


## REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS

# Museum Care of Indigenous Cradles: Insights From Consultation With Tribal Communities

Abby S. Baka<sup>1</sup>  | Ephraim 'Zefren' Anderson<sup>2</sup> | Shanan Noah Anderson<sup>3</sup> | Carmen Clark<sup>3</sup> | Ira Coffey<sup>4</sup> | Hayley Kievman<sup>1</sup> | Olivera Masters<sup>1</sup> | Ishmael Medina<sup>1</sup> | Blanca Yagüe<sup>1</sup> | Alyson Wilkins<sup>5</sup> | Alexandra Greenwal<sup>1,5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Anthropology, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA | <sup>2</sup>Navajo Weaver, Shiprock, New Mexico, USA | <sup>3</sup>Shivwits Band, Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah Cultural Consultants, Ivins, Utah, USA | <sup>4</sup>Paiute-Shoshone Enrolled Member, Reno-Sparks Indian Colony, Reno, Nevada, USA | <sup>5</sup>Natural History Museum of Utah, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

**Correspondence:** Abby S. Baka ([abby.baka@utah.edu](mailto:abby.baka@utah.edu)) | Alexandra Greenwal ([agreenwal@nhmu.utah.edu](mailto:agreenwal@nhmu.utah.edu))

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## ABSTRACT

Traditional cradles are important objects in many Indigenous American cultures. A historical tendency of museums to overlook Indigenous perspectives on proper object handling and display has often resulted in improper care of culturally sensitive objects in museum collections. Through interviews at the Natural History Museum of Utah, we consulted members of Indigenous communities in and around Utah to ascertain culturally appropriate practices for housing, handling, displaying, researching, and imaging Indigenous cradle objects. Cradle forms and beliefs vary across cultures, and cradles can be significant on individual, familial, artistic, practical, and spiritual levels. Consultants provide feedback on physical and spiritual considerations that museums should incorporate into their care practices. Results provide insights regarding proper museum care of cradles specific to the cultures with which the consultants identify. Additionally, they provide broader insights regarding considerations all museums should prioritize when seeking Indigenous input on the care of cradle objects of any cultural association.

## 1 | Introduction

Museums have an unfortunate history of overlooking, misrepresenting, or failing to gather perspectives from the people whose cultures are represented in their collections, including North America's Indigenous cultures. Such failures have led to improper care for, display of, and communication about Indigenous objects in museum collections, public misunderstanding about American Indigenous history and culture, and Tribal distrust towards museums that hold their objects (Cooper 2007; Isaac et al. 2024; Lawlor 2006; Sleeper-Smith 2009). The Native American Voices Initiative at the Natural History Museum of Utah (NHMU) has sought to address this issue by inviting paid Tribal (or Indigenous) collaborators from Utah and neighboring states (Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico) to visit the museum to provide cultural context and recommendations for display, collections records, and care of Indigenous objects in NHMU's

collections. During these consultations, it became clear that basketry cradles and cradleboards in museum collections are a sensitive class of Indigenous belongings deserving special consideration in the management of anthropological collections.

We present consultants' insights regarding the proper storage, handling, display, and imaging of—an terminology for—traditional North American Southwest and Great Basin Indigenous cradles in museum collections. Through interviews with paid Indigenous consultants as part of the Native American Voices Initiative, funded by the National Endowment of the Humanities, we have recorded the preferences of Tribal members regarding culturally appropriate practices for the museum treatment of traditional cradles. Our results serve as a guide for culturally appropriate practices for museums housing Indigenous cradle objects. Additionally, insights are being used to update NHMU's records, storage, display, and handling protocols and exhibits.

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Specific insights regarding handling, storage, display preferences, and terminology are therefore specific to tribes within the United States and the surrounding regions. However, broader insights from this project are relevant to museums housing cradles from any Native American Tribe, as the results provide guidance regarding what questions and considerations should be taken into account when making decisions about the curation and display of traditional cradle objects. Furthermore, since Indigenous knowledge of the proper treatment of cradles is rooted in cultural beliefs, recorded in interviews with tribal members about these objects serve as records of Indigenous oral history that will be made available to relevant Tribes and, if Tribes consent, shared publicly.

