# NASHVILLE COPTS:
# CULTURAL IDENTITY, COMMUNITY COLLABORATION, AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

by

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ABSTRACT

My thesis, *Nashville Copts: Cultural Identity, Community Collaboration, and Cultural Institutions*, examines the necessity of collaboration between museums and surrounding communities using oral histories to facilitate engagement and investment. I also attempt to show how museums and other cultural institutions can work with minority communities, like the Copts in Nashville, to foster greater understanding between ethnic and immigrant groups and the rest of the Nashville community. I conducted oral histories with members of the Coptic immigrant community in Nashville to demonstrate this collaboration. This thesis addresses the uses and best practices of oral histories, Coptic cultural identity and immigration, Public History theories about shared authority and representation, different learning types and needs for exhibition, and the history of the Coptic Church and people. By understanding how the process of conducting oral histories builds community relationships and promotes collaboration, project organizers and museum professionals can better represent surrounding ethnic and minority communities.

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

> I feel like a lot of times when I was personally exposed to anything talking about Egypt, they only talk about the very beginning, the pharaohs and all that, and people are so unaware of where Egypt is today and they're so focused on the pharaohs and the temples and the statues when there is really life in Egypt, other than just camels and the desert and pharaohs ... There's so much civilization and people there, I can see them talented in so many ways, the architecture there is amazing, but it's not something that anyone talks about because light is not shed on this aspect but something else.[1] – Rachel Aguib

If the purpose of museums and similar cultural institutions is to serve the people around them by promoting education and understanding, community collaboration is essential for maintaining effective relationships. Museums should not be an ivory tower where an awed audience come to stare respectfully at objects in a case, but an interactive experience that engrosses visitors and allows them to make their own meaning from history. These museums need to be engaging and beneficial not only to tourists but to the communities they serve. In a time when funding and appreciation for the humanities and arts is under attack, emotional and financial investment from the community in cultural organizations may be the only way that these institutions continue to survive and flourish.

Oral histories present museum curators and project organizers with a unique opportunity to connect with the community around their institution. Minority

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[1] Rachel Aguib, interview with the author, Nashville, TN, March 3, 2017.

communities are frequently underrepresented both in museum exhibitions and visitation. The process of conducting oral histories builds a relationship between the participants and can help establish trust. Community members who participate then have a vested interest in seeing the project come to fruition and are engaged with the museum. Oral histories can therefore serve as a vital resource for museums to connect to communities and people, like minority groups, who are currently not being reached in a way that is collaborative and sustainable.

In Nashville, one underrepresented minority group is the Coptic Christian community. With over two thousand local Copts, the Nashville community has one of the highest population ratios of Copts in the United States.[2] However, due to both the Copts own disengagement and Nashville's lack of incorporation of immigrant cultures, there is little interaction between the Copts and the greater Nashville community.[3] As one interviewee stated, "Nobody understands anything about our culture."[4] This project attempts to lay the framework to facilitate more understanding between these two groups by working collaboratively with the Coptic community in Nashville to conduct oral histories.

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[2] "2010 Religious Census," Religious Congregations and Membership Study 2010 (Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, 2010).

[3] Jamie Winders, *Nashville in the New Millennium: Immigrant Settlement, Urban Transformation, and Social Belonging* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2013), 141-2.

[4] Michael Fouad, interview with the author, Nashville, TN, March 3, 2017.

The Coptic Christians of Egypt create and maintain their cultural and religious identity, through the conquests of multiple empires and rulers, by tracing the historical continuity of their heritage to the founding of the Coptic Church by Saint Mark. After the Roman Empire converted to Christianity, the Coptic Church in Alexandria became a theological powerhouse and helped influence much of the early Christian doctrine. However, disagreements between the Alexandrian patriarch and the Byzantine rulers led to a split between the rest of the Empire and the Church in Egypt, which then became the Coptic Church.[5] In the seventh century, the Arab army conquered Egypt and brought in the Islamic faith, which is still the religion of the majority of Egypt's population. After centuries of Mamluk and Ottoman rule, the British Empire took economic control of Egypt, introducing Western Christianity and culture. This annexation caused greater tension between Muslims and native Christians, who had coexisted somewhat peacefully under the Ottomans.[6]

Conflict between Muslims and Copts in Egypt during the last century has caused many Copts to emigrate to more religiously tolerant countries, including the United States. While this immigration has allowed the Copts more freedom and acceptance, it has also caused the Church to have to deal with globalization and Westernization for the first time. By working with the expanding Coptic population in Nashville to better

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[5] Jonathan Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 23.

[6] Lanver Mak, *The British in Egypt: Community, Crime and Crises 1822-1922*, International Library of Historical Studies, v. 74 (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 12.

understand Coptic identity abroad through oral histories, this project aims to foster understanding and collaboration between minority groups like the Copts and the community and organizations around them.

## Historiography

Due to the breadth of time periods and topics covered, this research had the potential to fit into many historiographic contexts. The scholarship used covered Public History theory on incorporating minority communities like the Copts into local historical organizations; the ways that collaboration between cultural organizations like museums and the surrounding community benefits both entities; incorporating different learning styles into exhibitions to engage a wider public; Coptic history from the early church to modern; and current issues for Copts like maintaining cultural identity through immigration and modernization.

One of the most significant works for the research of this project was *Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections and Collaboration.*[7] This collection of essays from various Public History and museum professionals details the experiences of museums around the world in incorporating, engaging, and collaborating with minority and underrepresented groups. These essays offer case studies to exemplify many of the methods for working with minority groups that I addressed and proposed in this project. *Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections and Collaboration* also provided

[7] Vivien Golding and Wayne Modest, eds., *Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections and Collaboration* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

theoretical framework about effective representations of minorities in exhibitions, offering examples of issues and potential solutions for better representation through collaboration and shared authority. By using a collection of essays written by authors with varying viewpoints and understandings of collaborative practice, *Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections and Collaboration* was able to present diverse and sometimes opposing methodologies that allowed the reader to formulate their own ideas about effective collaboration.

John Paul Rangel's "Moving beyond the Expected: Representation and Presence in a Contemporary Native Arts Museum" and Richard Sandell's *Museums, Society, Inequality* also addressed issues of representation in museums by comparing the use and interpretation of Native American art in the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts to traditional representations at other museums.[8] Rangel uses intense theoretical concepts such as the Critical Race Theory to frame his argument that museums should use Native value systems and beliefs as the model of representation, since traditional exhibition systems incorporate Western biases.[9] Sandell then ventures that museums and similar institutions should "impact positively on the lives of the disadvantaged or

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[8] John Paul Rangel, "Moving beyond the Expected: Representation and Presence in a Contemporary Native Arts Museum," *Wicazo Sa Review*, no. 1 (2012) and Richard Sandell, ed., *Museums, Society, Inequality*, (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[9] "By Critical Race Theory, I mean the critical examination of the limitations of objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality and 'equal opportunity,' which includes taking into account race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. CRT challenges oppressive dominant ideologies by intervention, counter-storytelling, and analysis." Rangel, 39.

marginalized individuals, act as a catalyst for social regeneration and as a vehicle for the empowerment of specific communities and also contribute to the creation of more equitable societies."[10]

Likewise, *Museums and Their Communities*,[11] edited by Sheila Watson, and *Progressive Museum Practice: John Dewey and Democracy*[12] by George Hein explained ways to make museums could make a positive community impact by becoming more inviting and engaging for the public, including minority groups. *Museums and Their Communities* is another edited volume that combines several authors' experiences in community outreach. Moira Simpson's *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era* then went one step further by using detailed case studies to demonstrate how museums, including the American Alliance of Museums, effectively benefitted nearby areas through collaborative practices.[13] These works all used case studies as examples of museum exhibitions and practices that show both effective and ineffective techniques of community engagement.

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[10] Sandell, 4.

[11] Sheila E. R. Watson, ed., *Museums and Their Communities*, Leicester Readers in Museum Studies (New York: Routledge, 2007).

[12] George Hein, *Progressive Museum Practice: John Dewey and Democracy* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2012).

[13] Moira G. Simpson, *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era*, The Heritage: Care, Preservation, Management (London: Routledge, 2001).

One important aspect of building an exhibition that successfully engages the minority groups is understanding the basic characteristics of learning types and design. Despite collaboration and shared authority, if an exhibition is not appealing and interesting to visitors from the community then it will not succeed. *Adult Museum Programs: Designing Meaningful Experiences* and "I'm Different; Not Dumb: Modes of Presentation (VARK) in the Tertiary Classroom" both address different learning styles that affect visitors' understanding and engagement with exhibitions.[14]

John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking's *The Museum Experience Revisited* is a vital resource for understanding the complete experience of why people attend museums and what they learn from their visit.[15] *The Museum Experience Revisited* uses extensive surveys and visitor studies to discuss visitors' motivations for museum attendance, as well as the importance of engaging different learning styles and needs in exhibitions. *Museum Exhibition: Theory and Practice* then elaborates on motivations for museum attendance by detailing Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which shows that people's basic needs must be met and secure before they will make time for educational activities like

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[14] Alison L. Grinder and E. Sue McCoy, *The Good Guide: A Sourcebook for Interpreters, Docents, and Tour Guides* (Scottsdale, Arizona: Ironwood Press, 1985), and Neil D. Fleming, "I'm different; not dumb: Modes of presentation (VARK) in the tertiary classroom." In *Research and Development in Higher Education, Proceedings of the 1995 Annual Conference of the Higher Education and Research Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA), HERDSA*, vol. 18, 1995.

[15] John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, *The Museum Experience Revisited* (Walnut Creek, Calif: Left Coast Press, Inc, 2013).

museums.[16] This hierarchy helps museum professionals understand why low income communities may be less likely to visit a museum. The American Alliance of Museum's 2010 publication "Demographic Transformation and the Future of Museums" is the AAM's official publication discussing minorities and museum attendance.[17] The report details attendance numbers based on surveys and census data. After providing this statistical data, "Demographic Transformation and the Future of Museums" then addresses the AAM's recommendations on how these relationships with minority communities could be improved.

Oral histories emerged as a recurring theme throughout these works on museums and communities as one of the most effective methods of collaboration and engagement. This project used oral histories as an integral part of the research process and the most important primary source available for studying Coptic identity in the United States. The Oral History Association outlines its guide to best practices on its website, which integrates years of professional knowledge to promote the most effective methodologies for gathering oral histories.[18] The Ethnic Communities Oral History Project's article "'May Your Children Speak Well of You Mother Tongue': Oral

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[16] David Dean, *Museum Exhibition: Theory and Practice* (London: Conway, 1996).

[17] Betty Farrell and Maria Medvedeva, "Demographic Transformation and the Future of Museums," (Washington, D.C.: American Alliance of Museums, 2010), http://www.aam-us.org/docs/center-for-the-future-of-museums/demotransaam2010.pdf.

[18] Oral History Association, "Principles and Best Practices," October 2009. http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/

History and the Ethnic Communities" then expands on the knowledge provided by the Oral History Association by explaining the Project's experiences conducting oral histories in diverse communities.[19]

These experiences, like publishing oral histories and research in two languages so that all community participants can read it, offer valuable guidelines for researchers inexperienced in dealing with ethnically diverse communities and can help avoid missteps that could break trust or damage relationships in the community. Charles R. Lee and Kathryn L. Nasstrom's article "Practice and Pedagogy: Oral History in the Classroom" addresses a new way to expand community participation, collaboration, and partnerships within the community: working with schools to promote students doing oral histories. Partnering with schools allows students to not only build relationships with the community and cultural institution, but also to learn the importance of best practices when conducting oral histories.[20]

When conducting oral histories on minority and immigrant groups, like the Copts, it is essential to understand the community's history, as it directly influences participants' world view. For the Copts, who use their religious history and the Church as the central factor in forming their cultural identity, it is especially important to understand this history as it is the framework around which the Copts build their lives.

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[19] Sav Kyriacou, "'May Your Children Speak Well of You Mother Tongue': Oral History and the Ethnic Communities," *Oral History* 21, no. 1 (1993): 75–80.

[20] Charles R. Lee and Kathryn L. Nasstrom, "Practice and Pedagogy: Oral History in the Classroom," *The Oral History Review* 25, no. 1 (July 1, 1998): 1–7.

The historiography of Coptic history comes from a diverse range of scholarship and fields.

For the discussion of ancient history, I used the work of Egyptologists, Coptologists, Late Antiquity and Byzantine historians, Islamic medievalists, and historians of early Christianity. In many cases, these scholars' works are interdisciplinary between several of these fields and others like archaeology. Incorporating a wide variety of scholarship from both famous authors in the wider fields of Late Antiquity and Byzantine studies, like Peter Brown's *The World of Late Antiquity* and Judith Herrin's *The Formation of Christendom*, as well as the more specialized area of early Egyptian Christianity exemplified by the works of scholars like Roger Bagnall set the development of the early Coptic Church within the larger happenings of the early Christian world.[21]

Similarly, the research on modern Coptic history used a variety of scholarship from sources on the history of the modern Middle East like Derek Hopwood's *Egypt, Politics and Society, 1945-1984* and Joel Gordon's *Nasser: Hero of the Arab Nation*; and colonialism in Egypt like Lanver Mak's *The British in Egypt: Community, Crime and Crises 1822-1922* and Robert L Tignor's *Modernization and British Colonial Rule in Egypt, 1882-1914*.[22] By demonstrating the recent history of the Copts, it is possible to better

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[21] Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1971); Judith Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); and Roger S Bagnall, ed. *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[22] Derek Hopwood, *Egypt, Politics and Society, 1945-1984*, 2nd ed (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1985); Joel Gordon, *Nasser: Hero of the Arab Nation*, Makers of the Muslim

understand potential reasons for emigration. I also used an assortment of primary sources, such as the oral histories I conducted, newspaper articles, first-hand accounts like Wael Ghonim's *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People Is Greater than the People in Power: A Memoir*, U.S. government human rights reports, and Census data to demonstrate immigration.[23]

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World (Oxford: Oneworld Publishing, 2006); Lanver Mak, *The British in Egypt: Community, Crime and Crises 1822-1922*, International Library of Historical Studies, v. 74 (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012); and Robert L Tignor, *Modernization and British Colonial Rule in Egypt, 1882-1914* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1966).

[23] Bob Smietana, "Coptic Christians in Nashville Demonstrate for Egypt," *USA TODAY*, accessed March 8, 2017, http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/08/19/tenn-coptic-christians-rally-egypt/2674545/; Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People Is Greater than the People in Power: A Memoir* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012); "Minority at Risk: Coptic Christians in Egypt," Pub. L. No. CSCE 112-1-8, § Commission on Security and Coorperation in Europe, 66 (2011), https://permanent.access.gpo.gov/gpo50245/MinorityatRiskCopticChristiansinEgypt%5b1%5d.pdf.

