

# Field Trip: Night at the Museum

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## SPEAKERS

If You Don't Know, Now You Know, Megan Goodwin, Dr. Andrew Ali Aghapour, Bonus Ending, Simpsons, A Little Bit Leave It, Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst

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Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:17

This is Keeping It 101, a killjoy's introduction to religion podcast. For 2021-2022, our work is made possible through a Public Humanities Fellowship from the University of Vermont's Humanities Center. We're grateful to live, teach, and record on the current, ancestral, and unceded lands of the Abenaki, Wabenaki, and Aucocisco peoples. As always, you can find material ways to support indigenous communities on our website.



Megan Goodwin 00:40

What's up, nerds? Hi, hello. I'm Megan Goodwin, a scholar of American religions, race, and gender.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:46

Hi, hello. I'm Ilyse Morgenstein, Fuerst, a historian of religion, Islam, race and racialization, and South Asia.



Megan Goodwin 00:53


\*shushes\* \*in a hushed tone\* IRMF. Don't talk so loud!





Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:56


Wait, what?! I'm talking normal.


—


 M Megan Goodwin 00:58  
Seriously, woman, keep it down!!


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:00  
This is a podcast, Megan-- all we do is sit and talk into microphones, which are voice amplifiers, and I do not understand what you are doing. \*laughs\*


 M Megan Goodwin 01:09  
\*giggles\* We, WE, are doing a thing today!


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:13  
What kind of thing, Megan?

 M Megan Goodwin 01:15  
It's a field trip! We're in the museum. Museums, like libraries, demand quiet, RULED bodies! Do not be unruly, or you will influence me to be unruly! And you KNOW, that is my favorite way to be.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:27  
\*laughs\* Megan, when I said we should do an applied episode about museums and world religions and how the world religions paradigm shows up in museums-- because museums, like religion, were developed under imperialism-- and then when I said we should call it "Night at the Museum" because jokes, I did NOT think you would take the bit so far as to act like we're in a museum on the recording.

 M Megan Goodwin 01:50  
Well, then, you have mis-underestimated my commitment to the theatre.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:55  
Well, then, I am silently rolling my eyes for all to hear.

 M Megan Goodwin 01:58  
Good! Good foley work. I love it. You're getting it! But... we can't actually pretend to whisper

this whole episode. It's annoying. So.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:06

So, I suppose this is where we just introduce what we're doing and get into it?



Megan Goodwin 02:09

I suppose... Alright! Today, we are talking museums-- because museums are often a way to see the world religions paradigm preserved-- literally, and often not a good way-- in real life.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:23

And while we're going to do this in a vaguely silly way, as is our want, we are also joined by the very serious, very funny Dr. Andrew Ali Aghapour, a rockstar of a scholar. His expertise is on intersections of religion and science, American politics, and pop culture. He's also a comedian and a playwright. But he's here because he is ALSO a consulting scholar at the National Museum of American History. Andrew also happens to be part of the mishbucha, my chosen extended family, so I suppose just asking him created a guilt space in which he had to say yes... Nepotism aside, this triple-threat of a nerd is exactly who I want to give us, you know, a tour guide! In the museum!



Megan Goodwin 03:02

Yes! Yes. We definitely strong-armed Andrew into being here! With love. But YES, good. This is more like it. Be in this museum, be in the space. In fact, \*I\* want to see the exhibits now. So...



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:17

No, sir! I didn't see you playing with your LESSON PLAN again!



Megan Goodwin 03:31

Truly, nerds. Picture it: 2022 (masked). Or 2021, or 2001, or 1991 unmasked... ugh, it seems so strange! You are in a museum. It's in your city, or your town, or you're somewhere.... I don't know, fancy! Or, if you've never been made to go anywhere, maybe it's on a TV show, like Buffy! Or on your campus and your professor made you go. When I see that museum in my mind's eye, besides it being sort of big-- like, grand, a sense of spaciousness-- and QUIET, of course, I can also picture how things are arranged. I don't care what museum you're in-- natural history, art, city history, maritime (I do love a maritime museum)... Doesn't matter! Remember when we went to the railroad museum? ANYWAY.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 04:17



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 04:17

I put that in there just for you, sweetheart. \*giggles\*



Megan Goodwin 04:21

Museums are typically arranged-- and the museums that aren't arranged are usually famous for their purposeful chaos-- anyway, museums are ordered so that viewers can learn, so that, like-- so that like items hang together, whether that's similar periods, or regions, or subject matter. Often, they're ordered in such a way that if you were to wander about, there will be a clear delineation between objects either assumed to be or, as we'll talk about, argued to be different.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 04:49

Absolutely, yes. In addition to being places we imagine as serious and formal and elite, museums are physical buildings with collections and objects and storage facilities, but they are also arguments, values statements, and embodiments of ideology.