Terminology for cradle objects varies by region, Tribe, and personal preference. All consultants in this project agreed that the term *cradle board* was appropriate when referring to cradle objects from their Tribes, though they offered additional, nuanced insights on proper terminology. Members of Tribes not consulted in this study may prefer terms other than “cradleboard” for cradles from their culture, and not all tribes produce cradles that incorporate wooden boards or are board-shaped. As we intend for this study to inform museum practices regarding the handling of cradle objects across all Indigenous American Tribes and cultures, we choose to use the terms *cradle* and *cradle object* when referring to such objects here. However, we share consultants’ nuanced preferences for cradle terminology in Table 2 so museums housing cradle objects from their tribes can incorporate such insights into their signage and records. Each Tribe’s or individual’s nuanced preferences should be used in exhibits and museum records of cradles from that Tribe or individual.

## 2 | Background

### 2.1 | Indigenous Insights and Museum Curation

In recent decades, it has become clear that close Tribal involvement in museum curation and exhibit design is essential for ethical and accurate record keeping, object care, and public education about Indigenous objects, culture, and heritage (Kreps 2009). Additionally, it is becoming increasingly acknowledged that recording and respecting Indigenous knowledge of the proper treatment of traditional objects is synonymous with recording and respecting Indigenous cultural beliefs and heritage.

Indigenous curatorial traditions, such as Native American approaches to the care and handling of sensitive materials, define the definition of indigenous cultural heritage because they consist of practices, traditional knowledge systems, skills and instruments that function to transmit culture and are part of people’s traditional heritage.

(Kreps 2009, 199)

Efforts are being made to involve descendant Indigenous communities in the curation and exhibition of Indigenous objects in American museums (Shannon 2017), and to develop guides for

cultural practices for museum care of Indigenous objects (Ogden 2004; School for Advanced Research 2003). However, gathering a sufficient wealth of Indigenous knowledge to accomplish these ideals is a time-consuming and ongoing process, and many object classes have yet to receive sufficient attention during museum-Tribal consultation and post-consultation publication. Cradle objects are one such class. Given the incredible inter- and intra-Tribal diversity in cradle form, technology, and ideology across the continent (Bibby 2004; Broughn 2019; Farmer 2013; Schneider 1983), here is a dearth of understanding among non-Tribal curators, collections managers, and exhibit programmers regarding proper treatment of different Tribes’ cradle objects, as well as regarding what questions and considerations to take into account when making decisions about cradle handling, storage, display, record keeping, and imaging. We address this gap in knowledge by collecting direct insights and preferences from Tribal members, recording those preferences for future Tribal members and museum employees, and sharing Indigenous insights so that other institutions can better care for traditional cradle objects.

### 2.2 | Indigenous Cradles

Many Indigenous Tribes across North and South America have a deep history of using cradles, cradleboards, baby baskets, and other cradle objects to transport and handle infants. There is extreme diversity in the materials used to make these objects, in the methods for carrying them, in their shape and structure, and in their ornamentation. Cradle styles can be highly specific to different Tribes, cultures, and environments (e.g., Bibby 2004; Broughn 2019; Farmer 2013; Schneider 1983). Traditional cradle objects protect babies physically (Greenwald 2017) and calm and comfort them (James Chisholm 1978; James S. Chisholm 1983). Furthermore, they afford mothers efficient ways to carry babies as well as safe ways to lay infants down, prop them up, or hang them up while completing tasks, thereby improving maternal efficiency (Greenwald 2017; Nicolou et al. 2025).

The traditional cradles of the San Juan Southern Paiute, Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah, Skull Valley Band of Goshute, and Paiute-Shoshone (Reno-Sparks Indian Colony) consultants interviewed for this project are woven basketry cradles, often with canvas or hide covers and woven sun shade covers. Diné cradles are constructed of wooden boards connected by leather lashings. The traditional cradles of the Ute and Anasazi (Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation) are constructed of a wooden board with a hide or canvas cover and a woven shade.

## 3 | Methods

### 3.1 | Recruiting Consultants

Participants in NHMU’s Native American Voices Initiative were recruited for this study. The Native American Voices Initiative invited artists, elders, cultural experts, and knowledge keepers from Utah’s eight federally recognized tribes and tribes within traditional Utah lands to visit NHMU as paid consultants. Recruitment for the Native American Voices Initiative