# CHAPTER TWO: HISTORY OF THE COPTS IN EGYPT

> "My life in Egypt, I love my country and I am still proud that I am one of the grandchild (sic) for the pharaoh's people who did that civilization in the past … But Egypt has been occupied for 2,400 years continuously … The people sometimes live without knowing the history. They are suffering and don't know why or how … Every people who occupy Egypt are putting a fingerprint on the country and that's why Egypt is not a homogeneous country … That's why my life was so hard in Egypt, very hard. Why very hard? Because you understand what's going on. If you don't understand, you're going to live with the flow and you'll never suffer … So I was having a lot of objection but there was no way to correct it."[1] – Michael Fouad

Christianity in Egypt is a complex tradition dating nearly to the time of Christ himself. Conventionally starting with the founding of the Egyptian Church by St. Mark, Christianity found a strong, early foothold in Egypt. In the third and fourth centuries, first ascetic and then coenobitic monasticism developed in Egypt. This strong tradition of Christianity carried over through doctrinal arguments and even the Arab invasion to thrive for over fifty years before Islam became the prevalent Egyptian religion. Despite persecution, the Coptic Church now continues as a minority Christian faction both in Egypt and through diaspora spread around the world.

## Early Church

Christianity came to Egypt relatively early in the first century A.D. While an exact date is not known, the tradition of the Coptic Church states that it was St. Mark who

[1] Michael Fouad, interview conducted by the author, Nashville, TN, March 3, 2017.

first brought Christianity to Alexandria around 43 A.D. after writing his gospel with St. Peter in Rome.[2] Although there is no concrete evidence for this belief, Christianity certainly made its way to Alexandria quickly. This was likely because of the atmosphere of scholarly learning and sharing, as well the large Jewish population of the city.[3] However, early Egyptian Christianity had its setbacks. Before Constantine made Christianity legal in the Roman Empire, there were several large-scale persecutions by Roman emperors and officials. The Roman emperor Decius began the first major persecution of Christians in Egypt (omitting many small local riots) when he ordered systematic forced sacrifices to Roman gods in 249 A.D. Those who disobeyed were imprisoned and killed. After the death of Decius and the end of the first persecution, the Church grew to include bishops in many of the nome (district) capitals. With the flourishing expansion of Christian culture also came a mass translation of the Bible, especially the New Testament scriptures, into the now fully developed Coptic language.[4]

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[2] Stephen Davis, *The Early Coptic Papacy: The Egyptian Church and Its Leadership in Late Antiquity* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2004), 5-6.

[3] According to William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 11-13, early Christianity often spread through Jewish communities in the East, since the new religion was largely founded on the Jewish religious tradition. The earliest evangelists, like St. Mark, were also converted Jews, which gave them access to various Jewish communities through shared cultural experience.

[4] Before the invention of Coptic, the last form of the Egyptian language which used predominantly Greek letters, there was no written Egyptian language for about two hundred years. Around 50 A.D. after the fall of the Ptolemaic dynasty to the Romans, written Demotic (the fifth phase of the Egyptian language) slowly faded from use in favor of Greek. From this point until the development of Coptic around the third

However, in 303 A.D. the emperor Diocletian issued an edict requiring that all the inhabitants of the Empire make sacrifices to the Roman gods, all Christian churches were to be destroyed, the scriptures burned, the arrest and torture of the clergy, and high-ranking Christian officials should be stripped of their offices and status. The subsequent series of arrests, tortures, and executions became known as the Great Persecution. The patriarch of Alexandria, Peter, fled the persecution and later justified his actions by identifying with the "Church of Martyrs" concept, by then prevalent in the Alexandrian Church.[5]

By the time of the Great Persecution, the influence of the idea of the "Church of the Martyrs" created by the Bishop Dionysius was so strong that even the great Saint Anthony,[6] known as the 'father of monks', traveled to Alexandria in an attempt to be martyred. Although unsuccessful (not for lack of trying, since Anthony openly spoke in

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century, there was simply no way to communicate in Egyptian, despite the language still being spoken. To communicate, native Egyptians had to use a Greek translator to write the letter for them, then the recipient also had to hire a translator to read the contents and reply. Of Coptic source material, about half are letters. Roger Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity.* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 237-239. Also see Roger Bagnall, *Everyday Writing in the Graeco- Roman East*, (Las Angeles: University of California Press, 2011).

[5] Davis, 37-35.

[6] For more information about St. Anthony, see Athanasius. *The Life of Saint Antony*, in *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, transl. H. Ellershaw, (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1927); Stephen Davis, *The Early Coptic Papacy: The Egyptian Church and Its Leadership in Late Antiquity* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2004); St. Anthony, *The Letters of St. Antony the Great*, transl. Derwas J. Chitty, Fairacres Publication; 50 (Oxford: S.L.G. Press, 1975).

favor of the Christians in the streets of Alexandria and even in a courtroom before a judge during the Great Persecution), Anthony's vigorous attempt shows the idealism in early Christianity placed on physical rejection of the world in favor of spirituality. This is apparent in Athanasius' account of Anthony and the persecution in his *Life of Saint Anthony*, where he notes that, "… he (Anthony) longed to suffer martyrdom."[7] The need to abandon the world either through martyrdom or asceticism is reflected in the monastic movement, in which men and some women would leave the comfort of the villages in favor of an isolated life in the desert where they could focus entirely on faith without distractions, that St. Anthony is credited with founding in Egypt. Peter Brown notes that this sense of "displacement" and leaving the "civilized world" was one of the keys to Anthony's teachings and early ascetic monasticism.[8]

The next major development in Egyptian asceticism was coenobitic (communal) monasticism, founded by Pachomius on the island of Tabennesi in Upper Egypt around 320 A.D.[9] In a series of visions, Pachomius was instructed by God to build a monastery where monks could live together to aid their spiritual journey and the community.[10] The

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[7] Athanasius. *The Life of Saint Antony*, in *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, transl. H. Ellershaw, (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1927), 613.

[8] Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1971), 98.

[9] Judith Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 61.

[10] Harmless, 118-119.

Egyptian people embraced the concept of monastic life and by the time of his death, the monasteries had attracted as many as seven thousand followers.[11] By the eighth century, monastic holdings made up around a third of the Egyptian land noted in tax records. Family-owned monasteries also became a popular trend among the wealthy, which then had to balance the founding principles of asceticism with the accommodation of the family's interaction with society. On an individual level, monks owned, sold, and rented their monastic cells, many of which archaeology has shown to have been well furnished with imported pottery.[12] As James Goehring states, "… the power, wealth, and prestige embodied in many of the monasteries, of whatever sort, seem to increase their presence in the very world that the myth of the desert taught the monks to flee."[13]

Outside the monasteries, Christianity had developed into a well-organized hierarchy with an extensive clergy and churches throughout Egypt by the mid-fifth century. The bishop of Alexandria, known as the patriarch, was one of the most influential theological forces in the Eastern Empire. In 431 A.D. at the Council of Ephesus, the patriarch Cyril the Great, along with the famous founder of the White

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[11] Philip Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth- Century Egypt*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 71-76.

[12] James E. Goehring, "Monasticism in Byzantine Egypt, Continuity and Memory," in *Egypt in the Byzantine World 300-700,* ed. Roger Bagnall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 396-7.

[13] Ibid, 392.

Monastery, Shenoute, doctrinally went head to head with the powerful bishop of Constantinople, Nestorious, over the role and title of Mary, Jesus' mother.[14] Likewise, although the Second Council of Ephesus in 449 A.D. was technically supposed to resolve the question of Christ's humanity/divinity, it became a power struggle between the Church leaders in Rome, Constantinople, and Alexandria in which the Alexandrian patriarch Dioscorus I triumphed theologically over the bishop of Constantinople Flavian.[15] However, this victory and the great influence of the Alexandrian patriarch were short-lived.

Under the Emperor Marcian in 451 A.D., the Council of Chalcedon convened to repudiate the Second Council of Ephesus. Dioscorus, the Alexandrian patriarch who did so well at the previous Council, was condemned and exiled.[16] This began a long period of schism and crisis in the Egyptian Church, which eventually caused the Church to break into two separate theological entities. The pro-Chalcedonian (and therefore official Byzantine) side supported the Council's findings that Christ had two complete natures, both fully divine and fully human. However, many Christians in Egypt, as well as many other parts of the Empire, retained their belief in the doctrine created at the Second Council of Ephesus, which stated that Christ only had one nature that combined man

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[14] Robert Ritner, "Egypt under Roman Rule: The Legacy of Ancient Egypt," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Islamic Egypt 640-1517* vol. 1, ed. Carl Petry, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 30.

[15] Ibid, 30.

[16] Ibid, 31.

and God.[17] The Egyptians maintained their support for Dioscorus and the monophysite theology. Although it was not strictly based on race, since by the fifth century Egypt had been a combination of Greek and native Egyptian peoples for around eight hundred years; the Egyptians were more likely to fall on the monophysitic side, while the Greeks followed the Empire and the Council.

## Islamic Annexation

The division in the Church was not the only problem facing the Byzantine administration by the early seventh century. First, in the mid-sixth century during the reign of Justinian, Prokopios reported a great plague that ravished the populations of the East:

> It started from the Egyptians who dwell in Pelusium. Then it divided and moved in one direction towards Alexandria and the rest of Egypt, and in the other direction it came to Palestine on the borders of Egypt; and from there it spread over the whole world, always moving forward and travelling at times favorable to it.[18]

Later, Heraclius, the Exarch of Africa, rebelled against the Byzantine emperor Phokas. In 608 A.D., his son Heraclius also used many Egyptian troops to successfully rebel against and remove Phokas as emperor. Because both Heracliuses used so many troops from

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[17] Jonathan Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 23.

[18] Prokopios, *History of the Wars*, vol. II, transl. H.B Dewing, xxii 7-8. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16764/16764-h/16764-h.htm

Egypt in the rebellions against Phokas (because Egypt is the closest African province to Constantinople), the loss of Egyptian life was heavy.[19] Then, the Persian emperor Khusro II invaded the Byzantine Empire and conquered Antioch, Jerusalem, and eventually Egypt in 619 A.D.[20] The country was thus weakened by years of religious, social, and military struggle, as well as a severe plague, when the Islamic army conquered Egypt.

After winning Syria and Palestine, the Muslim army entered Egypt at the end of 639 A.D. The army was a relatively small and ragtag group consisting of around four thousand troops, mostly cavalry. The leader, general 'Amr Ibn al-'As, was supposedly the one to push for the invasion of Egypt. According to tenth century Muslim chronicler Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, 'Amr Ibn al-'As said to the Caliph 'Umar, "The conquest of Egypt will give great power to the Muslims and will be a great aid for them, for it is the wealthiest land and the weakest in fighting and war power."[21] Strategically, Egypt was not only a vital

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[19] Walter Kaegi, "Egypt on the Eve of Muslim Conquest," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Islamic Egypt 640-1517* vol. 1, ed. Carl Petry, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 37.

[20] Brown, 169.

[21] Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, *Futuh*, in Petra Sijpesteijn, "The Arab Conquest of Egypt and the Beginning of Muslim Rule," in *Egypt in the Byzantine World 300-700,* ed. Roger Bagnall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 440. According to Sijpesteijn, there were rumors that the Copts actually aided the invading Arab army in an effort to throw off the yoke of Byzantine religious oppression. Although this myth was prevalent in early scholarship on Copts, there is little concrete evidence supporting the theory. It is likely that some Copts did help the army, while others likely fought with the Byzantines to oppose the Muslims. Regardless, Byzantine control over Egypt was weak at best during this period, so the invading army would likely have had little trouble conquering the region with or without the help of the Copts.

resource for grain and taxes, but also the lynchpin giving the Islamic army access to the rest of North Africa. In November 641 A.D., Alexandria signed a treaty with the Arabs agreeing to surrender the city by September 642.[22] Although there was a rebellion in Alexandria backed by the Byzantine navy in 646 A.D., after the capitulation of Alexandria in 641 A.D. Egypt was essentially fully under the control of the Arabic army.

Life for the Egyptians for about the first fifty years after the country came under Islamic control did not change a great deal. The Arabs left the Byzantine administrative system largely intact for over one hundred years, only replacing the highest officials with Muslims. They did not settle in the Byzantine capital of Alexandria, but instead created a new capital at Fustat near the fortress of Babylon that the armies first conquered.[23] In fact, because the goal of the Islamic army was not to convert conquered peoples but to expand territory, for the first hundred years after the initial occupation the Arabs did not promote Islamization among the Egyptian people. They lived mostly in the new towns they created and formed a small group of social elite controlling the country.[24]

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[22] Hugh Kennedy, "Egypt as a Province in the Islamic Caliphate 641-868," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Islamic Egypt 640-1517* vol. 1, ed. Carl Petry, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 62-63.

[23] Sijpesteijn, 444-451.

[24] Wipszycka, 346.

## Middle Ages and Ottoman Period

After the new Arab government had full control of Egypt, the Church was initially allowed to keep its property and continue collecting taxes while dealing with the Muslim administration as advocates for the greater Christian community. Christian communities were considered religious minorities (*dhimmis*) and collected around the churches both in the city and rural settings, making the Church the center of Christian life in charge of charity, organization, and education.[25] Throughout the Middle Ages, monasteries fostered much of the Christian scholarship that kept the Coptic language alive through reproduction of old texts and the creation of new theological manuscripts, while serving as important economic factors for the communities around them.[26] The autonomy from the Byzantine Empire is what then allowed the Coptic Church to develop and gain its own identity outside the previous theological arguments.[27]

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[25] Terry G. Wilfong, "The non-Muslim Communities: Christian Communities," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Islamic Egypt 640-1517* vol. 1, ed. Carl Petry, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 188.

[26] Ibid, 188-190. Continuity of the Church was of importance to Coptic scholars during the Middle ages. This was characterized by the copying and editing of old manuscripts. These scholars especially emphasized the idea of the Church of the Martyrs. For more on this, see Mark N. Swanson, *The Coptic Papacy in Islamic Egypt (641 - 1517)*, The Popes of Egypt, a history of the Coptic Church and its patriarchs from Saint Mark to Pope Shenouda III / ed. by Stephen J. Davis (Cairo: American Univ. in Cairo Press, 2010) and Arietta Papaconstantinou, "Historiography, Hagiography, and the Making of the Coptic 'Church of the Martyrs' in Early Islamic Egypt," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 60 (2006): 65–86.

[27] Wipszycka, 346.

The ease with which the Arab conquest had fit into Egyptian society began to change in the early ninth century under the Abbasid government. Because the governor changed the system of taxation, there were many local rebellions in the Delta, which were quickly and decisively suppressed by the Arabs. This created a distrust between the Muslims and Egyptian people that disrupted the easier, early transition. Also, although the Arab ruling class did not initially seek to convert the native Egyptian population to Islam, in the late seventh to early eighth centuries there was a mass conversion of the peasantry and merchant classes. This began with the merchants, who sought to advance their standing with the elite by converting to Islam and taking Arab names. For the peasantry, after the mistrust of Christians created by the rebellions, it was easier for some to convert than to try to remain Christian.[28] By the Mamluk period in the thirteenth century, the number of Christians in Egypt had reached its lowest point due to heavy taxation, crushed revolts, and the official destruction of churches.[29]

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[28] Ibid, 346-347. For more on Copts during this period, see Kurt J. Werthmuller, *Coptic Identity and Ayyubid Politics in Egypt, 1218-1250* (Cairo: American Univ. in Cairo Press, 2010).