Megan Goodwin 05:08

Yes. So today, our lesson plan is simple but not even a little bit simplistic. We're talking about how world religions show up in museums, and why that's a problem in... oh, so very many ways. A practical, experienced problem. Which brings us to... the 101 on today-- \*clicks tongue\* --the section where we do professor work. Okay, IRMF! Let's change up our HISTORY OF THE WORLDS (RELIGIONS) formatting a little. Across this giant megaseason, we've been starting our 101 with these pesky Socratic questions. I think today, though, we'd be better serving our nerds if we just tell them why we give a care about museums, how we think that's applied religious studies, and also... as is our want, all the imperialism. I want us to use facts and examples! I want to space my own theatre performer roots and soul! I want to ACT in this audio field trip! Are you with me?!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:00

Well, of COURSE I'm with you. I'm ride or die! But I demand we start with why this episode, why this example? And then, I demand we talk imperialism. If you get to be an actress, then I want to stay yelling at imperialism. My role is straight woman, literally and jokingly, I suppose, as well as the STAR stone cold bummer. \*giggles\*



Megan Goodwin 06:21

\*chuckles\* You are that, and I oblige you happily. You know, I love a museum. An exhibit is a thing I often get for fun after I do a hard thing-- it's true, it is a literal way I reward myself. I'm not ragging on museums in this episode, per se, but as usual, I'm asking us to make sense of them. Especially because when we see religion named in museums, there are some striking patterns that... yeah, well, \*we're\* not surprised by, and after this episode, our nerds, I suspect,

will not be surprised either. I also assume our nerds are, like, maybe onto this already because... many of them have been listening for a while. But maybe we can still shock you! Let's find out.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:05

Alright. Like, as we try to shock (and maybe awe) our nerds, can I ask: why museums and not, say, music, or news, or some other practical, material example?



Megan Goodwin 07:17

Okay, well... for the record, you picked museums. \*laughs\* That's a little obnoxious of you to make ME explain why, but okay, sure, fine. Why not? Museums, for me, represent a lot of what we're talking about this megaseason, that's why! First and foremost, museums are a status thing. They are high culture, they're elite. There's class and race baked right into the concept. Who has access to museums, who decides what is museum worthy-- or exhibit worthy, what the capital value of a collection would be-- all these hit on my most favorite clusterfuck of issues, like gender, race, class, sexuality, and of course, religion. Second, and as deeply important to me but probably more professionally your bag, museums are literally developed as an idea and go from plots of land to grand buildings filled with STUFF, specifically during the European colonial and imperial period. Museums that claim to be international-- that represent "the world" in any capacity-- are, in many ways, just plundered goods from colonized, imperial subjects. We'll get there. I know you'll get us there. Okay, but Ilyse-- enough of this monologuing. I need you to get into character. I know, I know. You like the scripted, stand-up, truth-bomb style. But today, I think we need to take a different approach. I want a quiz show meets imagination set of games. Are you in?!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:36

I suppose I don't have a choice, right? Like, we're in this?



Megan Goodwin 08:38

Nope. We're here. Buckle up, buttercup. Alright, so here's what I want to do. I'm going to walk us through some museums across the world through the cutting use of maps-- no, NOT like nation-state maps, BUT those handy-dandy maps that they give you at the information desk of any museum.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:55

Alright, that sounds... great, for an audio medium.



Megan Goodwin 09:00

.....

Shut up and play along, goddamnit. \*chuckles\*



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:02

Yes, ma'am. Alright, let's get-- let's get this going. Okay, I'm holding a map, I've unfolded it-- NEVER to be refolded again-- of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. One of the places my dad took me regularly as a child. I'm here.



Megan Goodwin 09:20

SUCH good foley work. You're there! It's New York! You feel cool as fuck. You're in the great hall, just off 82nd. You have that little metal button the Met was famous for. I see these galleries on my map: to the right, the Egyptian gallery (made famous, obviously, in When Harry Met Sally); left is Greek and Roman art. AHEAD of us, we can choose Medieval Art; European Sculpture and Decorative Arts; past that, the American collections (I know you're skipping that shit) and some modern art. Oh, but look! On the second floor, I see something up your alley: "Florence and Herbert Irving South Asian Galleries. You brought the South Asians and the Jews together, PLUS, Gallery 234 through Gallery 243 represent India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. They primarily trace the development of the sculptural arts associated with the temples and shrines of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. And maybe you'd want to see the gallery formerly known as Islamic Art but currently known as "Art of the Arab Lands--: Oh. Wow, okay. "--Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia."



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 10:29

Okay, so that's a really good job of reading the map at me, but I want to unpack "Arab Lands" for, conservatively, the next 45 minutes. But I'm... I'm... I'm feeling a little lost on my map! If I'm looking for Christian or Jewish art, where should I go? Because like, I'm already pretty familiar with Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain art. I'm really here to learn! So what should I do? I don't-- my map is not helping right now.



Megan Goodwin 10:58

Can't find Christians-- check. Okay. Let me check my maps legend. There... is nothing about Christianity...? Okay. I'm gonna use the interactive map online... Okay, that's weird.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:11

What's weird?



Megan Goodwin 11:12

Well, so, like, when I search for other religions, they show up with gallery titles. But, like, Christian and Jewish do not...? I'm directed to galleries with places or genre names, like "Italian Sculpture and Decorative Arts" or "Renaissance" or "Renaissance"

sculpture and decorative arts, or Baroque, or Renaissance.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:26

Hmm. Goodwin, I think we've discovered our very first problem.