**TABLE 1** | Consultants and their tribal affiliations. *g*

Consultant name	Tribal/cultural affiliation
Zefren Anderson	Diné (Navajo)
Everett Pikyavit <i>g</i>	Moapa Paiute
Ira Coffey <i>g</i>	Reno-Sparks Indian Colony (Paiute-Shoshone)
Natalie Edgewater, Richard Graymountain, Jr., Louise <i>g</i> Tallman	San Juan Southern Paiute
Shanandoah Anderson, Carmen Clark <i>g</i>	Shivwits Band of the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah
Lisa Bullcreek, Copen Thomas <i>g</i>	Skull Valley Band of Goshute <i>g</i>
Alan Groves	Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation and Hopi

was done by graduate student research assistants and faculty *g* in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Utah. Recruiters reached out to tribal leaders via email and telephone; several Tribal members agreed to be consultants or put recruiters in touch with tribal members they believed would be interested in serving as consultants. Additionally, recruitment was done by reaching out to museum curators, Indigenous artists, and ballerists, and by speaking directly to Indigenous people at events such as the Indigenous Art Market at NHMU.

As consultants in the Native American Voices Initiative Tribal members viewed objects in the museum's Native Voices and First Peoples galleries, dedicated to modern Utah Tribes and Utah archaeology, respectively, as well as objects housed in the museum's anthropology collections. Consultants provided cultural context for museum objects and provided feedback on gallery displays and object handling and storage practices.

Consultants from the Native American Voices Initiative were invited to participate in this study about cradles during their visits to NHMU. Consultants signed consent forms to be participants.

Eleven individuals were interviewed about cradles for this study. These individuals do not represent a random sample of Tribal members. The sample is biased towards people who have access to email and telephone, people who are known to the elders and leaders contacted by recruiters, people who are able to participate in events such as art markets, people who are local to Salt Lake City or can arrange transportation to NHMU from their homes across the region, people who are comfortable being recorded and photographed, and people who are open to collaborating with museums (often considered colonizer entities) and eager to discuss their cultural backgrounds. Interviewed individuals and the Tribes or cultures with which they are affiliated are listed in Table 1. *g*

## 3.2 | Collecting Insights

### 3.2.1 | Preparation for Interviews

Prior to their arrival at the museum, consultants were emailed a list of objects housed at NHMU associated with their respective Tribal affiliation. Consultants had the option to request that specific objects from this list be pulled out of storage in preparation

for their visit; they could also request to view broad classes of objects, such as baskets or rugs. If consultants did not request specific objects or object classes, anthropology collections staff at NHMU decided which objects to pull. Their decisions were based on which objects had underdeveloped records, were of equivocal cultural origin, or were of particular research interest. Additional objects were pulled from storage throughout the consultants' visit if interests arose. Additionally, many Tribal objects are on display in the Native Voices gallery at the museum and were viewed by consultants in the gallery. In support of this research project, cradles listed in the museum's records affiliated with the consultant's culture were pulled from storage prior to that consultant's arrival or were shown to the consultant in the Native Voices gallery.

### 3.2.2 | Recording

Consultants were asked to sign consent forms to be recorded. Consent to be recorded was not mandatory for payment and participation in the Native American Voices Initiative Interviews were recorded by a professional filmmaker using video and audio equipment.

Interviews were recorded to hard drives before being uploaded to secure museum data storage platforms. Recordings will be uploaded to Mukurtu ([mukurtu.org](https://mukurtu.org)), a platform for collecting and sharing cultural data, stories, and perspectives. Materials uploaded to Mukurtu can be made available publicly or only to members of specific Tribes. It was made clear to consultants that if they shared any information with us that they wished to only be shared with their own Tribe, we would ensure that their wishes were respected when materials are uploaded to Mukurtu. Handwritten notes were also taken throughout the interviews.

### 3.2.3 | Interview Structure and Questions

Interviews were semi-structured and conversational. The interviewer made sure that all questions listed below were answered over the course of the interview, but they were not always asked in the same order, so as to be adaptable to the conversational flow of the interview. If a question was answered without being directly asked of a consultant, the interviewer often did not formally ask the question.

TABLE 2 | Consultants' recommendations for storing and displaying cradles from their culture.