[29] Wilfong, 196-7. According to Guirguis and van Doorn-Harder, in 1200, there were 2,048 Coptic churches in Egypt and 834 monasteries; in 1430, 193 churches and 74 monasteries; in the late 16th century after the Mamluk period, there were only 112 churches and 5 monasteries. See Magdi Guirguis and Nelly van Doorn-Harder, *The Emergence of the Modern Coptic Papacy: The Egyptian Church and Its Leadership from the Ottoman Period to the Present*, The Popes of Egypt, vol. 3 (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2011), 6-7.

While the Mamluk reign was difficult for the Christian communities, the early Ottoman occupation and conquest was challenging for the entire Egyptian population.[30] The Mamluks and Ottomans were both Turkish speaking, Sunni Muslim groups, with the Mamluks occupying Egypt, the Levant, and the Arabian Peninsula and the Ottomans in Turkey. Despite these similarities, increased pressure from the Shi'a Safavid Empire in the East and the Ottomans' penchant for expansion led them to invade the Mamluk's territories to enlarge their own holdings and profits.[31] After the Ottoman invasion, life for the Egyptians in many ways continued in much the same cadence as before.

The Ottomans, like many of the conquerors before them, left much of the effective Mamluk government structure of taxation and administrative law in place. The Copts were still allowed to elect a pope, who acted as an intermediary between the Muslim government and Christian people, and maintained their communities and churches.[32] However, the Ottomans also were described by the Egyptian chronicler

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[30] The conquest of Egypt by the Ottomans was very well documented. Arabic, Turkish, Jewish, and European sources describe the invasion and subsequent first few years of Ottoman rule. Some of these authors include Egyptian chroniclers Muhammad Ibn Iyas and Muhammad Ibn Zunbul, Muhammad Ibn Tulun of Damascas, Ottoman chronicler Hoca Sa'duddin, and 'Abd al-Samad al-Diyarbakri who translated Muhammad Ibn Iyas' work from Arabic to Turkish and added more Ottoman perspective.

[31] Michael Winter, "The Ottoman Occupation," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Islamic Egypt 640-1517* vol. 1, ed. Carl Petry, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 490-3.

[32] Magdi Guirguis and Nelly van Doorn-Harder, *The Emergence of the Modern Coptic Papacy: The Egyptian Church and Its Leadership from the Ottoman Period to the Present*, The Popes of Egypt, vol. 3 (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2011), 9-11. Although the Copts were allowed to keep their churches and pope, the Ottomans

Muhammad Ibn Iyas as less religious and many of the traditionally celebrated Islamic holidays were not observed in the same lavish abundance as before. While this alleged lack of religious fervor may have benefited the Christian population after the trials of the Mamluk period, the Ottoman policy of deportation (*surgun*) did not. Many political opponents, notables, and Christian artisans were extradited to Istanbul to use their skills on various building projects.[33]

The incursion of Western civilization into Egypt and the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries again marked a transformation in the treatment and status of Christians. Before the nineteenth century, *dhimmis* may have been required under Ottoman law to distinguish their religious status by a marker or different form of dress. Yet, despite this distinction, *dhimmis* communities were still well integrated into urban life and allowed to self-govern to an extent.[34] After the efforts of missionaries and penetration of Western Christian ideas into the Ottoman Empire, the Ottoman's traditional tolerance of the *dhimmis* communities degraded to suspicion and unease. The *dhimmis* groups retracted into marginalized communities distinct from the rest of the population.[35]

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took all legal power away from the pope so that he was more of a spiritual leader and less political.

[33] Winter, 505.

[34] Jonathan Porter Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 265-6.

[35] Ibid, 267-69.

## British Involvement in Egypt

The most prominent Western entity to be involved in Egypt in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the British Empire. For the British, Egypt was a resource for high quality, cheap cotton and an extremely important connection to the eastern part of their empire.[36] The overland trade route to India was essential to commerce, so Cairo became a hub of British economic activity and migration. With the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869, Egypt's value to the British increased to the point that they took over the country's finances. After the 'Urabi Revolt in 1882, Britain gave up the pretense of Egyptian governmental control and placed the country under a 'Veiled Protectorate' in which British citizens were placed in key positions to run the government and the ability to protect their economic interests.[37] Despite a certain respect for the Copts among British scholars and authorities, they were subjected to the racism inherent in colonialism as well as *dhimmis* status since Egypt was still technically part of the Ottoman Empire. [38] This meant that, while there was extensive protection for Western

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[36] Robert L Tignor, *Modernization and British Colonial Rule in Egypt, 1882-1914* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1966), 12.

[37] Lanver Mak, *The British in Egypt: Community, Crime and Crises 1822-1922*, International Library of Historical Studies, v. 74 (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 10-11.

missionaries in Egypt, the Copts and those who converted to Christianity were still not protected in the legal system from persecution.[39]

Although the Ottomans sided with the Axis Powers in World War I, Egypt's unique position under the authority of the British, the empire caused the government to cooperate with the Allies. Britain then used Egypt as a strategic base for their war operations in Africa, which caused even more resentment among the Egyptian people. After the war and the end of the Ottoman Empire in 1919, Britain agreed that Egypt could be a self-governing state, although they still were involved in running the economy and government.[40]

## Nasser and pan-Arab Nationalism

This continued tension between the Egyptians and the interference of the British came to a head with the Revolution of 1952, masterminded by Gamal Abdel Nasser. After gaining the presidency, Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal and made vast

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[38] Copts were respected by the British for being Christian, even though they were Orthodox. British scholars believed that Copts were the 'true Egyptians' descended directly from the Egyptians of the pharaonic period, whereas Muslims were descended from the Arab invaders. In truth, many people converted to Islam over the nearly 1,200 years that Muslims have ruled Egypt and there is no 'true' Egyptian people. See Kyriakos Mikhail, *Copts and Moslems under British Control: a Collection of Facts and a Résumé of Authoritative Opinions on the Coptic Question* (Port Washington, N.Y: Kennikat Press, 1922), for a primary source exemplifying this belief.

[39] Mak, 12. For more about Copts during British rule, see Vivian Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt: Challenges of Modernization and Identity*, Library of Modern Middle East Studies 99 (London; New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2011).

[40] Derek Hopwood, *Egypt, Politics and Society, 1945-1984*, 2nd ed (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1985), 13-15.

improvements in modernizing Egypt's industry and farming.[41] He also became the face and leader of the pan-Arab movement, which advocated for unity among the Arab nations in the Middle East.

A reaction to the Western colonialism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, pan-Arabism became popular in the Middle East during the middle of the twentieth century. It promoted secular unity across the Middle East in an effort to establish greater political and economic power. The implementation of the pan-Arabic ideology came to fruition in the United Arab Republic, established between Syria and Egypt during Nasser's presidency in 1958. This union combined the governance of Syria and Egypt, although Egypt had a greater share of representation and power.[42] The United Arab Republic disbanded in 1961 after disputes between Syrian politicians and the Egyptian controlled government, and the idea of pan-Arabic unity gave way to pan-Islamic unity.[43]

Due to the secular nature of Nasser's socialist government, it was fairly supportive of Egypt's Coptic Christian population. The Copts backed Nasser's social welfare and nationalist agenda, and in return he allowed them to build twenty to thirty churches a year, some with state funds. Coptic cultural identity experienced a

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[41] Ibid, 37-9.

[42] Joel Gordon, *Nasser: Hero of the Arab Nation*, Makers of the Muslim World (Oxford: Oneworld Publ, 2006), 59-61.

[43] Ibid, 69-71.

resurgence in popularity with the Sunday School Movement, which promoted modernization of the Church and a greater understanding of the Coptic language.[44] Nasser also appointed Copts as representatives to parliament. Despite these concessions, many still claimed that there was discrimination against Christians in governmental and bureaucratic service and promotions.[45] This bias, as well as economic instability, led to many Copts, especially the youth, being forced to find work outside Egypt in the 1950's and 1960's. In close-knit Coptic families and communities, this created a sense of displacement where expats often felt disconnected from their home.[46]

## Coptic Diaspora and Immigration

This diaspora[47] was exacerbated by the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic extremism in second half of the twentieth century. After Nasser's death in 1970,

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[44] Sana Hassan, *Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt: The Century-Long Struggle for Coptic Equality* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 74-6. The Sunday School Movement began as a reaction to foreign missionaries at the turn of the twentieth century, especially Protestants. The Protestant churches presented a more engaging style of worship that attracted many young Copts. The movement grew in the 1940's and 1950's when many Copts graduated from university and applied their new ideas of social equality and modernization.

[45] Ibid, 57-8. For the first time, many Coptic youths graduated from universities in the mid-twentieth century and were excited to become involved in Nasser's government. However, contrary the state rhetoric, these graduates soon found that they were passed over for government jobs in favor of their Muslim counterparts.

[46] Edward Wakin, *A Lonely Minority: The Modern Story of Egypt's Copts* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963), 160.

his successor Anwar al-Sadat negotiated a peace treaty with Israel, which many Egyptians believed to be abandoning the Palestinians. This, combined with an effort by Sadat to garner support for his regime by promoting Islam, led to violent protests and an increase of support for extremism and the Muslim Brotherhood during the 1970s.[48] The Muslim Brotherhood rejected Nasser's ideas of nationalism, socialism, and progress by Western standards in favor of a return to the purist version of Islamic interpretation. This Islamist ideology promotes violence against nonbelievers who refuse to convert, which makes Coptic Christians the obvious target in Egypt.[49] As Michael Fouab noted during an interview of his immigration to the United States in the early 1980s,

> You say your opinion, and your opinion is not respected for the corruption. So, I decided to come to the United States because there was a tragic situation happened to me. I restored a Jew (sic) synagogue, I'm Christian but I restored a Jew synagogue, and they made me feel that I made the biggest mistake of my life and I deserved to die for it. So I said, okay well we're going to stop that. And I'm going to start a new life in a new country with some Christian people like me, and I'm never going to bother nobody and nobody ever

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[47] Defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary as, "the movement, migration, or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland." "Definition of DIASPORA," Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed March 10, 2017, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diaspora.

[48] Wakin, 127-128; Hassan, 106.

[49] Habib C. Malik, *Islamism and the Future of the Christians of the Middle East*, Hoover Institution Press Publication, no. 585 (Stanford, Calif: Hoover Institution Press, 2010), 38-9.

> going to bother me. I'm live like a human, just a regular human, and that's why I am here.[50]

In the late 1970s, Christian and Muslim students met in violent clashes, churches and homes were burned, and churches in Alexandria bombed. When the Coptic pope Shenuda III publically denounced Sadat's proposal to make *shari'a* law the basis of Egyptian legislation, Sadat had him exiled to a monastery in the Natrun Valley. Sadat then imprisoned over 1,500 political opponents, including Copts, before being assassinated in 1981.[51]

Under Mubarak, the State reversed Sadat's policy of appeasement and reached a tense alliance with the Church under the presence of a mutual enemy in the Islamic militants. Pope Shenuda came out of exile and resumed control of the Church. He acted as an intermediary between the government and the Copts, and changed his rhetoric from confrontation to pacification by receiving state officials at Christmas and Easter.[52] When the Islamic militants changed their target from just religious minorities to tourists,

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[50] Michael Fouab, interview with the author, Nashville, TN, March 3, 2017.

[51] Hassan, 108-110. Under Sadat, one of the worst incidents of community violence in modern Egyptian history occurred in al-Zawiya al-Hamra when a Copt shot at Muslim vigilantes during a dispute over the building of a church. For several days, the government did nothing to stop the bloodshed. Copts were shot, disemboweled, apartment buildings burned with the residents barricaded inside, and children thrown from windows.

[52] Ibid, 113-4. For more on the complex political relationship between the Coptic Church and the Mubarak regime, see Mariz Tadros, "Vicissitudes in the Entente between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the State in Egypt (1952-2007)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41, no. 2 (2009): 269–87.

businesses, and security officials in an effort to gain the attention of the government. This helped turn both the Egyptian population and government against the radicals, although it did not eliminate violence against Christians.[53] Throughout the 1990's and early 2000's, periodic violence against Christians erupted around Egypt. In many cases, such as an incident in 2000 when twenty Copts were killed and none of the ninety-eight accused murders were found guilty, the Egyptian government under Mubarak still blatantly ignored religious violence against minorities.[54]

While Christians faced intermittent violence during the Mubarak regime, the anarchy and Islamic extremism of the post-Revolution period has promoted a climate where Copts are frequently targeted. The revolution in Egypt began on January 25, 2011, as part of the greater Arab Spring movement.[55] Facebook and Twitter pages called for mass protests against Mubarak and the government on January 25, which led to days of clashes between protesters and security forces that eventually led to the end of Mubarak's dictatorship. In the moments after the Revolution, the future for Christians

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[53] Ibid, 117-8.

[54] Rachel M. Scott, *The Challenge of Political Islam: Non-Muslims and the Egyptian State* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2010), 74-5.

[55] The Arab Spring was a series of protests around the Middle East that led to the dictators of several countries being contested and even deposed. The protests were both violent and non-violent, and the struggle led directly to civil wars in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Libya. For more on the Arab Spring, see Hal Marcovitz, *The Arab Spring Uprisings* (San Diego, CA: ReferencePoint Press, Inc, 2014) and I. William Zartman, ed., *Arab Spring: Negotiating in the Shadow of the Intifadat*, Studies in Security and International Affairs (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015).

and Muslims to peacefully coexist in Egypt looked bright. As Wael Ghonim stated, "(After Mubarak announced his resignation, in Tahrir Square) … and I called on a young Christian man to lead a prayer for the martyrs as well. Everyone started chanting, 'Muslims and Christians, we are all Egyptians!' Those moments in Tahrir Square that night were the happiest of my life."[56]

Despite the hopeful outlook right after the Revolution, relations between Christians and Muslims in Egypt have further devolved as the Muslim Brotherhood gained greater control of the Egyptian government. The July 2011 Congressional hearing before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe for the One Hundred and Twelfth Congress, "Minority at Risk: Coptic Christians in Egypt," found that since the Revolution, churches were burned and bombed, homes destroyed, dozens of Copts killed, Coptic women forced to marry Muslim men and convert, and that "early signs look discouraging."[57] Tensions about Christians building and renovating churches remain high and are the attributed cause of many of the post-Revolution attacks. Although

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[56] Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People Is Greater than the People in Power: A Memoir* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), 280-2. This is the first- hand account of the Revolution by activist and Google executive Wael Ghonim, who's Facebook page helped initiate and coordinate the protests. It provides a unique insight on how technology factored in to the Egyptian Revolution.

[57] "Minority at Risk: Coptic Christians in Egypt," Pub. L. No. CSCE 112-1-8, § Commission on Security and Coorperation in Europe, 66 (2011), 2. https://permanent.access.gpo.gov/gpo50245/MinorityatRiskCopticChristiansinEgypt%5b1%5d.pdf. Also see "Egypt 2012 International Religious Freedom Report" (United States Department of State: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2012), https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/208598.pdf.