Megan Goodwin 11:31

Dun, dun, dun.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:31

In this museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, one of the largest in the world and certainly the most powerful in the US, religions associated with white folk and Europe are not on the map! Those religions are just part of culture. They have specific understandings of time, style, genre that aren't reserved just for experts, but for all museum visitors. Right? If Baroque is a word that is expected to have any meaning with the museum-going public, but Arab Lands is also supposed to have meaning with the museum-going public... Wow. That seems to say that religions like Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism-- not only are these primary organizing identity of the objects, but it's... it's sort of, like, generic? That our museum thinks we... that's all we need to know about Indian art. Yeah, yeah. Okay, so what I hear you saying, IRMF, is that for Europeans and Americans-- or, ugh, under the umbrella of Judeo-Christian (which, we don't even have time to get into why that's a problem)-- religion is part of it, but it doesn't define it. Whereas for everyone else, religion is explicitly named as central and crucial to the art itself. Yeah. And like, what's bizarre in this is that Renaissance art is definitionally either shit from the Bible or, like, tablescapes. It's SO religious! And yet, we're not calling it religious art. We're not labeling it religious art. And now that we're looking around here-- like, I'm following you around this beautiful museum-- some of the objects from the wing formerly known as Islamic art, and currently called such a mouthful that it will always be the Islamic art wing aren't really religious at all.



Megan Goodwin 13:15

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 13:16

And the lack of art from India that is modern and not just Hindu icons, or Hindu statues of deities, is... it's something, all right.



Megan Goodwin 13:26

Yeah, that's a-- that's a choice. It's almost as if this giant museum, this force of culture itself, is telling us that the most important thing to know about East, Central, South, and West Asia; north west and east Africa AND the Middle East is that THOSE places are religious. And it

North, West, and East Africa, AND the Middle East, is that THOSE places are religious. And it seems like Europe and North America get to be places with, like, varieties of art AND experiences.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 13:53

Weird. It's almost like we're watching the world religions paradigm-- where Christianity is the winner of civilization, and also Christian art isn't seen as religious, per se, but culture-- like, it's universal for all-- it's like it's right there on the wall, and in my map!



Megan Goodwin 14:13

Weird indeed.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:16

I got a question, though, Megan.



Megan Goodwin 14:17

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:18

Do you think this is the case in other museums, too?



Megan Goodwin 14:21

I mean... I have-- I have... I have been to some museums, and... Okay. Like, I can't even commit to the bit. Yes, we know it is! We know it is. Take any European or American museum, and you're gonna find similar patterns! Which brings me to this question, Ilyse. Look, I know you're getting weirded out by all the buddhas and Vishnus and prayer niches and Qur'anic inscriptions just staring at you. Do you know how these objects from faraway lands, like, got here?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:48

OH! I totally know this!!!! Imperialism. Orientalism. Plunder, and pillage.



Megan Goodwin 14:54

Yes, yes, yes. Say more-- I know you want to. Well you know how I talk about imperialism? No. Do you... do you talk about imperialism? I don't-- I have never, I've never noticed. YES, all the time. Yes. We are aware



time. Yes. we are aware.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:07

\*laughs\* Alright, well, I was going to say, you know how I always talk about imperialism and we often talk about the guys with guns and the guys with pens?



Megan Goodwin 15:15

Mhm.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:16

Well, so like, there's a third group here, and, um... that's the guys with pickaxes and pallets and ships. The guys with pens tell these laborers and, you know, Indiana Joneses-- the archaeologists, the anthropologists, the linguists, the art historians-- where to dig and where to extract. And the guys with guns, well, they guard these heritage sites while--



Megan Goodwin 15:43

Wait so... but that's just... that's just stealing.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:49

Indeed, it is. It is-- it is also how the British Museum in its entirety, for example, exists.



Megan Goodwin 15:56

Stealing.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:57

Yeah.



Megan Goodwin 15:57

Okay.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:57

It's why the Rosetta Stone is just, like, right there when you walk in.



Megan Goodwin 16:02

It is. Yeah, I saw it!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 16:03

It's-- when the Brits called India the jewel in the British crown, this was a-- this was, like, a metaphor, but also, it was exceptionally literal because the Koh-i-Nur diamond, which is 105 carats, and one of the largest diamonds in the whole ass world, is literally set in the Queen Mother's crown. Which is in the Tower of London. Under guard.



Megan Goodwin 16:27

Yeah, saw that too! Yes.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 16:29

So when we talk about imperialism as the extraction of wealth and resources, this is-- this is what we're talking about. Because if you look up the Koh-i-Nur, this gigantic diamond, you see language like "it was ceded from the Mughals to the British."



Megan Goodwin 16:44

Interesting use of passive voice there.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 16:46

Uh huh!