Tribe	Consultant(s)	What terminology would you like museums to use when referring to cradles from your culture in your records?	How should cradles from your culture be stored in museum collections (spiritual considerations)?	What kinds of objects should be stored with?	Is it ok to store cradles from your culture with cradles from other cultures?	How would you like cradles from your culture in museum collections to be handled?
Diné	Zefre Aderso	Baby carrier, cradleboard, traditional Navajo term (though this may be controversial among other Navajo people)	Components should be tied from each other and stored as a bundle in collection cabinets, wood and leather oiled every 20-40 years if oily made and used for trade (display)	Domestic objects. No ceremonial objects (except baskets), no grave goods or objects associated with death.	Yes	"The same way you want someone to handle something that you built."
Shivwits Band of the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah	Sharon Aderso Carme Clark	Cradleboard	Flat on their backs in collection cabinets	Full-sized cradles with baskets. Miatare cradles with toys and children's objects	Yes	Newer ones are pretty sturdy, older ones need to be handled more delicately.
Sajava Southern Paiute	Richard Graymont, Natalie Edgewater, Louisa Tallman	Cradleboard, <i>gkurn</i>	Flat on their backs in a cool, dry place where they won't get broken, covered with a cloth	Ullace naskets, other cradles	Yes	Gently, two gloved hands supporting its weight

(Continued)

TABLE 2 | (Continued)

Tribe	Consultant(s)	What terminology would you use when referring to cradles from your culture in our records?	How should you store cradles in museum collections (spiritual considerations)?	What kinds of objects should be stored with?	Is it ok to store cradles from your culture with cradles from other cultures?	How would you like cradles from your culture in museum collections to be handled?
Skull Valley Band of Goshute	Lisa Bullcreek Copen Thomas	Cradleboard oll cradle, teaching cradle	Flat on their backs in collections cabinets considerations are less important for cradles that were not and will not be used by an infant	Not discussed	Not discussed	Not discussed
Paiute-Shoshone of the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony	Ira Coffe	aby basket, cradleboard Dollcradle, display cradle	Hanging up or flat on their backs in a dry place (e.g., collections cabinets), protected from dust, acceptable to keep a blanket rolled up in it to maintain shape.	Did not express preference	Personally, yes. May be best to check with makers	“Don’t be afraid to handle them.”

(Continues)

TABLE 2 | (Continued) **u**

Tribe <b>u</b>	Cons Itant(s) <b>u</b>	What terminology <b>u</b>	How sho ld <b>u</b>	What <b>u</b>	Is it ok <b>u</b>	How <b>u</b>
Moapa Paiut <b>u</b>	verett <b>u</b> Pilyavit <b>u</b>	Cradleboard, <i>konoau</i> Doll cradle, miniature cradle, toy cradle	Spiritual considerations less important for cradles that are not going to be used by future infants, though hanging, covered <b>u</b> or upside <b>u</b> down is acceptable	Did not express preference	Yes	As you would handle any other <b>u</b> fragile object <b>u</b>
Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray <b>u</b> Reservation, Hopi	Alan Grove <b>u</b>	Miniature cradle <b>u</b>	Hanging up or flat on their backs in collections cabinets	Did not express preference	Yes	Gloved hands. Prefers the <b>u</b> general public not physically handle them. <b>u</b>

The interviewer selected, or almost all, of the following questions during each interview:

- What kinds of objects should be stored with? and
- Is it ok to store objects from your culture with objects from other cultures?
- What terminology would you like museums to use when referring to objects from your culture in our records?
  - e.g., sacred objects? Basketry objects? Baby baskets? Cradleboards?
- What terminology would you like museums to use when referring to small objects from your culture?
  - e.g., Toy object? Doll object? Miniature object? Child's play object?
- Is it ok for NHMU to display objects from your culture in its exhibits?
- Is it ok to store objects from your culture in glass-fronted cabinets?
- Do you prefer NHMU to cover the objects from your culture with sheets when they're in storage? In glass-fronted cabinets? In non-glass-fronted cabinets? and
- Who should be allowed to view objects from your culture?
- Is it ok for NHMU to take photos and create 3D scans of objects from your culture? and
- Is it ok for NHMU to make those images publicly available?
- How would you like objects from your culture in museum collections to be handled?
- What are the cultural beliefs and viewpoints that influence how you prefer objects to be handled and stored?
- What kind of research are you comfortable with regarding objects from your culture?
- Are objects considered sacred objects in your culture? Please elaborate.
- Are objects considered utilitarian or everyday objects in your culture? Please elaborate.
- Are your preferences for the treatment of toy or miniature objects different than your preferences for the treatment of full-sized objects?
- Do infants in your culture receive more than one object throughout their development? (e.g., newborn object and larger object later on?) If so, do you have different preferences for how these different object types are treated?
- How did you learn the cultural expectations and preferences for treatment of objects?
- Did your parents use tradition to object to you when you were an infant?
- Did you use tradition to object to your own children?
- How did your parents store objects in your homes? and
- How did/do you store objects in your homes?

