adopting a rhetoric of neighborliness within my community mindset. Others can donate to organizations that are doing the work to promote equity and inclusion or visit museums like the Tenement Museum who are giving voice to the voiceless. Levinas' notion of neighborliness was a response to regime riddled with persecutions, violence, and harmful rhetoric that led to the deaths of millions. He believed it was our ethical responsibility to take care of one another, especially in the face of difference. In her editorial, Marina Levina (2025) responds to Levinas' ethical call of neighborliness stating:

Empathy does not and should not be based on understanding and signification. Our humanness is not a thing to be justified, explained, or signified; it is the ethical and moral imperative of life itself. These are not ethics of inclusion, but ethics of survival. We must face the Other with radical empathy, or we ourselves will not survive, or survive in a wrong way (p. 11).

We cannot only act when the threat is being levied against *us*. Our responsibility in the Levinasian sense starts and ends with the Other having nothing to do with the self. The responsibility to others outlined by Levinas' asks that we embrace the difference of others – the humanness – and protect it. This act of neighborliness is an act of resistance. It cannot stop at the museum. It must become part of our way of living. We can all treat immigrants as “good” neighbors who are worthy of our care and attention.

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Appendix B

Facilitation Guide

Purpose

To create a space for individuals to share their personal narratives, foster cross-cultural understanding, and build a sense of community through the exchange of objects and stories rooted in immigration experiences.

Outcomes

- **Increased Cultural Understanding:** Participants will deepen their understanding of diverse immigration experiences and perspectives.
- **Strengthened Community Connections:** Attendees will have the opportunity to build relationships with others from various backgrounds and foster a sense of belonging.
- **Empowerment and Validation:** Sharing personal stories will empower individuals and validate their experiences, contributing to a more inclusive and supportive community.

Materials

- Printed worksheets
- Pens

Welcome (10 minutes)

- Agenda
- Consent Script
- Community Guidelines
 - Be brief
 - Be honest and respectful
 - Listen with curiosity, not hostility – listen to understand
 - Everybody's an expert in their own life
 - We believe that language matter so use language that is respectful and inclusive

Storytime (10 minutes)

- Take some time to write down the story of your object and how it relates to your immigrant/migrant identity

Introduction (5 minutes)

- Share your name and what drew you here.

Round One (30 minutes)

- Briefly share the story of your artifact

Round Two: Understanding Ourselves (we might not get to every question) (15 minutes)

- What did it feel like to share your story?
- Why did you choose your story/object?
- What are three words to describe your feelings toward your im/migration history?
- How does your story help you understand the community you are in?

- What was the most difficult part about writing your story?
- How has your migration experience influenced your relationships with family and friends?

Quick debrief of understanding ourselves before transitioning into reflecting on others stories.

Round Three: Understanding Others (15 minutes)

- How did the other stories relate to your own story?
- What story made you think differently about something? Describe a specific thing you learned.
- Which story stands out to you and really grabbed your attention or surprised you? What elements in the story caused you to notice it?
- What was the most valuable lesson you learned from listening to others' stories?

Quick debrief of sharing and connecting the stories before transitioning into reflecting on community building in Fort Collins.

Round Four: Community Connections (15 minutes)

- How did this process shape how you view your community?
- What are spaces in Fort Collins that make you feel welcome?
- What are the features of that space that made you feel welcome?
- How does your story connect to the broader immigrant/migrant experience in Fort Collins?
- What can we do as individuals and communities to create more inclusive and welcoming spaces for immigrants and migrants in Fort Collins?

Wrap Up (10 minutes)

- Take some time to fill out the reflection questions at the end of the worksheet.

Closing Remarks (5 minutes)