Egyptian law still requires Christians to receive permission to repair or build churches, pressures from the popularization of Islamism erupt when there is the perception of Christian expansion.[58]

It is not only tensions between Muslims and Copts that cause Christians to emigrate from Egypt. The pull of better job opportunities and an existence free of discriminatory laws encourages many Copts to leave Egypt for Canada, the United States, and Australia, as well as countries closer to home like Greece. However, it is the richest and those with the most promising careers who are able to leave, which further complicates the situation for the Church in Egypt. When more of the wealthy and influential Copts leave, those left behind have even less money and power.[59] While this unintentionally helps to further exacerbate the issues for those that remain, those that move abroad still remain close to the relatives and churches that they left behind in Egypt.

As Eliot Dickinson notes in his book about Coptic migration to Michigan, "In the course of my research, at the end of an interview with a well-respected elder of St. Mark Church, I was gently advised not to dwell on the Muslim-Christian strife in Egypt … Unfortunately, it is a pressing human rights issue that cannot be ignored, and it plays a

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[58] "Egypt: New Church Law Discriminates Against Christians," *Human Rights Watch*, September 15, 2016, https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/09/15/egypt-new-church-law-discriminates-against-christians.

[59] Samuel Tadros, *Motherland Lost: The Egyptian and Coptic Quest for Modernity*, Hoover Institution Press Publication, no. 638 (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 2013), 211-2.

significant and unique role in the story of Coptic immigration ..."[60] Likewise, it is not my intent to focus on the negative relationship between Muslims and Copts in Egypt. However, a brief coverage of the complexities of this relationship and the role it has played in the development of the Coptic community, as well as the influence of external global factors and economy, is necessary to understand the causation of Coptic immigration to the United States.

[60] Eliot Dickinson, *Copts in Michigan*, Discovering the Peoples of Michigan (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2008), 20-1.

# CHAPTER THREE: ORAL HISTORIES AND COPTIC IDENTITY IN NASHVILLE

> We have this unique history, unique heritage, of having the faith from the time of Saint Mark and the Apostles of Christ. It's hard in the sense that trying to make it known in the community when the churches are still very Egyptian culturally.[1] – Tony Hasaballa

The last fifty years have marked huge changes and modernization in the structure of the Coptic Church, both in Egypt and abroad. For the first time in its history, clergy and laity are now having to navigate the expansion of the Church into a global entity because of immigration. Until the 1950s, very few Egyptians permanently left Egypt. To accommodate the new waves of immigration, however, the Church has now established dioceses with bishops and a large network of churches and priests around the world since the mid-twentieth century.[2] In the United States alone, the U.S. National Orthodox Census states that there were 172 Coptic parishes in 2010 (an increase of fifty- six parishes since 2000), as shown in Figure 1.[3] This exponential growth has raised

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[1] Tony Hasaballa, interview by the author, Nashville, TN, March 3, 2017.

[2] Elhamy Khalil, *The Making of a Diocese: The Early Years of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Los Angeles, Southern California and Hawaii* (Los Angeles, CA: Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Los Angeles, Southern California and Hawaii, 2008), 3-7.

[3] Alexei D. Krindatch, "US National Orthodox Census," Religious Congregations and Membership Study 2010 (Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, 2010), http://www.hartfordinstitute.org/research/2010-usorthodox-census.pdf, 6. See **Appendix** for a table comparing the number of Coptic parishes to those of other Orthodox denominations in the U.S.

questions among Copts in Egypt and the United States about cultural identity and the future of the Church as the Coptic diaspora continues to expand and disperse.

**Tab.3 Orthodox Christian Churches in the USA: Change in Number of Parishes in 2000-2010 (6)**

| Orthodox Christian Churches in the USA | Number of parishes in 2000 | Number of parishes in 2010 | Changes in number of parishes: % |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America | 501 | 525 | + 5% |
| 2. Orthodox Church in America | 456 | 551 | + 21% |
| 3. Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese | 206 | 248 | +20% |
| 4. Serbian Orthodox Church in North America | 118 | 122 | + 3% |
| 5. Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia | 128 | 138 | + 8% |
| 6. Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA | 106 | 100 | - 9% |
| 7. Patriarchal Parishes of the Moscow Patriarchate | 32 | 30 | - 6% |
| 8. Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese | 14 | 31 | + 121% |
| 9. American Carpatho Russian Orthodox Diocese | 76 | 79 | + 4% |
| 10. Vicariate for the Palestinian / Jordanian Orthodox Christian Communities | N / A | 9 | N / A |
| 11. Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Diocese | 9 | 20 | + 122% |
| 12. Albanian Orthodox Diocese of America | 2 | 2 | 0% |
| 13. Macedonian Orthodox Church: American Diocese | 16 | 20 | + 25% |
| 14. Holy Orthodox Church in North America | 25 | 27 | + 8% |
| 15. Coptic Orthodox Church | 116 | 172 | + 48% |
| 16. Armenian Church of North America (Catholicosate Etchmiadzin) | 89 | 94 | + 6% |
| 17. Armenian Apostolic Church of America (Catholicosate of Cilicia) | 38 | 37 | - 3% |
| 18. Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church | 59 | 94 | + 59% |
| 19. Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch | 23 | 32 | + 39% |
| 20. Malankara Archdiocese of the Syrian Orthodox Church in North America | 22 | 41 | + 86% |
| **TOTAL (7)** | **2036** | **2368** | + 16% |

(6) The 2000 data were obtained in the study *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States. 2000. Glenmary Research Center: Nashville, Tennessee* (published in 2002). Both 2000 and 2010 data were gathered by the same person – Alexei Krindatch. Both 2000 and 2010 studies gathered data on church adherents and the number of parishes. It should be noted, however, that data on adherents in 2000 study were in many cases based on estimates and various statistical calculations, while 2010 figures are more accurate and precise, because they were obtained directly from the local parishes. In addition, in 2000 study, we were unable to get data on adherents for #4, 5 and 15. Therefore, changes in number of parishes (rather than in number of adherents) during 2000-2010 serves as a more reliable indicator for evaluating of growth/decline for each Church.
N / A – not applies, because "Vicariate for the Palestinian / Jordanian Orthodox Christian Communities" did not exist in 2000.
(7) Not counting # 10, because "Vicariate for the Palestinian / Jordanian Orthodox Christian Communities" did not exist in 2000.

Figure 1. Created by Alexei Krindatch for the Religious Congregations and Membership Study 2010.

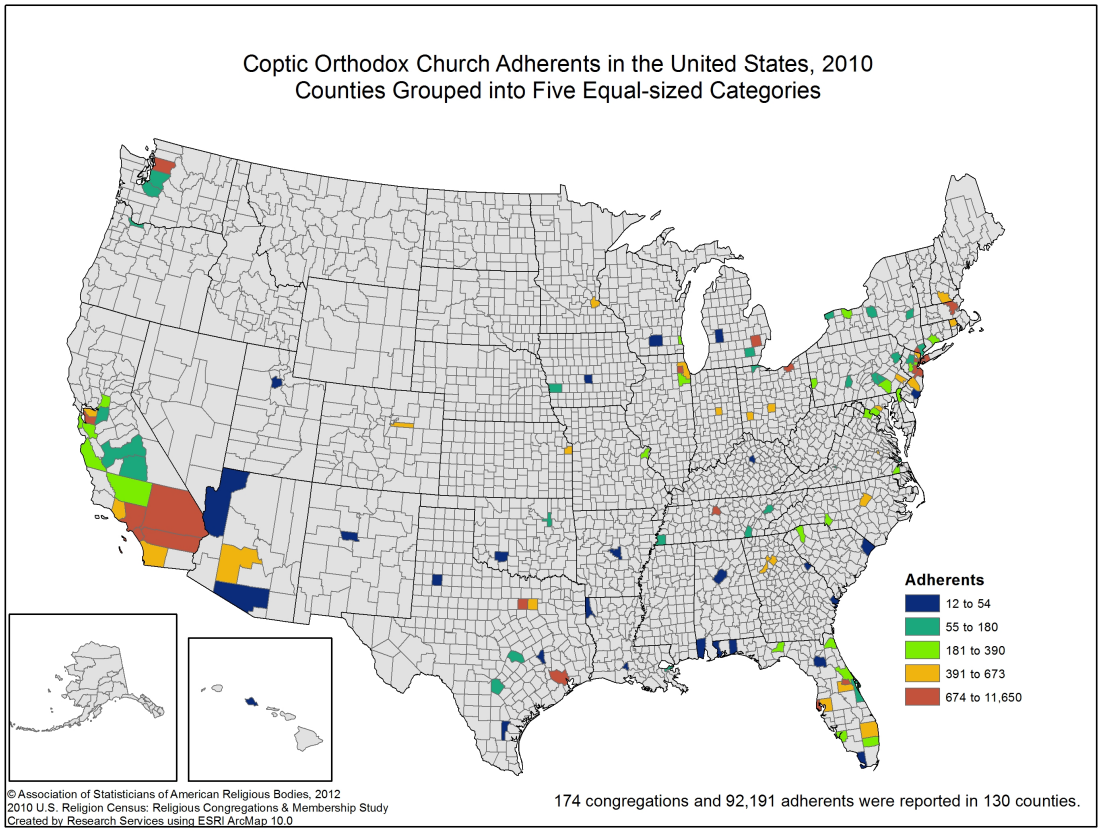


Figure 2. Map for the U.S. Religious Census of the Religious Congregations and Membership Study 2010.

## Copts in the United States

The first small wave of Coptic Christians came to the United States under the 1965 Immigration Act, which modified the previous 1924 Origins Act to allow more immigration from non-European countries. This number quickly swelled after Egypt lost the Six Day War to Israel in 1967, since social unrest historically tends to cause problems for the Copts. By 1970, Pope Shenuda III appointed Father Gabriel Abdelsayed as the

first Coptic priest with an official posting.[4] The number of Copts and churches have both grown exponentially in light of the persecution in Egypt in the last fifty years, and there are now over two hundred Coptic churches around the country (Figure 2).[5]

Until an exact survey is conducted by the Coptic Church, it is impossible to know with complete accuracy the number of Copts living in the United States at this time. Nearly every group, scholar, and organization has a different population estimate, and they vary greatly. The International Organization for Migration says there were around 533,000 Copts living in US, Canada, and Australia in 2010, while Ghada Botros numbers them at around 700,000 in the U.S. alone.[6] Likewise, the U.S. National Orthodox Census reports around 92,000 Copts in the United States (Figure 3), and Nadia Marzoui's article "The U.S. Coptic Diaspora and the Limit of Polarization" estimates 350,000 to 450,000.[7]

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[4] Eliot Dickinson, *Copts in Michigan*, Discovering the Peoples of Michigan (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2008), 23-4.

[5] Nadia Marzouki, "The U.S. Coptic Diaspora and the Limit of Polarization," *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 14, no. 3 (July 2, 2016): 263.

[6] Jennifer Brinkerhoff and Liesl Riddle, "General Findings: Coptic Diaspora Survey" (George Washington University: The Elliott School of International Affairs, February 23, 2012), http://www.copticorphans.org/sites/all/uploads/reports/CopticSurveyReport2-2012.pdf, 5, and Ghada Botros, "Religious Identity as an Historical Narrative: Coptic Orthodox Immigrant Churches and the Representation of History," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 19, no. 2 (June 1, 2006): 195.

[7] Alexei D. Krindatch, "US National Orthodox Census," Religious Congregations and Membership Study 2010 (Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, 2010), http://www.hartfordinstitute.org/research/2010-usorthodox-census.pdf, 4, and Nadia Marzouki, "The U.S. Coptic Diaspora and the Limit of Polarization," *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 14, no. 3 (July 2, 2016): 263.

**Tab.1 Orthodox Christian Churches in the USA (as of 2010): Number of Adherents (1) and Regular Church Attendees (2)**

| Orthodox Christian Churches in the USA (3) | Total Adherents | Regular Church Attendees | % of regular attendees in the total of adherents |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America | 476,900 | 107,400 | 23% |
| 2. Orthodox Church in America | 84,900 | 33,800 | 40% |
| 3. Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese | 74,600 | 27,300 | 37% |
| 4. Serbian Orthodox Church in North America | 68,800 | 15,400 | 22% |
| 5. Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia | 27,700 | 9,000 | 32% |
| 6. Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA | 22,400 | 6,900 | 31% |
| 7. Patriarchal Parishes of the Moscow Patriarchate | 12,400 | 1,900 | 15% |
| 8. Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese | 11,200 | 2,200 | 20% |
| 9. American Carpatho Russian Orthodox Diocese | 10,400 | 4,900 | 47% |
| 10. Vicariate for the Palestinian / Jordanian Orthodox Christian Communities | 6,800 | 815 | 12% |
| 11. Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Diocese | 2,600 | 1,200 | 46% |
| 12. Albanian Orthodox Diocese of America | 700 | 185 | 26% |
| 13. Macedonian Orthodox Church: American Diocese | 15,500 | 1,700 | 11% |
| 14. Holy Orthodox Church in North America | 2,200 | 1,700 | 77% |
| 15. Coptic Orthodox Church | 92,100 | 46,900 | 51% |
| 16. Armenian Church of North America (Catholicosate Etchmiadzin) | 64,500 | 8,300 | 13% |
| 17. Armenian Apostolic Church of America (Catholicosate of Cilicia) | 30,500 | 7,700 | 25% |
| 18. Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church | 17,000 | 9,000 | 53% |
| 19. Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch | 15,700 | 4,200 | 27% |
| 20. Malankara Archdiocese of the Syrian Orthodox Church in North America | 6,400 | 3,400 | 53% |
| **TOTAL** | **1,043,300** | **293,900** | **28%** |

(1) **"Adherents"** are defined as the most inclusive category of Church membership. Data on adherents were obtained directly from the local Orthodox parishes by asking parish clergy: "Approximately how many individual persons in total are associated in any way with the life of your parish: counting adults and children, regular and occasional attendees, paid stewards and persons who do not contribute financially?"

(2) Data on **"regular attendees"** were obtained directly from the local Orthodox parishes by asking parish clergy: "Approximately, how many persons - including adults and children - attend Liturgy in your parish on a typical Sunday?"

(3) The Churches #15-20 belong to the category of the so-called "Oriental Orthodox Churches" (also known as "pre-Chalcedonian" Churches, because of their rejection of the Christological definitions of the Council of Chalcedon in 451). They are in full communion with one another, but not with the other (# 1 -14) Churches. The Churches # 13-14 are Churches of irregular status: that is, the other Orthodox Churches consider them "uncanonical" (unlawful).

Figure 3. This figure was created by Alexei Krindatch for the Religious Congregations and Membership Study 2010.

The reason for this massive difference between various scholars and organizations is that the U.S. Census, which gives an official number to the population and ethnic groups

living in the U.S., does not currently document different religions. This means that, while we can estimate Copt numbers based on the overall Egyptian population in the United States and Nashville (Figure 4), there will be no official record of the number of Coptic people living in the U.S. until (and if) the Coptic Orthodox Church does an official census.