Given the concentration of these interviews, questions were not always worded exactly as listed above; additionally, some questions were overlooked, glossed over, or not answered thoroughly. When necessary, consultants were asked follow-up questions by telephone, text, or email.

## 4 | Results and Insights

Insights from Tribal members about proper treatment of Indigenous objects included both physical and spiritual/intangible considerations. All consultants who were asked whether objects were sacred or utilitarian/everyday objects considered objects to be practical, everyday, working objects, though some did not like the term “utilitarian.” Some consultants considered objects sacred objects, while others did not. Regardless of whether they considered objects sacred, all groups considered objects and/or associated object decorations to have spiritual and personal significance beyond their practical functions. Co-author Ir Coffey (Paiute-Shoshone, Reno-Sparks Indian Colony) considers objects, like baskets, to be inherently sacred, as they’re usually blessed by the maker prior to, during, and/or after production, and during gifting of recipients, to protect infants and their family. He explains that an object may have specific personal connection to the infant it was made for, as ornamental designs are often requested by the family or designed by the maker based on predictions regarding the infant’s personality.

Though the preferences and instructions about object storage, handling, display, and terminology described below refer to consultants’ input regarding objects specific to their own Tribes and cultures, their responses indirectly provide broad insights regarding what factors museums should take into consideration when making decisions about handling other groups’ objects. Preferences for object terminology, handling, and storage are summarized in Table 2, and preferences for object imaging, research, and display are summarized in Table 3.

### 4.1 | Spiritual and Intangible Considerations

A common theme expressed by many of the consultants, excluding Everett Pilyvit (Mopai Paiute), was that the proper treatment of objects in museum collections depends on whether the object was used by an individual or was created for sale to collector or museum. Many of the objects in NHMU’s collections were made as art or display pieces meant to be sold to tourists, museums, and non-Indigenous individuals; these objects were not used to hold an infant throughout development. Many of the consultants felt the spiritual considerations regarding the treatment of such objects are less important than for objects that were created for, and used by, an infant.

Most interviewed parties expressed that it is important to protect objects from spirits. The exception was co-author Zefren Anderson (Diné), who said that objects themselves do not need to be protected spiritually, but that associated decorations and fetishes (e.g., umbilical cord fetish) do. This is especially

**TABLE 3** | Consultants' recommendations for cradle imaging, display, and research.

Tribe	Consultant(s)	Is it ok for the NHMU to display cradles from your culture in our exhibits?	Is it ok for museums to take photos and create 3D scans of cradles from your culture?	Is it ok for museums to make images and 3D scans of cradles from your culture publicly available?	Are you comfortable with research being done on cradles from your culture?
Diéne	Zefre Anderson	Yes, if acquired ethically	Yes	Yes	Yes
Shivwits Band of the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah	Sharon Anderson Carmel Clark	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sage Southern Paiute	Richard Graymont Natalie Edgewater Louise Tallma	Yes, if they were made for trade/ display and never used by a infant. Display without dolls inside.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Skull Valley Band of Goshute	Lisa Bullcren Cope Thomas	Yes	Yes	Yes, but only Goshutes, Utah tribes, and tribal students should be able to view them outside of the museum. No Tribal people should physically visit the museum to view scans.	Yes, but only for Native people to monetize Native traditions
Paiute-Shoshone of the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony	Ira Coffey	Yes, but it is best to ask the maker or donor first	Yes, but I suggest getting it from multiple people.	Yes, but I suggest getting it from multiple people.	Yes, but only for Native people to monetize Native traditions
Moapa Paiute	Verett Pikyavi	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, Hopi	Ala Grove	Yes	Yes	Yes, for research purposes. Check with creators/donors for marketing and display purposes.	Yes

