

# Good critical thinking about rhetorical situation

People



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## **“ That’s My Dinner on Display”: A First Nations Reflection on Museum Culture**

The article, “ That’s My Dinner on Display”: A First Nations Reflection on Museum Culture”, has been penned by Gloria Jean Frank. The author talks about the representation of the First Nations people in the museum that treats them as anthropological specimens. The article opines that many of the objects that are exhibited in the museum in relation to the First Nations people are not antiquated or defunct. Thus, the cultures of the First Nations that are reflected in the museums require critical evaluation and scrutiny. The author is herself a First Nations people, and hence has the most apt background for gauging the propriety of representation of the First Nations cultures in the museum. The author explicates her experience of a visit to Royal British Columbia Museum, and opines how the misrepresentation makes people ignorant of reality of the cultures of the First Peoples misconstrue the cultures of the First Nations people. She indicates that the audience is made to imbibe the incorrect idea about the cultures in context. She aims to inform the readers about the characteristics of the First Nations cultures. Thus, she aims to initiate a debate regarding the propriety of such a practice by any museum.

Being deeply engaged as a representative of the First Nations people herself, the author chooses the form of a very personal account of her museum guide experience. This allows her to put the subject naturally in the center of her narration. The stylistics of the article is a combination of a personal reflection on the position of aboriginal peoples in the modern American culture; it’s perception by non-native population, and the scientific analyses

of the historical circumstances that led to the present state. In terms of narration mode, the article is also multifaceted. We clearly see narration (one day in a museum), description (describing the various aspects of the problem), she is pervasive and argumentative and also provides exposition (giving the detailed background). The purposes of the article is to inform the reader about the facts regarding the inadequacies of cultural representation of the First Nations, the inferior and offended position that came to being due to the “ competition” to “ fill” the museums. She argues that the desire to survive or profit led to such ugly distortion. She uses the following imagery: lunge for anthropological artifacts (aggressive connotation, a “ fencing term”), scampered in search of cultural objects (connotation of pillaging), “ lead the race” (sports terminology that strips the process of humanity). She mentions that this period is referred to as “ museum age”, which creates the grim atmosphere of the ruthlessness of the course of history.

A few times in the text we encounter the term “ pre-contact”, which describes the logic of the exhibition. In this article this pre-contact sounds as diminishing and condescending. It is used as a rhetoric tool to implicate the mentoring attitude towards the First Nation peoples. Although the usage does not seem intentional, it is somehow clearly felt, at least in my opinion. The term First Nation begins to sound as a euphemism in the context of the article, when “ shattered times” seem to be associated with post-contact times. The misunderstanding or, to be more precise, lack of will to understand the depth of the culture of the Native Americans and desperate need of regaining identity after centuries of acculturation, is vividly conveyed by the last scene. Children rush in to the hall where the author

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takes time to rest and meditate on her feelings. He notices the comment of their instructor to pay attention to the lines (that is to the form not the meaning). At this moment she remembers a ceramic figure of Santa Clause in his sleigh decorated in the traditional Northwest Coast style. This kitsch item symbolizes the shallowness of the aboriginal culture perception by general population.

The article is an example of non-standard approach to academic writing. It possesses all the features of a scientific work, such as proper citing of the sources, use of terminology, logical exposition. At the same time it is deeply personal and motivating. The reader feels the righteous indignation of the author at the indolence of the system while the problem is evident. Something must be done before the “bridge” turns to collision course.