Megan Goodwin 16:47


Mmm.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 16:47

So why are museums like the British Museum, like the Met, like the grim-- I'm gonna say this really badly, because my French is poor-- Musée de quai Branly, which some activists call the Museum of Stolen Goods in France, because it is only dedicated to the arts of Africa and Oceania, it's horribly ordered-- like, there's no order, it's basically, like, a warehouse of colonial items they didn't know where else to put. There's dozens of these kinds of collections,


museums... but like, Megan, why did these-- like, why do these museums exist? Stealing, apparently. I learned about it. It's stealing. Yeah! The answer is colonialism, and specifically, an imperial mindset that says "these backward heathens only have their backward religion. Modern art? Not from Iran. Not from India. Not from Gambia. Not from Benin. Those places only have religion-- and their religion is ancient, like, the truly ungodly amount of bronze and stone Hindu deities that hang out in austere museums across London, Paris, New York, Berlin. Icons, literal icons, that were ripped out of holy sites by conquering armies, guys with pens, and the middle men who handled it, frankly, often illegally, like, literally stealing. As opposed to, like, just legally. Like, under imperialism, it was legal to steal. Still stealing, motherfuckers, but legal stealing and, like, the actual, like, piracy and plunder of holy sites.

 Megan Goodwin 18:15

Sure, sure, sure, sure. Yikes.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:19


Yeah, extremely yikes. One of the many reasons why I do not care for Indiana Jones.

 Megan Goodwin 18:24

Jeeesus! Okay, well, when I planed a funny roleplaying moment, this isn't where I thought we'd end up.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:30

Oh, you knew EXACTLY what you were in for.

 Megan Goodwin 18:33

Twist! Fair enough. So where does that leave us? I think I'm stuck somewhere in the British Museum, or maybe the Met, or possibly the Louvre, which might be my nightmare because imperialism and crowds.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:47

Yeah, I mean, it's bad. It's bad. So here's where we're at. We are safely ensconced in our various homes. So like, step back out of the map, Muppet style.

 Megan Goodwin 18:57

Okay, okay. I'm safe. I'm safe. Okay.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 19:01

We-- the world religions-- we're at number two, okay? So number one, get out of your map. Number two, the world religions paradigm is all over museums. It's how collections are ordered; it's evident in whose religions are primary, the only thing that we need to know about them, for example, or whose religious art gets classified as... art, or as a type of art. We also see the world religion problem in things that, say, Muslims make being inherently religious, even when it isn't. Like, okay, I've seen chairs, watches, drawings of families all held in wings labeled "Islamic Art" simply because Muslims made it. We would never call a chair that happened to have been built by a Christian religious.



Megan Goodwin 19:47

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 19:48

We barely call paintings of literally Jesus Christ Christian art, or at the very least, we don't label the wing that we house it in "the Christian Wing" or the "Christianity Wing." And the third place that we're at, Megan, is that museums are populated with the world's treasures because of imperialist, colonialist violence. Full stop, end of sentence. And without those experiences, the artistic, cultural, heritage resources would never have been removed from their original locations, put under glass, and then mediated through white, elite and usually Christian lenses.



Megan Goodwin 20:25

Yeah, yeah. Just flat out don't have museums without imperialism. And we do not have imperialism without religion. Ergo, religion is in your museum-- and whose religion is religious, and whose is art or culture tells us so much about the world religions paradigm, which we have been yelling about for months now!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 20:50

But you know what? Yelling aside, what the hell do we know? I mean, we know a lot, a lot, actually, but let's hear from an ACTUAL expert. So here, Dr. Andrew Ali Aghapour, who could talk to us about SOOO so much, but we've specifically asked him to tell us about museums, artifacts, exhibitions, and displaying religion. He is, once again, a consulting scholar at the National Museum of American History, and here he is.



Dr. Andrew Ali Aghapour 21:17

My name is Andrew Ali Aghapour, and I'm an expert on religion, science, and museums. I care that people know about what I study because when religion and science intersect, that's usually a place where things get really weird and interesting, and a museum is a really great way to

experience that weirdness. So I'm a consulting scholar at the National Museum of American History and for the last six or so years, I've been working on an exhibit that just opened called "Discovery and Revelation: Religion, Science, and Making Sense of Things." It's an exhibit that has about 40 objects that tell the diverse history of religion and science in America, and I didn't ever think that I was going to be working on a museum exhibit. I went and got a PhD in Religious Studies and decided to focus on religion and science because when I was in college, I took a few classes that blew my mind, teaching me about religion and how it's this crazy intellectual category that kind of doesn't mean anything, and has this really crazy specific history. And similarly, science seems like we know what it is, but the more you study it, the crazier and more diverse it is as a set of, like, fields of knowledge. And so, I got really interested from an early age in studying religion and science, these two things that have crazy histories, and that, once you mix them together, you know, stuff gets real weird. Like, religion and science intersects in our bodies, health, our ethics, our metaphysics, our worldviews. I think there's a reason that we often have really strong opinions when it comes to issues around religion and science, like evolution, or like ethics, because these are really important parts of our lives. So, I became interested in religion and science, got my PhD, and then Dr. Peter Manseau from the National Museum of American History reached out to me because they were developing an exhibit on religion and science and needed a consultant to help with that project. I immediately jumped on it, like, how exciting to be able to use some of my academic training to help with this exhibit. I loved going to the National Museum of American History as a kid, so it was, you know, an honor, and then there are a lot of things, when it came time to start work, that really surprised me. So, I wanted to share with y'all initially some of those surprising things, things that I wish I had known. First of all, the Smithsonian is crazy. Like, the National Museum of American History, the museum where we have this exhibit, has 4 million annual visitors, it's got 1.7 million objects in its collection, plus access to millions and millions of more through loans with other museums, and if y'all ever go to the National Museum of American History, you can see just how much stuff is there because of, you know, how many things-- how much material history there is in our country. Like, at this museum right now, you can see Abraham Lincoln's hat, the Michael Keaton Batmobile, the first COVID vaccine-- we just got that-- there's an entire train, you can see a whole ass train IN the museum if you want to, and like, a few feet away is Grandmaster Flash's turntable, right? They've got everything at this museum. And one of the crazy first things that I thought when I was being introduced to that is, like, how do we make sense of the millions of objects that have been collected here and try to tell a specific story about religion and science? That's where the work ended up being way more collaborative than I ever could have imagined. In the making of an exhibit like this, you want to bring in as many voices as possible, learn as much as possible, and so there were multiple ongoing meetings with academic advisory committees. There are tons of specialists within the museum who are experts on things like accessibility, and diversity, and ethics, and who helped to articulate main ideas that can get across to the 4 million visitors from all walks of life who are going to be coming in and seeing these objects. So, something that surprised me a lot about religion and science in museums is just how much process work has to happen in bringing a lot of people together to help narrow things down from millions and millions of possible objects, to, let's say, 30, that you're gonna use to tell important stories about a topic like religion and science. We brought academics together, and many of them, you know, said things that-- we all agreed about some things about religion and science. For example, that religion and science stories often privilege Christianity and big, contentious scientific issues like evolution, but that that focus overlooks the wide variety of religious communities and scientific practices that link up and combine and intersect and interact in a whole lot of ways across the United States. So, one of the things that we knew in bringing these objects together and creating an exhibit was that we wanted it to reflect the diversity of religions in America, and the diversity of ways that religion and science interact. I also learned that museum people get kind