Population Group: Egyptian (402-403)

1 - 27 of 27

| Subject | United States | | Metropolitan Government CCD, Davidson County, Tennessee | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| NATIVITY AND PLACE OF BIRTH | | | | |
| Total population | 142,832 | 100.0 | 918 | 100.0 |
| Native | 50,707 | 35.5 | 141 | 15.4 |
| Born in United States | 48,636 | 34.1 | 131 | 14.3 |
| State of residence | 35,597 | 24.9 | 81 | 8.8 |
| Different state | 13,039 | 9.1 | 50 | 5.4 |
| Born outside United States | 2,071 | 1.4 | 10 | 1.1 |
| Foreign born | 92,125 | 64.5 | 777 | 84.6 |
| Entered 1990 to March 2000 | 40,111 | 28.1 | 679 | 74.0 |
| Naturalized citizen | 52,332 | 36.6 | 123 | 13.4 |
| Not a citizen | 39,793 | 27.9 | 654 | 71.2 |
| REGION OF BIRTH OF FOREIGN BORN | | | | |
| Total (excluding born at sea) | 92,125 | 100.0 | 777 | 100.0 |
| Europe | 1,192 | 1.3 | 11 | 1.4 |
| Asia | 2,571 | 2.8 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Africa | 87,118 | 94.6 | 766 | 98.6 |
| Oceania | 88 | 0.1 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Latin America | 448 | 0.5 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Northern America | 708 | 0.8 | 0 | 0.0 |
| LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME | | | | |
| Population 5 years and over | 130,540 | 100.0 | 801 | 100.0 |
| English only | 29,918 | 22.9 | 58 | 7.2 |
| Language other than English | 100,622 | 77.1 | 743 | 92.8 |
| Speak English less than "very well" | 34,213 | 26.2 | 418 | 52.2 |
| Spanish | 1,963 | 1.5 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Speak English less than "very well" | 440 | 0.3 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Other Indo-European languages | 4,725 | 3.6 | 29 | 3.6 |
| Speak English less than "very well" | 1,050 | 0.8 | 22 | 2.7 |
| Asian and Pacific Island languages | 198 | 0.2 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Speak English less than "very well" | 21 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 4, Matrices PCT35, PCT36, PCT38, PCT43, PCT45, PCT47, PCT49, PCT61, PCT64, PCT67, and PCT70.

Figure 4. Created by the U.S. Census Bureau to compare Egyptian Population in the U.S. and Metro Nashville in 2013.

Krindatch states that another reason for the major discrepancy in projected numbers of Copts in the U.S. is that Orthodox headquarters sometimes exaggerate the number of members because they count everyone affiliated with their denomination rather than just church attendees.[8] Likewise, advocacy groups tend to estimate populations on the higher end of the spectrum to add validity and weight to their arguments, whereas groups like the U.S. National Orthodox Census may approximate a little low in an effort to counterbalance the exorbitantly high number purported by other groups. According to the U.S. Census Bureau in Figure 5, there were about 250,000 Egyptian (not just Coptic) immigrants and their children living in the U. S.[9] However, this estimate does not account for third and fourth generation Egyptians, who are the children and grandchildren of the wave of immigration in the 1960s and 1970s. Regardless of the exact number of Copts in the United States, one thing is abundantly clear: the population is quickly growing and with that growth comes both benefits and challenges.

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[8] Alexei D. Krindatch, "Orthodox (Eastern Christian) Churches in the United States at the Beginning of a New Millennium: Questions of Nature, Identity, and Mission," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41, no. 3 (2002): 560-1.

[9] U. S. Census Bureau, "Egyptian Population Profile in the US, 2013," accessed March 8, 2017, https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_133YR_S0201&prodType=table and U.S. Census Bureau, "Profile of Selected Social Characteristics: 2000," Accessed March 3, 2017, https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=DEC_0_SF4_DP2&prodType=table.

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| Subject | United States | |
|---|---|---|
| | Egyptian (402-403) | |
| | Estimate | Margin of Error |
| TOTAL NUMBER OF RACES REPORTED | | |
| Total population | 229,196 | +/-7,933 |
| One race | 95.4% | +/-0.7 |
| Two races | 4.2% | +/-0.6 |
| Three races | 0.4% | +/-0.4 |
| Four or more races | 0.0% | +/-0.1 |
| | | |
| SEX AND AGE | | |
| Total population | 229,196 | +/-7,933 |
| Male | 54.3% | +/-0.9 |
| Female | 45.7% | +/-0.9 |
| | | |
| Under 5 years | 8.7% | +/-0.7 |
| 5 to 17 years | 19.3% | +/-0.9 |
| 18 to 24 years | 10.3% | +/-0.7 |
| 25 to 34 years | 17.9% | +/-0.9 |
| 35 to 44 years | 15.0% | +/-0.8 |
| 45 to 54 years | 11.9% | +/-0.7 |
| 55 to 64 years | 9.0% | +/-0.6 |
| 65 to 74 years | 5.3% | +/-0.5 |
| 75 years and over | 2.5% | +/-0.3 |
| | | |
| Median age (years) | 31.6 | +/-0.5 |

Figure 5. Created by the U.S. Census Bureau to represent Egyptian Population in 2013.

Coptic immigrants tend to enter the U.S. through the traditional immigrant corridors of New York, Florida, and Los Angeles. The first wave of Copts in the 1970s and 1980s settled in these areas, so the largest concentration of Copts is still in the Northeast and in California.[10] According to Tony Hasaballa, "When people come from Egypt, they come to specific areas, either New York or New Jersey or the Florida area, Texas area, or the California area…. The community in New Jersey, it's huge."[11]

[10] Dickinson, 23.

[11] Tony Hasaballa, interview by author, Nashville, TN March 3, 2017. Hasaballa is a second generation Coptic immigrant who grew up in Connecticut. He moved to Nashville in June, 2016, on the orders of H.G. Bishop Youssef (bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States) to become the Biblical studies teacher at St. Clement Coptic School.

Nevertheless, as the Coptic population grows, it also disseminates out of these major hubs and into smaller cities like Nashville. When asked why her family decided to move from New York to Nashville in 1995, Rachel Aguib stated that, "My parents could not find jobs in New York, nothing within their field, or even in any other field. Someone came from Nashville to New York to recruit people, they recruited I believe fifteen families to come to Nashville. And so we were one of them and we came with them here. My parents were hired by a hotel."[12] This network of established Copts around the country helping bring new immigrants into areas where they can flourish is a key factor in the spread of Coptic communities from New York and Los Angeles into the heart of the country.

## Copts in Nashville

Until the 1990s, Nashville was not a city that fostered very much immigration. Neighborhoods remained much the same demographically as they had been at the beginning of the twentieth century, with black neighborhoods in north and east Nashville, wealthy white neighborhoods to the west, and working class white neighborhoods to the southeast. The immigrant population consisted of a small group of refugees from places like Vietnam, Kurds from Iraq, and Copts from Egypt.[13] Then, in

[12] Rachel Aguib, interview by author, Nashville, TN, March 3, 2017. Aguib is a first generation Copt who came to Nashville with her family in 1995. She is now a teacher at St. Clement Coptic School.

[13] Jamie Winders, *Nashville in the New Millennium: Immigrant Settlement, Urban Transformation, and Social Belonging* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2013), 13.

the 1990s, families like Rachel's, as well as immigrants of other ethnicities, came to settle in Nashville. Between 1990 and 2000, the foreign-born immigrant population in the United States increased an astounding 57.9%. Southern cities like Nashville that had always viewed immigration to be "something that happened elsewhere" suddenly had an influx of foreign-born inhabitants.[14] As seen in Figures 5 and 6, the increase in the Coptic population in Nashville has been so prolific that the area now has one of the highest population ratios in the country at between 0.5 and 0.99%, matched only in small areas of the Northeast.[15]

For the Copts in Nashville, this growth is reflected in several ways. The first is by the abundance of churches in the area. As Hasaballa reflected in an interview, "Here in Nashville, now, they currently have about seven to nine churches. Seven are actually established with buildings and actual congregations. Two of them are kind of beginning. They pray on Saturdays and are not full-time service yet."[16] The visit of Pope Tawadros II

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[14] Ibid, 16. While conducting a study about immigration in Nashville, Winders conspicuously omits any mention of the vibrant and growing Coptic community. Despite the main focus of the book being Hispanic immigration, Winders mentions many other immigrant groups throughout the course of the study and is remiss to not acknowledge the Coptic community.

[15] "2010 Religious Census," Religious Congregations and Membership Study 2010 (Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, 2010).

[16] Tony Hasaballa, interview by author, Nashville, TN March 3, 2017. According to Dr. Elhamy Khalil, the buildings for these churches, as sacred spaces, can be acquired either by moving into an existing church building that the congregation has left, or building a new church. If the congregation moves into a previously built church, they must alter the building to fit their needs by building an altar, an iconostasis, and a special room for making *Korban* (holy bread). Khalil, 57.

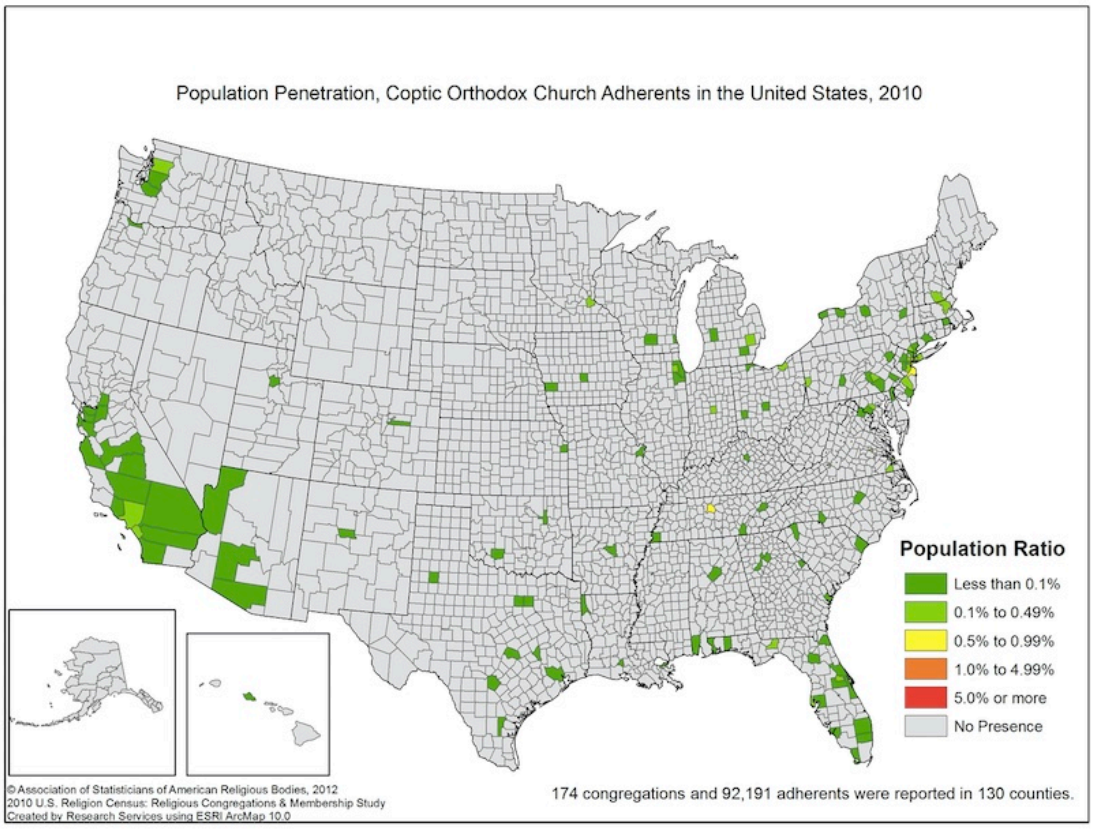


Figure 6. Created by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, 2012.[17]

in 2015 also illustrates the size and importance of the Nashville Coptic community to the greater Coptic Church. The Pope came to Nashville as part of his first tour of the U.S., which included bigger cities like Atlanta, Houston, and Los Angeles.[18] Pope Tawadros was in Nashville to ordain two new priests and consecrate a new section of the St. Pishoy Church, as well as individually bless the people of the Coptic community who

[18] Allan Turner, "Coptic Pope in Houston on First U.S. Visit," *Houston Chronicle*, accessed March 9, 2017, http://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Coptic-pope-in-Houston-on-first-U-S-visit-6565312.php.

attended a special service. *The Tennessean* estimated that over 2,000 Copts from the Middle Tennessee area were in attendance at the services held at St. Pishoy.[19]

One benefit that Copts in Nashville have is that they view the city as their home. Unlike many other immigrant groups that come to the United States for work but eventually plan to return to their country of origin, Copts move to the United States to stay here permanently. "(Copts) feel that they came to live permanently in America. Thus, they have to adapt, participate, and contribute to their community as much as they can."[20] Because of this, they have established a tight-knit community in Nashville that involves churches, schools, and charitable organizations.

However, despite the call to participate in the larger Nashville community, there is a disconnect between the Copts and the rest of the Nashville population. All of the interviewees for this project agreed that the Coptic community is neither well-known or at all understood in Nashville. "Nobody understands anything about our culture … Nobody cares from the society here to know about other cultures, not just the Coptic culture but any culture," stated Michael Fouad.[21] Because Nashville was so

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[19] Jordan Buie, "Coptic Christian Pope in Nashville on First U.S. Visit," *The Tennessean*, accessed March 9, 2017, http://www.tennessean.com/story/news/religion/2015/10/09/coptic-christian-pope-visits-nashville-weekend/73666046/.

[20] Elhamy Khalil, *The Making of a Diocese: The Early Years of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Los Angeles, Southern California and Hawaii* (Los Angeles, CA: Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Los Angeles, Southern California and Hawaii, 2008), 117.

[21] Michael Fouad, interview conducted by the author, Nashville, TN, March 3, 2017.

"unprepared" to accommodate or understand larger immigrant populations, there is no social or political framework to welcome groups like the Copts and incorporate them into the community.[22] Tony Hasaballa pointed out that it was not just the Nashville community that was not trying to understand the Coptic community, but also the Coptic community was not trying to understand Nashville.

> The unique thing is … The thing that I was amazed about with the Nashville Coptic community is that they were able to keep the sense of community with each other, there's still the sense of family with each other … Here they are still able to get that sense of community, which has its positives and negatives as well. Because a positive can be that sense of community and being able to relate to people in similar situations. But the negative that I see here in Nashville compared to other areas of Coptic communities is that here in Nashville they're very much still enmeshed in that Egyptian culture and they're not even a part of the community outside of their Egyptian communities. And that can be a negative in the sense that they don't learn how to grow, how to adapt and how to deal with different situations outside their parent's culture.[23]

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[22] Winders, 141-2. Winders notes that in many other 'immigrant friendly' cities, there are social networks in place that can easily accommodate new ethnicities and nationalities, like immigrant parades and celebrations. Nashville, because it has not traditionally had a population of 'new' immigrants, has none of these. Any segregation in neighborhoods in Nashville occurs because of historic racism, not immigrant community clusters (Winders, 24).