of touchy when you talk about objects because, you know, we think of a museum exhibit as being a bunch of objects, but it's actually much more than that! At the Smithsonian, they use this framework called IPOP: ideas, people, objects, and physical experiences, like things that you can touch and mess around with. The reason being that if you want to tell a story in a space, if you just have objects, or just focus on ideas, you're not going to capture all people and the way that they learn. That in response to neurodiversity, and the various ways that people interact in a space, you want to have all of these dimensions of experience captured. And then from there, there's all this thought about how, once you do have your objects, your, you know, your people, like portraits and write ups about those people, concepts, banners, you know, imagery, and objects-- once you've got all that stuff decided on, then you have to organize it in a 3D space, such that no matter what size you are, no matter what your interest set, as you walk around that space, you're going to have things directly in front of you, things that are far away, that are just catching your eye, and a whole lot of, like, ways to exist in this space that have you learning the key takeaways, or asking-- more importantly, asking reflective questions based on what you've seen in the exhibit. So, that was a big learning experience for seeing how much work goes into creating an exhibit. And from there, I guess, is where things got really fun, which is that we got to decide on what objects and people and stories were going to represent religion and science in America for the purposes of this exhibit. And we picked some really fun things! I really-- this is just an extended plug for y'all to go see this exhibit, which is open for the next year. But we've got things like Benjamin Franklin's lightning rod. There was a huge debate when the lightning rod was invented because some of the Puritans back in the 18th century thought that lightning was a way that God, like, smited people. It was a way to dole out justice. And so, if you had lightning rods that diverted lightning from zappin' people, you're taking away one of God's tools. Maybe you're not supposed to do that! There was a huge scientific/religious debate about that. We've got an EEG headset-- electroencephalograph headset-- that basically has the sensors that go around your head and measure electrical activity, measure your brainwaves. And this particular set of sensors that we have was used as part of this kind of large scale cooperation between the Dalai Lama and Western neuroscientists in the 90s, where Buddhist practitioners had their brainwaves measured to see what could be learned about meditation and its physical effects on the body. We've got a digital prayer mat, a prayer mat-- we've got compasses that will point you towards Mecca, which have been invented-- have existed for centuries and have taken way different forms as technology has evolved. We've got this digital prayer mat that also counts your rak'ahs, something I could have used as a kid, that helps you pray, since it's different-- a lot is different at different times of the day. We've got a portrait of Henrietta Lacks that we borrowed from the National Portrait Gallery. Henrietta Lacks is the person who has-- who created the HeLa cell line, an immortal cell line that's used in medical research across the world every single day, which has saved perhaps millions of lives. But Henrietta Lacks died in 1951, and doctors took those cells from her body without her consent. She was an African American woman whose cells were taken from her, used for science and technology and for-profit research. She never consented to this, her children have never been paid for this, and we have a portrait of her holding a Bible, which is a religious text that has become really important for her living relatives as a way to make sense of Henrietta Lacks' immortality and sacrifice. We also have other objects that are on loan from other museums, like a Peyote tray, on loan from the National Museum of the American Indian, which is used for Peyote ceremonies. And that lets us tell the story of how Peyote has been studied by scientists, and has been given legal exception to be not viewed by the American government as an illicit drug if it's being used for religious practices. So, that raises really interesting questions about religion and law and how we determine what counts as religion. It also tells the story of Indigenous ecological knowledge, the ways that indigenous groups have systems of knowledge that interface with science, not as something that is less than, but kind of equal to as separate but intersecting ways of making sense of the material

world. So, we've got an incredible collection of objects at this exhibit that tries to tell the stories of religion and science in America. That's where I'm coming from. That's what I guess I'm plugging. But y'all asked some really important questions about how we make sense of religion and the world religions model within the space of the museum. And that's the question, right? That's, that's an important question that gets asked all the time within the Smithsonian because working in museums and making these choices also involves reckoning with the past of museums, looking case by case at where these objects have come from, how they were acquired, and also dealing with the fact that collection inevitably reflects the particular ideologies and interests of the people who are doing the collecting generation after generation. So, one of the great questions I'll ask is how spaces like museums reflect the world religions model. And one of the first things that come to mind there is just how much an exhibit ends up kind of meeting people where they are, and some of the choices and sacrifices that you have to make with that. Like, when we were doing some early visitor surveys, I was running around with a clipboard, asking visitors to the museum that, you know, "If you saw an exhibit on religion and science, would you walk in?" And the overwhelming response was like, "No, religion and science isn't for me, you know, that's not" that seems like something that's about conflict. And that's not my style. Then I would ask them a question like, "Alright, well, what is something that interests you in your own past related to religion and science?" Then they would say like, "Oh, well, I'm really interested in, you know, morality, and the debates about that," or, "I'm really interested in religion and nature, and what different religions have thought about nature over time." So then the conversation continues, starts to introduce them to some concepts, some counter-examples, some things that might make them question some of their assumptions, and all of a sudden, they're interested, right? And they're filling out the survey how I secretly hope they'll fill it out, which is that like, "Oh, hey, maybe I would walk into this space." Maybe this is bias survey practice. But what struck me about those conversations is that whether you're teaching undergrads or trying to influence the 4 million somewhat random folks who walk through a museum every year, you're trying to meet people where they are, and you're making some judgment calls, right? Sometimes I know that I, like, wrote captions or, you know, entries, and I also co-wrote our book "Discovery and Revelation," which has some amazing pictures and write-ups of these objects (plug plug). But I had to come to terms with the fact that sometimes, I'm gonna write Buddhist, because if we have 100 words, and I want to complicate your assumptions that religion and science are in conflict, I might just have to write, you know, "Here is an EEG headset that was used in collaborations between Buddhist meditators, or Buddhist monks, and Western neuroscientists." And there's already a danger of essentialism there, right? That, of course, it's not mutually exclusive, that you can't be a Western neuroscientist AND a Buddhist practitioner" and we do talk about that in the book" but put in a caption, right, that's trickier. And we also don't want to essentialize Buddhism as a single thing, right? There's so many different Buddhism's, different groups of Buddhists, some of whom call themselves Buddhists and some don't" y'all all have a great episode about this" and so, one of the things that, I think, makes the work of museum captions, especially, so generative, and creative and complicated, is that when we speak about religion, we're already using a discourse that we need to, you know, problematize and critique. And we have to have questions about how we do it well! But what makes me excited about that, and the thing that my experiences at the museum have taught me, is that there's something really exciting here about the weird things that we can do together. You know, at the National Museum of American History, everyone I've worked with on this, multiple kinds of large and sprawling teams, people are aware of the history of museums, aware that every exhibit is going to ask deep, intellectual questions that might disrupt the very categories that we go in with, and at the end of the day, creating an exhibit is a process of bringing voices together, including a wide variety of experts, deciding on big questions, bringing together the stories of different ideas, people, and objects,

and creating a 3D space where people have their minds blown, right? Don't quote me on that, but that's kind of what I feel like they're doing over there. And what makes me excited is that that means that the future of museums is a future that is post-world religions. It's a future that is aware of the history of religion, and the violence that it can do as a category. Because the future of museums is the future of us, right? We get to educate the next generation about religion. I really, really hope that every subsequent generation of folks doing work at the museum has listened to Keeping It 101! That if you want to do work that relates to religion, here's some resources for you. So, you're up to speed. So what's my takeaway? Go visit a museum! The National Museum of American History and Culture, the National Museum of American History, the National Museum of the American Indian— all museums that will change you, where a lot of really brilliant experts have come together to create spaces that will make you question your assumptions, experience new things, learn histories, and be changed. And when you go to museum exhibits, I encourage you to then think about how you would do it better! Because, you know, no museum can be written from outside of history, from outside of the particular lenses that come in with all the various collaborators who make the thing happen. So yeah, that's my takeaway. Come see our exhibit!



Megan Goodwin 40:53

You think egghead professors would just know about their, like, little areas of expertise, but it's really thrilling to hear how Andrew applies his nerd to an actual set of objects to create an exhibition! What I hear him saying is, basically, museums: it's complicated!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 41:09

Yeah. And I was especially interested to hear about the politics of individual objects, the way that curators are really critically thinking, and, frankly, the limits of those critiques. Like we've been saying all season-- and frankly, since this podcast started-- it's one thing to deconstruct in theory. In practice, categories... they work because they work! They have purchase, and they make sense. Like, in our conversations, and in our language, even if they are imperfect at best, and horrible at worst. Anyway, I guess now we have to go to the National Museum of American History and see this exhibition for ourselves!



Megan Goodwin 41:48

Yeah, we do! Also, don't they have a book coming out? I feel like--



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 41:53

It's in the homework.