[23] Tony Hasaballa, interview conducted by the author, Nashville, TN, March 3, 2017.

Because the Coptic community of Nashville is so tight-knit, and the greater Nashville society was ill-equipped to know and incorporate them, there remains (for most of the population) a huge divide in which neither group really understands the other.

## Oral Histories as a Connection

It is the duty of museums and other cultural organizations to bridge this gap and help immigrant groups like the Copts celebrate their identity and heritage while helping them become a welcome part of the greater Nashville community. These organizations are the perfect opportunity to make a connection between immigrant communities and the rest of the population in Nashville. By working with these minorities to create projects that represent the community in a way that engages the public, cultural organizations act as a bridge to understanding and acceptance.

The key for museum and history professionals while attempting these projects is to approach the endeavor with an open mind. The outcome of a partnership between an organization and an immigrant community may not (and for interest's sake perhaps should not) be a traditional exhibit comprised of photos or artifacts with text to explain them. Organizers must think outside the proverbial box to think of new ways to capture the attention of their audience, which in this context consists of both traditional museum goers as well as the minority community they are trying to reach. For the cultural organization to successfully engage both groups, they must involve them with the planning and execution of the exhibition.

An important way to orchestrate this involvement is through oral histories.[24] However, unlike many museums' use of oral histories, the organization must not simply conduct an interview, pick out quotes that work for their exhibit theme, and throw some text around it to explain the context. This has been the go-to methodology for the use of oral histories for years and, while acquiring the first-person accounts of history is vital, this usage after procurement is weak at best. To be truly effective and educational, the implementation of oral histories in an exhibition has to grab the attention of the audience and involve them emotionally in the outcome of the story.[25] There are very few things more interesting than a good story, so why not actually use the stories that we have in a successful way?

## Oral History Best Practices and Methodology

Best practice is defined by the Oral History Association as "certain principles, professional and technical standards, and obligations" that should be upheld during the course of an oral history.[26] The implementation of these principles does not begin when the interview starts, but well before in the administrative work necessary for organizing an oral history. Before beginning an interview, the Oral History Association recommends

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[24] See Laurie Mercier, Madeline Buckendorf, and Oral History Association, *Using Oral History in Community History Projects* (Carlisle, PA: Oral History Association, 2007).

[25] David Dean, *Museum Exhibition: Theory and Practice* (London: Conway, 1996), 25.

[26] Oral History Association, "Principles and Best Practices," October 2009. http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/

finding an appropriate repository (like an archive) to house the completed interview, acquire equipment to record the interview so that the narrator's voice is available as part of the oral history, and discussing with the interviewee uses of the recording and purpose of the interview to make sure they understand that in which they are agreeing to participate. During the interview, have a list of proposed topics and questions ready. Although the purpose of an oral history is to let the interviewee tell his or her story and perspective, guiding questions are necessary to keep the interview on track. Also, the interviewee should sign an informed consent form, which describes the uses and purpose of the interview and transfers the right to the interview to the repository. After the interview has been delivered to the repository, the Oral History Association then states what is perhaps the most important part of conducting an oral history, which is that the interviewer must maintain the integrity and unique perspective of the interviewee by accurately representing their words with context and sensitivity.[27]

Another vital aspect to effectively conducting an oral history is getting to know the subject and his or her community. It is necessary for the interviewee to be comfortable not only with the topic he or she are discussing, but also with the interviewer. By meeting before the day of the interview, the subject might feel more

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[27] Ibid, For the complete recommended best practices, see http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/.

relaxed and able to talk about difficult issues during the oral history. If not, he or she may not feel able to fully tell the story or even be willing to meet.[28]

While working with different ethnic and cultural groups, this step in the oral history process is especially important. If the project is truly going to be for and about a specific community, one must make all materials readily available to everyone in the target group. If many of these people speak or read another language, then published works should be bi or even trilingual when printed, despite the cost. These works should then be distributed throughout the community in local libraries, web groups, and ethnic book stores.[29] If I am able to take this project further in the future and publish an extensive record of oral histories with the Coptic community, it will be vital to ensure that the work is in both Arabic and English, as well as readily accessible to anyone who might wish to read it.

In my experience working with the Coptic community in Nashville, there were several steps to mutual understanding and trust for the completion of my oral histories. First, I worked with the Albert Gore Research Center to determine that their archive was

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[28] Cullom Davis, Kathryn Back, and Kay MacLean, *Oral History: From Tape to Type* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1977), 11.

[29] Sav Kyriacou, "'May Your Children Speak Well of You Mother Tongue': Oral History and the Ethnic Communities," *Oral History* 21, no. 1 (1993): 75. According to Kyriacou, there are four reasons to publish bilingual literature: "To provide shared experiences to households covering two or more generations; to be as accessible as possible; to give back to the community from which it came; to provide material for educational purposes." Kyriacou, 75.

the repository where my finished oral histories would be stored. Then, before actually speaking to anyone that I wanted to interview, I had to get permission from the priest at St. Mina's Coptic Orthodox Church, Father Boutros. Because the Coptic community is so close-knit around the Church, this was a vital step that showed understanding and respect for their cultural expectations. As Sav Kyriacou of the Ethnic Communities Oral History project notes, working with existing community organizations such as the Church provides an insight into the target group that is sometimes not obvious to the organizer.[30] For this project, this proved extremely true and without Father Boutros' approval, there would have been no oral histories.

After getting Father Boutros' blessing for the project, he gave me several names and the contact information of prospective people to interview, whom I then contacted to see if they would be willing to participate. We then agreed to all meet on the same day (both for convenience and for the comfort of the subjects) at the local Coptic school. I made sure to conduct the interviews in a quiet room for the best sound quality using the Albert Gore Research Center's recording equipment. I was pleasantly surprised when, after my second interview, a member of the local Coptic congregation happened to hear about my project and asked to be interviewed. This enthusiasm translated to the oral history, which provided insight from a different generation and was extremely

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[30] Kyriacou, 76-7. Kyriacou suggests going one step further and training members of the target community to do the oral histories themselves. If members of the community conduct the oral history, they not only have a better understanding of what questions to ask but can also make interviewees more comfortable and trusting during the interview.

helpful. During the course of this process, I have maintained the high standards of the Oral History Association to the best of my abilities and am attempting to accurately represent the tone and integrity of the interviews in this project.

## Coptic Identity through Oral Histories

Through the course of these interviews, the theme that most clearly resonated was that Coptic identity revolves around the Church. The history and continuity of the Church from the beginning of Christianity is a source of pride and identity. This essential idea that Copts are the true Egyptians because they can trace their faith (and therefore lineage) to the pre- Arab period is evidenced by Fouad's descriptor of the Copts as "the pharaoh's people" and Hasaballa's statement that, "We have this unique history, unique heritage, of having the faith from the time of Saint Mark and the Apostles of Christ."[31] Because religious history was such a significant factor in the development and continuation of the Coptic Church in Egypt, it has persisted after immigration as the defining aspect of modern Copts. This religious identity and historical legacy now serves as the thing that differentiates and unites the Copts outside Egypt.[32] When asked about

[31] Fouad and Hasaballa, interviews with the author, Nashville, TN, March 3, 2017.

[32] Ghada Botros, "Religious Identity as an Historical Narrative: Coptic Orthodox Immigrant Churches and the Representation of History," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 19, no. 2 (June 1, 2006): 179-180. I would recommend reading this paper as an in-depth sociological look at how Copts in the United States and other diaspora communities use religious, historic, and social experiences to create a collective social memory tying them to the religious heritage and forming a cultural identity. According to Botros, Copts in diaspora communities use their shared history and experiences to create a new cultural identity as Copts outside Egypt.

how she has maintained her Coptic identity while in the United States, Rachel Aguib explained,

> It's mainly family and the Church. My dad is pretty close to church and he likes the Orthodox faith a lot, so he implemented a lot of things at home, and then he made sure we were involved in Church…" "and so I grew up in church, mainly because here we didn't speak the language, we weren't familiar with the area, we didn't know much about Nashville, basically it was home and church. which worked for our benefit, because then, we got a chance to get exposed to more things, to learn more, and to get attached, and so it worked out.[33]

The Church and its history are the center point around which the rest of Coptic life radiates. For families that have been in the United States for several generations, the Church is often the main connection many Copts have to Egypt and their cultural heritage. [34] According to Tony Hasaballa, "My parents, who were so grounded and rooted inside the Church, they were able to have myself and my brother and the rest of my family were able to continue to be rooted inside the Church. They were dedicated, you know, that's I think what allows people to be American and at the same time have Coptic identity is their dedication …. When people immigrate here, the only thing that's left of Egypt here is the Church."[35] For those newly immigrating, it provides a safety net

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[33] Rachel Aguib, interview with the author, Nashville, TN, March 3, 2017.

[34] Marzouki, 263.

of social, religious, and even financial support and helps them find a new home in America where they feel accepted.

Despite the Church being the solidifying factor for Copts in the United States, there are still aspects of Coptic diaspora identity that push the Church to modernize and adapt, sometimes in ways that it is not yet prepared to do. The most obvious example of this is political activism of many Copts outside Egypt. Since more Copts began emigrating from Egypt in the last fifty years, the Coptic diaspora, now living abroad out of the immediate danger of persecution, has been very vocal about human rights issues faced by Copts in Egypt. Understandably due to the circumstances under which they operate, the Church has chosen to counter this heated objection by taking a pacifist approach by celebrating the continuity of the Church and Christianity in Egypt.[36]

Recently in Nashville, the Copts have organized several large marches. The first was against Mubarak during the protests that became the Revolution (Figure 7), then another in 2013 protesting violence against Christians in Egypt, where protesters chanted, "Obama, Obama, don't you care? Christian blood is everywhere!"[37] Some

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[35] Hasaballa, interview with the author, Nashville, TN, March 3, 2017.

[36] Marzouki, 263.

[37] Basem Melika, *Copts in Nashville Protest against Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak*, accessed March 8, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSwWMWnXt3U and Bob Smietana, "Coptic Christians in Nashville Demonstrate for Egypt," *USA TODAY*, accessed March 8, 2017, http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/08/19/tenn-coptic-christians-rally-egypt/2674545/.

Copts in America even actively use their influence and growing numbers to get their representatives to push for human rights reform from the Egyptian government. With the invention of social media and the ease of communication that the Internet facilitates, it is now possible for the Coptic diaspora to make the plight of their friends and family still in Egypt more well-known around the world.[38]

Figure 7. Photo of Coptic protest in Nashville against Mubarak by Basem Melika

Another way that the Church has had to face modernity in the last decade is the push among many Coptic youth in the U.S. to have church services in English instead of Arabic. Since many were raised in America speaking English as their first language,

[38] Dickinson, 37-8.

Arabic seems outdated. Yet, services in Arabic are still necessary if the Church is to accommodate new immigrants from Egypt.[39] For a denomination that prides itself on historical continuity, this is a huge leap to accommodate diaspora youth. The Nashville churches are navigating this barrier by having "a church that is completely in English, St. Verena's … they're geared toward the Coptic youth that have grown up and are more assimilated to American culture."[40]

Because of the security afforded by the Church, Copts who came to Nashville (at least in the more recent years) do not seem to have faced many of the difficulties that other immigrant populations have had with finding their place within the framework of Nashville's social and racial climate. Winders notes that for the Hispanic immigrant population, even second generation children who were born in the United States have trouble situating themselves within the existing understanding of race and ethnicity.[41] For many Coptic children, they simply go to the local Coptic school, eliminating this confusion while further entrenching their cultural identity and heritage. They have formed a socially self-sufficient community within a community in Nashville that meets nearly all their needs.

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[39] Khalil, 144. Although parts of the liturgy is still held in the Coptic language, most of the service is now either in Arabic or English.

[40] Hasaballa, interview with the author, Nashville, TN, March 3, 2017.

[41] Winders, 233-4.

While the Copts in Nashville certainly benefit from this ingrained identity, this also reflects Hasaballa's statement that, "they don't learn how to grow, how to adapt and how to deal with different situations outside their parent's culture."[42] The Coptic community in Egypt has been forcibly isolated from the rest of the population by their faith for so long that, after people immigrate to the United States, they sometimes voluntarily continue to separate themselves from the community around them. For Fouab, the way to break this cycle and become more involved in life in the United States is for people from the various cultural backgrounds in America to sit down together in a social setting. "If they wanna (sic) keep their culture inside them, they are free because that is something that I cannot take from them … but we have to find a formula to melt all those people into American society … We need to have a social club … We have dinner together, we sit down together, drink, talk, know new people."[43] Although a sudden abundance of social clubs bonding people across the city may not be likely, the idea of connectivity and interpersonal connection behind this statement resonates with the purpose of this project.

Oral histories are a way not only for museums to connect to and work with a specific minority community that they have not been able to reach before. They can also then move that group, like the Copts, into an area of social awareness with the greater

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[42] Hasaballa, interview with the author, Nashville, TN, March 3, 2017.

[43] Fouab, interview with the author, Nashville, TN, March 3, 2017.

Nashville community. First, the process of gathering oral histories naturally targets the group being interviewed. It promotes a vested interest in the project among not only those interviewed, who want to see their thoughts and words implemented, but also their friends and family who lend their support to the interviewee. This communal investment can then be taken a step further by involving members of the community in the planning and execution of the exhibition. The American Association for State and Local History designates focus groups as one of the most important players in the creation of an exhibition, since the public (and specifically the immigrant group) is the entire reason for the exhibit in the first place.[44] Without this added step of involvement with the community, it would be easy for even those who participated in making the oral histories to lose interest by the time that the exhibition actually came to fruition, much less those who were only peripherally involved.

The next step in this multifaceted process of engagement is connecting the minority community to the rest of the historic organization's constituency through these oral histories. By presenting the oral histories in a manner that interests both of these groups and brings them together into a single space, the organization can help foster Michael Fouad's idea of promoting understanding through social engagement. Hearing

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[44] Catlin- Legutko notes, "It is also important to look beyond the internal players and think externally. The museum exists to serve the public, so what does the public want from your institution?" Cinnamon Catlin- Legutko, "DIY Strategic Planning for Small Museums," *History News*, AASLH Technical Leaflet #242, 63, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 2-3.

the stories of people from other cultures and ethnic groups through oral histories opens lines of communication between minority groups like the Copts and the population of the greater Nashville area.

# CHAPTER FOUR: CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS AS INTERMEDIARIES

> Well, you have to know that the people doesn't (sic) go to a museum. So if I add something inside a museum, who is going to see it? Who is going to know about it? … If you put it in an exhibit, who's gonna go and read? Who's gonna care?[1] -Michael Fouad

It is the responsibility of museums and other cultural organizations, as local institutions, to facilitate collaborative relationships with the community around them, built on mutual respect and trust. Museums exist for the public; it is their fundamental mission to be a space of learning and knowledge-sharing. By working with the communities around them to create meaningful exhibitions,[2] museums can begin to close the gap between the public's perception of cultural organizations as elitist, boring, and uncomfortable to a space of shared authority that accommodates many differing viewpoints.