Megan Goodwin 41:53

Oh, of course it is. Well, stay tuned for homework, then! But now, it's time to move on to A Little Bit, Leave It!





### A Little Bit Leave It 42:01

\*A Little Bit Leave It\*



### Megan Goodwin 42:06

Where we're letting you know what we think the most important, most interesting, or most challenging part of the topic is. It's a little bit to leave you with! So, you mentioned up top, Ilyse, that I sometimes get to go to a museum as, like, a treat for myself after I have done a challenging or exhausting thing. And that is true. The part about that that we did not say is that I have to go alone. Because museums are honestly really challenging for me, too. They often require dealing with crowds. I am also, like, a big time text and word person, so I LOVE museums, but I don't linger in them. I don't want to, like, take it in for hours at a time, and I've given to understand that that's kind of the whole deal with museums? I have a nightmare. Um, but even with my general uncomfiness with lingering and visuals I was, for example, absolutely struck dumb the first time I saw a Van Gogh in person. All the Tower Record posters in the world cannot capture the texture and light of those sunflowers. So, my Little Bit Leave It for today is just... go to museums, if you can. A lot of museums do free nights if museum-going is not in your budget. Go to museums, go to MORE museums, let them surprise you, and then I ALSO want to ask you to listen to Hannah Gadsby talk on her stand-up Nanette about the fact that we don't have van Gogh's art because he struggled with mental illness: we have Sunflowers and everything else because van Gogh had a brother who loved him and tried to get them help. Which is a short but sincere reminder, as we close out the season-- we've got one more episode, but still-- to take care of ourselves as best we can, accept help whether we think we need it or not, and go to therapy if that's available to us. I don't know, man, like, year three of COVID is a lot. But museums are great, even if I am not lingerer, and you should go to them if you can (and please keep wearing your mask while you're there).



### Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 43:50

\*sighs\* Yeah. My Little Bit Leave It is a little bit similar. I love museums! I love them. I love the idea of them, I love that spectacular art and objects and dinosaur bones would be available to or for anyone who wants to see them. I especially love when museums are truly considered public in that they don't cost to get in! They're taxpayer supported, and anyone can go through the front door, regardless of income. I love the idea like a library; that a museum can make available and accessible literal knowledge, ways of seeing the world that vary, from one wall to the next, even. And I credit a lot of my early development to the every-single-weekend visit to New York City's many museums with my dad, an erstwhile character on this pod. But, and you know there's a big but coming-- as much as I love them, the question of for and to whom is a big one. For whom are museums accessible? To whom do they provide access? And as always, at what cost? Why, as a small child in New York City, did I have access to Indic temple art, and who in India did NOT have access because I was looking at their stolen object?



### Megan Goodwin 45:06

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 45:06

Which is why conversations about repatriation, reparation, and restoration are crucial.



Megan Goodwin 45:12

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 45:13

BUT! If you don't know, now you know!



If You Don't Know, Now You Know 45:16

\*If You Don't Know, Now You Know\*



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 45:18

This is the segment where we get one factoid each. Okay, Megan, I'm going first because this is, like, my favorite.



Megan Goodwin 45:23

Okay!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 45:24

As people talk about decolonization and repatriation-- BIG key terms in museum thinking right now, where we're thinking, really, about returning stolen goods-- I've been obsessed with the story of Emery Mwazulu Diyabanza, a Congolese pan-African activist and provocateur, who has been just, like, clandestinely stealing artifacts from a variety of European museums.



Megan Goodwin 45:53


Oh my god, that's amazing.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 45:53

He's been arrested in both France and the Netherlands-- as far as I know, there could be other places-- but his whole platform is basically like Robin Hood meets cat burglar. He is liberating--

pieces -- but his whole platform is basically, like, Robin Hood meets cat burglar. He is liberating that's the language he's using-- he's liberating stolen African art from European colonizers, often unabashedly and in plain sight. So, I'm gonna give you some of those stories in the show notes, and for legal reasons. I do not condone stealing, but also, return it all.

 Megan Goodwin 46:21


Okay, that's amazing. I... obsessed. Immediately obsessed. This actually goes beautifully with my factoid! Did you know that it's not stealing to bring home literally any object from the British Museum? Hashtag Killmonger was right (or the first half of the movie, and then they had to make him an abuse of psychopaths so Disney subscribers didn't have to think too hard about colonialism). Anyway, the police, I should say if you're traveling, might disagree. But spiritually, not stealing. \*If You Don't Know, Now You Know\* Anyway, don't pack up your stuff yet, nerds! It's time for homework.

 Simpsons 46:50

\*Homework!\*

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 46:50

Well, obviously I am both thrilled to recommend any of Dr. Aghapour's stuff, but also, they're usually incredibly good reads. Andrew is a gifted, gifted writer whose, I think, strength is about making accessible things that feel unaccessible.

 Megan Goodwin 47:04

Mhm.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 47:05

SO! Like we said, there is a book coming out based on the exhibit Andrew has been working on at the Smithsonian. So, it's called "Discovery and Revelation: Religion and Science in America," which is both the title of the exhibit AND the book. So, you can find it online with some-- with some objects and also, I should mention that it's co-authored with Peter Manseau. So I'll link to that.

 Megan Goodwin 47:29

Dope!

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 47:30

"Zara" is Andrew's one-person show about religion, immigration and identity. I've got a news

Zara is Andrew's one person show about religion, immigration and identity. I've got a news piece on it and I'll link to the show-- like, to the flyers about the show itself. He has a piece called "Does Analytic Thinking Erode Religious Belief?", which is an oldie at this point, but also, it's SUPER smart and really interesting at that space of science and religion. And frankly, for, like, those of you who want to know more about religion, science, pop culture, and comedy, I'm just going to link to Andrew's website. He is a prolific public scholar, and his comedy stories are gold and masterful, so. Okay, on museums: I cannot recommend highly enough Dan Hicks's recent book called "Brutish Museums--" Get it? British Museums, Brutish Museums-- "the Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution." It's a fabulous book on all of that. Shimrit Lee's "Decolonize Museums" is a book coming out really soon. If it's not already. I have an advanced copy and it's super smart. And then, in the news, I will link to some of Mwazulu Diyabanza's activism and how he's stealing things from museums, in the name of anti-imperialism.




Megan Goodwin 48:49

Good for him. I LOVE that. Ugh, okay. Plus 1 million for all things Andrew. It has nothing to do with museums, but Andrew and I actually wrote a thing together about religion, abuse, and Kimmy Schmidt for Religion Dispatches in the early days of my book project, the spiritual if not PRINTED title of which-- the piece that we wrote-- is "Always Be Uppercutting." You're welcome. I also want to lift up cool conversations among pod besties, so I'm going to recommend you listen to Andrew chat about his research (and more) with friend of the pod, Greg Soden, on Classical Ideas. As for the rest, uhhhh, again! I love museums, but my attention span makes me a nightmare to bring to them. Two out of five, do not recommend. So I-I love them, but I am not a lingerer. So, in the spirit of religion in museums, though, I will say that should you have occasion to be in Montmartre, the hill above Paris, the Dali Museum is a goddamn treasure-chest and is also air conditioned, if it happens to be 95 degrees Fahrenheit while you're visiting (as it was when I was there). I will also highlight two cool pieces about scholarship in museums for our nerds, though. So, the first is an illustrated guide to curating a museum exhibit written and drawn by B. Erin Cole called "I Make Exhibits," first published in Contingent Magazine and, if my memory serves, is now being used by the Smithsonian and the New York Public School System. Which is pretty cool! Um, also the Editor in Chief of Contingent, Erin Bartram, is both a historian of religion and a museum worker! She does dope stuff at the Mark Twain house, which you can learn more about if you follow her on Twitter @erin\_bartram (E-R-I-N \_ B-A-R-T-R-A-M)! The second piece I want to recommend is by our guiding light, the self-described Mr. Burns to our Bart Simpson, Dr. Judith Weisenfeld. She wrote a really cool reflection about religion at the National Museum of African American History and Culture. And she wrote the piece for Sacred Matters right after the museum opened in 2017. Also, look, if you haven't visited the National Museum for African American History and Culture, WOOF. All I can-- all I can say is you have to go. You just-- you just have to. I have no words to describe being in the presence of Nat Turner's Bible. I just... eugh. But I CAN link you to the objects page on the museum's website, AND encourage you to go explore it, because truly, what a wealth of American history, culture, and religion.





Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 51:07


All really good recommendations.

 Megan Goodwin 51:08  
Hey, thanks.


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 51:09  
Big thanks to those of you writing reviews on iTunes, Amazon, and Google. It really helps! Our Nerd of the Week is @meganeddy. If you want to be a Nerd of the Week, write us a review! We'll shout you out and send some love directly.


 Megan Goodwin 51:23  
Yes. But this week, we love Megan Eddy best of all.


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 51:26  
That's right. It's the only new review, so she gets prime spot!


 Megan Goodwin 51:30  
They are number one, the rest of you all: number twos. You're welcome.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 51:33  
\*laughs\*

 Megan Goodwin 51:33  
Not really. We love you all. \*laughs\*

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 51:34  
That's not encouraging anyone to do the work for us.

 Megan Goodwin 51:37  
No.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 51:38  
Not-- not the tone we want. But keep it up!



Megan Goodwin 51:41

I was just going for the poop joke. ANYWAY, join us next time for the dramatic conclusion of HISTORY OF THE WORLD (RELIGIONS) PART ONE, where we reveal why, exactly, Ilyse has had a Mel Brooks runner for the whole damn season.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 51:56

Shout out to our research assistant, Alex Castellano, whose transcription work makes this pod accessible and therefore awesome. Need more religion nerderie? You know where to find us. It's on Twitter!



Megan Goodwin 52:06

You can find Megan (that's me!) on Twitter @mpgPhD, and Ilyse @ProfIRMF, or the show @keepingit\_101. Find the website at [keepingit101.com](http://keepingit101.com). Peep the Insta, if you wanna! AND drop us a rating or review in your podcatcher of choice. And with that...



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 52:26

Peace out, nerds.



Megan Goodwin 52:27

And do your homework! It's on the syllabus.



Bonus Ending 52:57

Black Panther: Killmonger, Museum Scene