From their inception, ideas about the function of a museum have been constantly changing. In the beginning, museums were monoliths erected by the wealthy for the elite whose sole purpose was prove its worth by having the best collections. This focus slowly turned to education and engaging public interest in exhibits and

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[1] Michael Fouad, interview with the author, Nashville, TN, March 3, 2017.

[2] I will use the term exhibition throughout this chapter to represent all forms of knowledge sharing and production that a cultural institution might employ, including but not limited to: exhibits, public programming and outreach, theatrical performances, living history, multimedia presentations, demonstrations, fundraisers, and political activism.

programming.[3] The true function of the modern museum is to be an educational force that is an active and vital community resource. Museums are not meant to be a stagnant reminder of the past, but instead a vibrant educational tool. It is the main function and obligation of modern museums to make their collections relevant and interesting to the public while engaging and empowering the local community.[4] This project argues for institutions to then take the developmental progression one step further to fully engage the community through collaboration in projects that benefit the community and its participants.

## Problems in Representation

While museums have made a concerted effort in the last fifty years to shift their focus from collections to education and public engagement, there remains the problem of underrepresentation and cultural connection in many of the exhibits. Curators develop exhibits based on their personal biases and experiences of how a museum 'should' look. Many Westernized museum exhibition practices either ignore minorities or represent 'other' cultures as static, a snapshot of a romanticized bygone era.[5] There

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[3] Marjorie Schwarzer, *Riches, Rivals and Radicals: 100 Years of Museums in America*, (Washington, DC: AAM Press, 2006), 8-10.

[4] Richard Sandell, "Museums and the Combating of Social Inequality: Roles, Responsibility, and Resistance," in *Museums, Society, Inequality*, ed. Richard Sandell, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 4.

[5] Such accidental biases and underrepresentation in curation were shown in Fred Wilsons' *Mining the Museum* exhibit, which used progressive education theory to address racism and underrepresentation in the Maryland Historical Society's collection. Wilson created spaces that highlighted issues of inclusion in the museum's exhibitions

is no real connection between artifacts and the people and belief systems from which they came other than a brief exhibit label. Instead, artifacts are classified according to categories assigned to them by colonial interpretations and they lose much, if not all, of their intrinsic cultural value.[6]

This is particularly true of Egyptian culture in museums, which invokes a vast amount of public interest but frequently fails to address anything after 1000 B.C.E., except Western archaeology. Since the French and British exhibited the spoils of their incursions into Egypt, the public has been intrigued by Egyptian art, architecture, and culture. However, because artifacts were often displayed for aesthetics instead of content, the public understanding of Egyptian history is nearly atemporal, with no distinction or connection of the time between Cleopatra, Rameses, the Great Pyramid, and Christians.[7] For the Copts, whose cultural identity is built around the idea of continuity since the time of the pharaohs (hence their self-designation of "the pharaoh's

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by juxtaposing objects that were usually displayed from the collection with those that were either not used or conspicuously absent, like slave shackles beside silver spoons. George Hein, *Progressive Museum Practice: John Dewey and Democracy* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2012), 187-8.

[6] John Paul Rangel, "Moving beyond the Expected: Representation and Presence in a Contemporary Native Arts Museum," *Wicazo Sa Review*, no. 1 (2012), 32.

[7] Karen Exell, "Community Consultation and the Redevelopment of Manchester Museum's Ancient Egypt Galleries," in *Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections and Collaboration*, ed. Vivien Golding and Wayne Modest (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 130-3.

people"),[8] this lack of representation and recognition that Egyptian culture continued after the Late Period is especially disenfranchising. While they feel connected to the ancient artifacts, the Copts also want to show that Egyptian culture did not suddenly stop after the more famous periods of history. As Rachel Aguib stated,

> I feel like a lot of times when I was personally exposed to anything talking about Egypt, they only talk about the very beginning, the pharaohs and all that, and people are so unaware of where Egypt is today and they're so focused on the pharaohs and the temples and the statues when there is really life in Egypt, other than just camels and the desert and pharaohs. I'd like to see pictures of the architecture now, pictures of the way people dress now, because people still think they are in the long garments and the things on their heads, and I feel like that takes away from the beauty of Egypt, because there is so much about Egypt that people don't know because they're not being exposed to it. There's so much more than just those camels and the pyramids. There's so much civilization and people there, I can see them talented in so many ways, the architecture there is amazing, but it's not something that anyone talks about because light is not shed on this aspect but something else.[9]

Many museum professionals are beginning to acknowledge this as an issue and reevaluate exhibition practices using decolonizing methodologies[10] and critical

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[8] Michael Fouad, interview with the author, Nashville, TN, March 3, 2017.

[9] Rachel Aguib, interview with the author, Nashville, TN, March 3, 2017.

[10] According to Rangell, decolonizing methodologies are an effort to move beyond colonial power structures and acknowledge and rectify misrepresentations. Rangell, 38.

ethnography[11] as a framework. Frequently, curators attempt to better represent different cultures and perspectives, but do not know how to effectively do so in an engaging and meaningful way. One integral step is the recognition of the seminal theory of shared authority, conceptualized by Michael Frisch as the idea that there is a shared authority over the content and interpretation of a museum between the curators and the audience. By recognizing this shared authority, museum professionals can then use it to better disseminate knowledge and create a dialogue with the community in which they function.[12]

## Audience, Learning Types, and Meaning Making

To effectively share authority over collections and exhibitions, project coordinators must understand their audience. People come to museums and other

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[11] Critical ethnography is a conscious decision to study people and cultures by their own standards. “Critical ethnography, as a methodological framework, functions well when looking at the production of knowledge and representation through a museum, an institution that historically has functioned as a hegemonic vehicle for the dominant society. Critical ethnography challenges the status quo and addresses issues of power, dominance, and inequality.” Rangell, 37.

[12] "(Shared authority) explores ways in which scholars and designers need to better respect, understand, invoke, and involve the very real authority their audiences bring to a museum exhibit, a popular history book, or a public program … this authority can become central to an exhibit's capacity to provide a meaningful engagement with history- to what should not only be a distribution of knowledge from those who have it to those who do not, but a more profound sharing of knowledges, an implicit and sometimes explicit dialogue from very different vantages about the shape, meaning, and implications of history." Michael H. Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*, SUNY Series in Oral and Public History (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), xxii.

cultural institutions with their own set of expectations, agendas, biases, and identity. Working within this framework can connect visitors to the exhibit or program by allowing them to make their own meaning about the content depicted.[13] As Freeman Tilden expressed in his first principle of interpretation, "Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile."[14] To make exhibitions relevant to their audience, project organizers should understand different types of learning and needs.

Visits to cultural organizations begin long before the person walks through the door. It is a conscious decision to spend leisure time and resources on a specific activity, of which they have a preconceived set of expectations. For someone to choose to participate in cultural enrichment activities like a museum, they must first have the security that their basic needs are met. As Maslow's hierarchy of needs demonstrates (Figure 8), people who are struggling to survive cannot and will not expend energy on cultural pursuits.[15] This means that many among minority and immigrant groups, who are often part of the lowest economic bracket, will never seek out cultural institutions.

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[13] John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, *The Museum Experience Revisited* (Walnut Creek, Calif: Left Coast Press, Inc, 2013), 34.

[14] Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 34-35.

[15] David Dean, *Museum Exhibition: Theory and Practice* (London: Conway, 1996), 22-3.

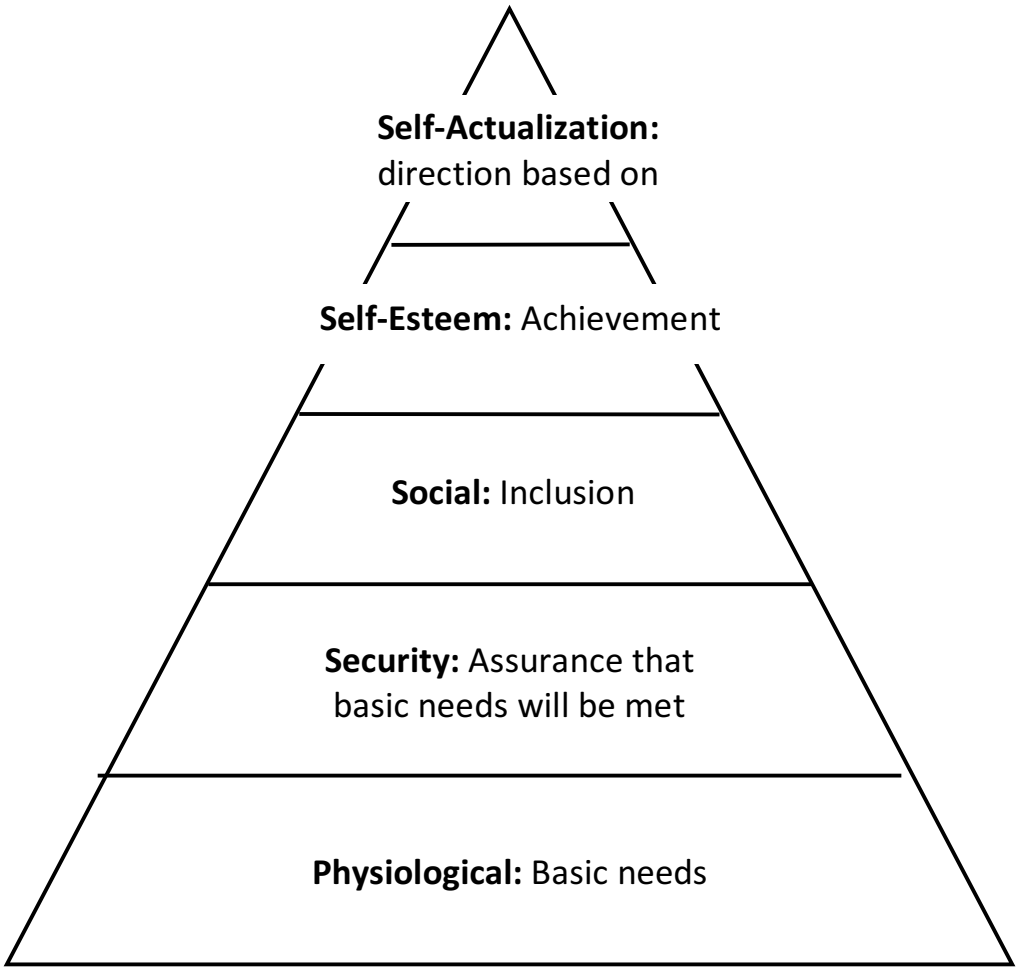


Figure 8. Created by the author to demonstrate Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

However, it remains the responsibility of the museum to reach these members of the community. Project organizers, working on the assumption that low income groups will never physically enter the museum, must then develop programming highlighting the

museum's offerings, that can be taken out into the community for schools and other organizations.[16]

People choose to visit, or not visit, a museum for a variety of reasons with a set expectation for the experience they will have. As Falk and Dierking write, "Most visitors come to museums specifically to see exhibitions and do 'museumy' kinds of things."[17] However, their motivations for coming to do these "museumy" things vary between visitors. Most adults who participate in museum experiences are more financially stable than those who do not, and pursue formal learning environments as part of a knowledge seeking identity. These knowledge-seekers perceive going to museums as actively bettering their family's and their own lives by acquiring specific, goal-oriented information.[18]

The American Alliance of Museums points out that non-Hispanic whites, who are currently the core demographic for museum attendance as shown in Figure 9, will likely be the minority in the United States within four decades if current population trends continue. This means that museums have even more obligation to expand the diversity of their constituency and reach more people to reflect these population changes.[19]

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[16] Ibid, 22.

[17] Falk and Dierking, 104.

[18] Bonnie Sachatello-Sawyer, ed., *Adult Museum Programs: Designing Meaningful Experiences*, American Association for State and Local History Book Series (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), 7-8.

[19] Betty Farrell and Maria Medvedeva, "Demographic Transformation and the

Figure 3a. **Demographic distribution of visitors to art museums/galleries in 2008**

| | % of visitors to art museums | % of U.S. population |
|---|---|---|
| *By race/ethnicity* | | |
| Hispanic | 8.6% | 13.5% |
| Non-Hispanic White | 78.9% | 68.7% |
| African American | 5.9% | 11.4% |
| Other | 6.6% | 6.4% |

Figure 3b. **Percentage* of U.S. adult population visiting art museums/galleries**

| | 1992 | 2002 | 2008 |
|---|---|---|---|
| All | 26.7% | 26.5% | 22.7% |
| *By race/ethnicity* | | | |
| Hispanic | 17.5% | 16.1% | 14.5% |
| Non-Hispanic White | 28.6% | 29.5% | 26.0% |
| African American | 19.3% | 14.8% | 12.0% |
| Other | 28.4% | 32.7% | 23.4% |

*Based on data from the Current Population Survey, which varies slightly from the American Community Survey data cited elsewhere in this report. **Source:** NEA, 2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

Figure 9. Created by Farrell and Medvedeva for the American Alliance of Museums "Demographic Transformation and the Future of Museums" Report.[20]

Some of the potential causes of visitation diversity discrepancies are historic racism and cultural barriers that make museums seem exclusionary, lack of museum-going familial traditions, and the sway of social networks to engage in other leisure activities. Another

Future of Museums," (Washington, D.C.: American Alliance of Museums, 2010), http://www.aam-us.org/docs/center-for-the-future-of-museums/demotransaam2010.pdf, 5. As the official AAM publication on museum attendance diversity, this is an excellent resource for studying minority participation in museums. The report brings together Census data, survey reports, and case studies to better understand the reason that museum attendance diversity does not reflect the population diversity in the United States.

[20] Farrell and Medvedeva, 12.

reason that the AAM identifies as a strong factor in minorities choosing to participate in museums is representation. Without exhibitions that are relatable and speak to a person's cultural identity, they are less likely to be involved or frequently participate in museum activities.[21]

People are more likely to be involved in leisure activities where they feel comfortable and invited. When museums are presented in the traditional manner, with huge neo-Classical exteriors and quiet, serious exhibits, people feel inadequate and awkward.[22] As John Cotton Dana reflected in 1917, "Their (museum) buildings are remote and are religious or autocratic or aristocratic in style; their administrators, perhaps in part because of this very aloofness and sacrosanct environment, are inclined to look upon themselves as high priests of a particular cult … "[23] Although many museums have moved past this form of expression, people (especially minorities with no familial tradition of museum attendance) often still envision museums in this fashion, particularly if the museum is in an imposing building in an affluent section of town. By advertising new interactive exhibits and public programs that break this museum stereotype in underrepresented neighborhoods through minority newspapers or

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[21] Ibid, 13-4.

[22] Falk and Dierking, 28.

[23] John Cotton Dana, *The Gloom of the Museum*, New Museum Series 2 (Woodstock, VT: The Elm Tree Press, 1917), 17.

community centers, museums can draw attention to services and programs of which minority groups may not have been aware.[24]

When planning new kinds of exhibits and public programming, project coordinators and curators should take into account the different types of learning[25] capabilities and needs of their audience. While this is a fundamental of design and planning, it is necessary to produce an effective exhibition. There are three learning domains that should be activated for the visitor to effectively retain knowledge. The first is the cognitive domain, which invokes analysis, interpretation, and synthesis. The second is the affective domain, involving emotional connection to information. The final domain is that of the motor skills, in which action and physical movement is the method by which information is retained.[26] N.D. Fleming also identifies four types of learners in addition to the learning domains: Visual, Aural (auditory), Reading/Writing, and Kinesthetic (movement).[27] Each of these learning types should be addressed in an

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[24] Falk and Dierking, 59.

[25] For the purpose of this paper, learning will be defined as, “a change in human disposition or capability, which can be retained, and which is not simply ascribable to the process of growth.” Robert M. Gagne, *The Conditions of Learning*, (New York: Holt, Rineheart, and Winston, Inc, 1965).

[26] Alison L. Grinder and E. Sue McCoy, *The Good Guide: A Sourcebook for Interpreters, Docents, and Tour Guides* (Scottsdale, Arizona: Ironwood Press, 1985), 3. Also see Marcella D. Wells, Barbara H. Butler, and Judith Koke, *Interpretive Planning for Museums: Integrating Visitor Perspectives in Decision Making* (Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, Inc, 2013).

[27] Neil D. Fleming, "I'm Different; Not Dumb: Modes of Presentation (VARK) in the Tertiary Classroom." In *Research and Development in Higher Education, Proceedings*

exhibition through several forms of media to be fully inclusive and engaging. In conjunction with an understanding of the different learning types, using a combination of the three learning domains in an exhibition can help visitors interact with the content and better retain information.

However, utilizing only labels as an exhibit medium is one dimensional and ineffective. As noted previously, people learn at different paces and relate to diverse forms of media. While some learners might best grasp a historical concept through a photograph, an others would need to hear a recording to achieve a similar understanding.[28] To accommodate these learning types, museums can use a variety of techniques and media to engage more of their audience.[29] Recordings or videos of oral histories should be utilized to move past written labels and present the audience with people and events to which they can easily relate. Exhibitions can then go one step further and, taking a note from the effective methodology of science museums, have hands-on exhibits to accommodate kinesthetic learners and the motor skills domain.

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*of the 1995 Annual Conference of the Higher Education and Research Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA), HERDSA*, vol. 18, 1995, pp. 308-309.

[28] Fleming, 308-9.

[29] Eilean Hooper-Greenhill describes this methodology as the “post-museum,” which, while there are objects, focuses more on the experiences of the cultures' past, present, and future represented through intangible heritage. "In the modernist museum display is the major form of communication … In the post-museum, the exhibition will be one among many forms of communication." Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, "Interpretive Communities, Strategies, Repertoires," in *Museums and Their Communities*, ed. Sheila Watson, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 81.

Physical movement and interaction with objects and concepts in a nonthreatening, judgement-free environment promotes participation and solidifies long term memory in visitors.[30]

Public programs, which are flexible in nature and can easily adapt to the needs of the audience from one program to the next, are an excellent way to exchange knowledge with visitors and open a space for dialogue. Museums are institutions of free-choice learning, where the visitor decides which elements to interact with based on their personal learning types and interests.[31] By presenting multiple options for engagement, museums can be relevant and interesting to a wider variety of community participants, which can then encourage collaboration and investment from underrepresented groups.

History is not linear, and professionals in cultural organizations cannot expect the dispersion of historical knowledge to simply flow from one source to another. It is a dynamic process of discussion and diverging viewpoints that emanate from a central event or series of events. Even when knowledge is presented as an absolute, people then take away their own meaning and interpretation from the encounter with that knowledge. Instead of projecting one viewpoint as the only possible meaning of information, exhibitions should invoke deeper thought processes and invite discussion to accommodate different beliefs and understandings. By first meeting the learning

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[30] Falk and Dierking, 203-4.

[31] Ibid, 107.

needs of visitors through diverse media and forms of interaction with collections, curators can progress to specifically addressing issues of representation and collaboration with the community around the institution.

## Community Engagement and Representation

Curators, no matter how unbiased they might believe themselves to be, must move beyond their own expectations and representations of other cultures by providing counter-narratives. They can do this by implementing community collaboration as a standard practice and using oral histories in diverse way throughout exhibitions to emotionally connect the community to the exhibition.

When a museum works with the community around it, an "engagement zone" is created. An engagement zone is the theoretical space in which the museum and community meet to enable intercultural understanding and dialogue. Engagement zones can then facilitate contact zones, which work to create contact between groups and cultures that have not interacted on a meaningful level before. The creation and use by museums of a combination of engagement and contact zones can not only open the museum to input and collaboration with the community, but allow different groups within the community to work together and come to a greater cultural understanding (see Figure 10).[32]

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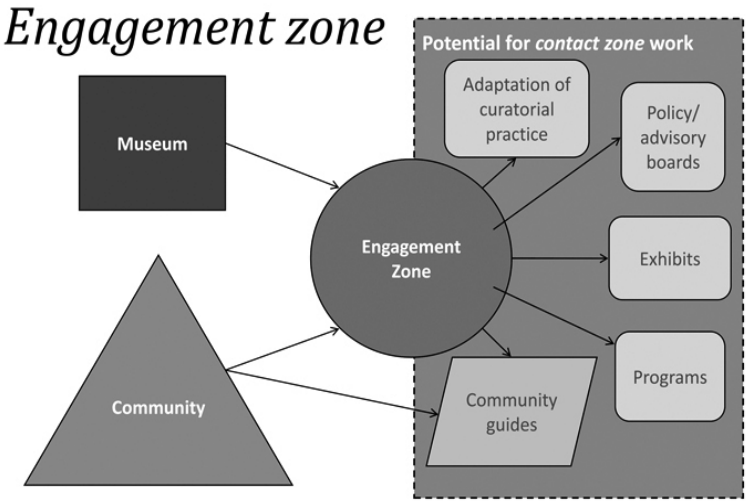
[32] Bryony Onciul, "Community Engagement, Curatorial Practice, and Museum Ethos in Alberta, Canada," in *Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections and Collaboration*, ed. Vivien Golding and Wayne Modest (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 79-82.




Engagement Zone Diagram. The model shows the input of individuals from the museum and community into the engagement zone and potential products or results of engagement work in the form of adaptation to curatorial practice, community participation or influence on policy/advisory boards, coproduction of exhibits, program development (often connected with exhibits), and the employment of community members possibly in the form of guides. The model highlights the potential for contact zone work (Clifford 1997), but also for engagement zones to occur without necessarily being, or including, contact zones. Model created by B. Onciul 2011.

Figure 10. Created by B. Onciul in 2011

The benefit of the engagement zone is that, unlike contact zones, there is no expectation of cross-cultural sharing for a purpose. So, while contact zones work to create a positive product from interaction, engagement zones exist to open dialogue with the community simply to promote cultural understanding. By working with the community in engagement zones before ever trying to generate an exhibition in the contact zone, museums can create a fluidity of power between curators and community members. Allowing power to fluctuate instead of always residing with the

'professionals' (as with museum consultations)[33] establishes trust and emphasizes the agency of community participants, which is often denied in a traditional museum setting.[34]

There are several ways in which cultural organizations can participate in collaboration with the local community. Creating an engagement zone in the form of an open forum with community leaders and participants can help construct collaborative relationships. Contributors from different groups within the community can then become temporary co-curators to ensure that the exhibition meets the group's needs and accurately represents their interests. A possible implementation of this idea is the creation of a community gallery or exhibit, which rotates temporary exhibitions based on the needs and wishes of the community and co-curators.[35] These self-representative exhibitions would allow participants and viewers to interact with each other on a culturally transcendent level that relates the human experience without professional curation.

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[33] Museum consultations with community members still leave all the power in the hands of the curators. While consultants might make strongly worded suggestions about an exhibition or curatorial decision, there is no insinuation or accountability that the curators will follow these suggestions. Serena Iervolino, "Museums, Migrant Communities, and *Intercultural Dialogue* in Italy," in *Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections and Collaboration*, ed. Vivien Golding and Wayne Modest (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 114.

[34] Onciul, 82-4.

[35] Moira G. Simpson, *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era*, The Heritage: Care, Preservation, Management (London: Routledge, 2001), 64; and Iervolino, 114.

As the popularity of the ideas of shared authority and community collaboration have grown, museums and organizations around the world have implemented their vision for these principles through exhibitions and projects. One of these, *Museums in the Life of a City: The Philadelphia Initiative,* was a partnership between the American Alliance of Museums and Partners for Livable Places in 1988. The goal of this project was to test the influence and involvement of museums in Philadelphia with their community. Staff members from twenty-two museums and community participants from different ethnic and social groups came together for meeting and submitted joint proposals for projects. This collaboration was beneficial for both the museums and the community, as the museum staff gained contacts and a better understanding of the needs of different minority groups and participants learned of the resources available from the museums. One of project proposed by the Johnson Homes Tenant Council trained participants in the practices of oral history through a series of workshops. These contributors then conducted a series of oral histories with residents of the James Weldon Johnson Homes, the first public housing development in Philadelphia, to document the experiences and memories of the tenants. These oral histories were shared with the community through local libraries.[36]

Another project that promoted intercultural sharing and relation was Jette Sandhal's exhibit *A Journey Unlike Any Other* at the National Museum in Copenhagen, Denmark, which broke from usual museum exhibition techniques to have visitor's

[36] Simpson, 61-3.

experience the life of a refugee first hand. At the beginning of the exhibit, the visitor was prompted to choose a refugee to 'be' and then ‘followed’ that person’s experience leaving their country and migrating to Denmark, through customs and across borders. Museum visitors had to deal with the police, played by actors, and work with officials for documentation. The goal of the project was to make the experiences of a minority group, refugees, relatable and personal to the participants and raise awareness for pressing social justice issues.[37]

At the Natural History Museum at the University of Parma (Italy), the exhibition *Creatures of Earth and Sky* worked to reinterpret the museum’s collection using stories about the animals from the cultures of local African migrants to open an intercultural dialogue with native Italians and between migrants from different African countries and cultures. The project coordinators began by establishing contacts within the African migrant community to find willing participants (which proved to be surprisingly difficult since there was no previous engagement zone). The exhibit then combined oral histories from the African participants living in Parma with the museum's natural history collections and a projection of the African night sky. The participants gathered stories and legends about animals in the museum's collections and the zoomorphic constellations in the African sky from their native cultures.[38] The African contributors

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[37] Hein, 190-1.

[38] Iervolino, 117-20. One of the issues with this project, although it did promote representation from a minority group, is that it only gave this representation within a very structured and intentionally designated parameter (stories about animals from

then acted as tour guides to help the exhibition become a space for discussion and intercultural understanding, while assigning new meaning to the collections through the stories.[39]

Museums are not the only institutions that have the potential for effective community collaboration. Other cultural organizations like libraries and schools are in a unique position as integral community resources and are therefore already functioning on a certain level as engagement zones. These organizations can easily move into community collaboration, with or without the backing of a museum. For schools, teaching with oral histories can help students relate to historic events and people. By taking this process one step further and teaching students how to properly collect and interpret oral histories, the schools build lasting relationships and work toward goals to help better the community, such as improved literacy, advocacy, and increased awareness of social problems. Oral history projects can also encourage the sharing of generational and intercultural knowledge while establishing connections between community members, students, and even other cultural organizations like museums and archives.[40]

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African culture). It cannot, therefore, be termed a truly collaborative project, but instead more of a lenient consultation.

[39] Ibid,

[40] Charles R. Lee and Kathryn L. Nasstrom, "Practice and Pedagogy: Oral History in the Classroom," *The Oral History Review* 25, no. 1 (July 1, 1998): 5-7.

To facilitate community knowledge sharing between schools and social groups and encourage interaction, it is necessary for local museums and archives to be supportive of these efforts as partners. Museums and archives are the best equipped repositories for these oral histories (although copies should be readily available in the schools and institutions like local libraries), so they can be well-preserved and maintained. Museums or archives can and should also offer training to interested students and community members in the form of open, free workshops, which will increase the quality of the oral histories and promote interest in the project.[41] By giving other cultural institutions like schools, whose unique situation within the community provides a preexisting engagement zone, with the resources and encouragement to effectively collect oral histories, museums and archives further benefit the local community and groups in their city.

For museums and exhibitions to be truly effective and relatable, they must not only engage visitors' different learning styles and needs, but also be inclusive and representative of collaborative efforts with the local community. Cultural organizations should establish engagement zones, and through them contact zones, to build spaces of power fluidity and trust that work to the benefit of the museum and community. By promoting collaboration and giving curatorial power to community participants,

[41] Sav Kyriacou, "'May Your Children Speak Well of You Mother Tongue': Oral History and the Ethnic Communities," *Oral History* 21, no. 1 (1993): 76-7.

museums can work to open dialogue and intercultural knowledge sharing between different communities, ethnicities, and generations.

# CHAPTER FIVE: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

While this project has been extremely enlightening, there is obvious room for improvement and expansion. The foundation has been set for working with the Coptic community in Nashville to create an engaging and interactive exhibition that highlights collaboration between a cultural organization and the Copts. The research in this paper laid the theoretical framework for a project that now needs to be further developed and implemented.

The first step to actualizing this project into an exhibition is to find a cultural institution willing to fully engage in a collaborative effort with the Coptic community. I would then need to continue building on the trust and relationships created during the collection of oral histories to establish more contact with the Copts and encourage participation in the project. Without Coptic engagement and participation, this exhibition would only contribute to the problem of misrepresentation and disinterest in museums by minority communities.

The project would be best exhibited as an interactive exploration in which visitors see and hear the oral histories so they connect emotionally with the interviewees. I would like for there to be minimal objects and artifacts on display, as photographs and artwork can be more engaging. There should be interactive elements to meet every learning style, such as recordings of the oral histories for auditory learners and blocks to build architecture like the churches in Egypt for the tactile/kinesthetic learners. Coptic participants could act as the guides for this exhibition

to promote even more interaction and shared knowledge between communities in the museum setting. The exhibition could also be accompanied by a community gallery, in which content, representation, and curation are decided entirely by the Coptic participants.

The project should reach outward from the cultural organization housing the exhibition by partnering with community members and institutions to continue and expand the oral history project. Workshops, sponsored by the cultural institution, could be held in the Coptic churches around Nashville to help the Coptic community understand the purpose and importance of this project. Likewise, schools should be engaged in the process of collecting oral histories and creating the exhibition. Lesson activity packets and plans that teach students about the importance of oral histories and how to conduct them could be made for the teachers, not only at the Coptic schools but for schools around the Nashville area. This would give students the opportunity to become involved in the project while building their own relationships in the community around them.

This project has the potential to be an excellent resource, not only for the Coptic community but also for the greater Nashville area. Community members and museum professionals could work together to promote understanding and social engagement with an immigrant community that remains largely unknown. By bringing attention to the human rights issues of the Coptic Church and people in Egypt as well as the vibrant community in Nashville, this project and the museum that supports it could help

connect the Coptic people to the surrounding community and solidify their new identity as immigrants, Copts, and community members. Because funding and appreciation for the humanities and arts is no longer certain, emotional and financial investment from the community in cultural organizations, which can be secured by collaboration and engagement, is essential to the continuation of these institutions.

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