true of cradles that were used by individuals that were just created for display. Consultants expressed that, when empty (i.e., when not holding a baby), a cradle can become occupied by a spirit, and that it is undesirable to put an infant in a cradle when a spirit is in it. Richard Graymountain (San Juan Southern Paiute) reported that if a grown individual's old cradle became occupied by a spirit, it could affect the individual's mental well-being even though they no longer used the cradle; prayers can mitigate such harms. It is therefore necessary to protect Southern Paiute cradles from spirits even after their use as a baby carrier is over. Co-authors Carmen Clark and Shanandoah Anderson (Shivwits Band of the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah) said it was important to protect a cradle from spirits after an infant had grown out of it, because if a stored cradle became occupied by a spirit, any future infants that used that cradle could be negatively affected by the spirit; even someone handling a cradle that was no longer in use, or a child playing with a smaller cradle, could be negatively affected if a spirit were to occupy the cradle. Everett Pikyavit (Moapa Paiute) and Lisa Bulcreek and Copen Thomas (Skua Valley Band of Goshute) did not feel that spiritual protection was necessary if the cradle was not going to be used by infants moving forward (e.g., if it had entered a museum collection). Alan Groves (Utah Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation and Hopi) did not have guidelines for protecting cradles in storage or on display from spirits, but did suggest that it would be best if members of the public did not physically handle them to protect their spiritual connection to any infants who may have used them.

Z. Anderson (Diné), on the other hand, said that in their family the cradle is a "too" that is passed on for use by multiple infants. The cradle itself does not maintain spiritual ties to infants, but decorations such as stones and arrowheads are added to the baby carrier for each infant, and these items do have a spiritual connection to the infant, which must be respected. Therefore, they said that an undecorated cradle itself does not need to be treated with any spiritual consideration, but that special considerations must be made for decorations, additions, and any cradles that bear such items. Z. Anderson suggested that if a museum houses a Diné baby carrier with decorations or additional items, those should be removed from the boards and stored in a separate bag with the baby carrier. Such items, they said, could still be displayed with the cradle, but that the physical separation between the cradle and decorations adds an extra layer of respect. If a Diné cradle was made for tourist trade and the museum can be certain that its decorations and additions were never associated with an actual individual and were made for display only, they did not feel such measures of separation need to be taken.

To avoid occupation of cradles by spirits, Clark and S. Anderson (Shivwits Band of the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah) requested that cradles not on display be covered with a cloth sheet. They said cradles not currently in use by an infant should always be stored in an enclosed space and not hung on a wall, so as not to invite spirits in. Rather than covering cradles, the San Juan Southern Paiute consultants suggested that cradles be left "open" or unaced so that a spirit could not get stuck inside and so that the infant's own spirit is able to broaden and move beyond the confines of the cradle board. They also said

it is important to protect cradles from breaking because physical damage to the cradle can negatively affect the mentality or physicality of the person who used the cradle as an infant. Pikyavit (Moapa Paiute) suggested hanging cradles not in use by an infant because any spirits that try to occupy the cradle will slip out, and that covering a cradle with a cloth would also be an effective way to keep out unwelcome spirits. However, he also said that if the cradle was not going to be used by any more infants moving forward, such considerations were less important.

Coffey (Paiute-Shoshone, Reno-Sparks Indian Colony) suggested that cradles in storage should be covered to keep them "clean." He suggested a clear plastic cover but also said a cloth cover would be a right. Through ongoing communications following his formal interview, he clarified that keeping a cradle "clean" does not just mean protecting it from dust and dirt; it also means protecting it from spirits. The need for such clarification following the official interview demonstrated to interviewers involved in this project the importance of asking for clarifications about such matters when consulting cultural experts. Language and word choice of Indigenous consultants can have layered or nuanced meanings that may not be immediately understood by non-Indigenous individuals.

Clark and S. Anderson (Shivwits Band of the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah) said that miniature cradles did not need to be covered and protected from spirits. Richard Graymountain, Louise Tamman, and Natalie Edgewater (San Juan Southern Paiute) had not seen miniature cradles used in their culture, so they had no opinions on the matter. Other consultants did not communicate strong feelings on the matter. Miniature cradles are discussed in more detail below.

## 4.2 | Physical Considerations for Handling and Storage

Clark and S. Anderson (Shivwits Band of the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah) said that cradles from their culture that are not on display should be handled in such a way that they are not bent by pressure. Coffey (Paiute-Shoshone, Reno-Sparks Indian Colony) was comfortable with cradles being hung or laid flat in storage. Edgewater, Graymountain, and Tamman (San Juan Southern Paiute) said cradles should be stored in a cool, dry place where they will not get broken. Coffey (Paiute-Shoshone, Reno-Sparks Indian Colony) said cradles (and other basketry objects) should be stored on their backs in a dry environment and expressed that people should not "be afraid to handle" cradles, as long as they do so with respect, as "they are made to be handled." On the other hand, Pikyavit (Moapa Paiute) said cradles should be handled carefully as fragile objects. Tamman, Edgewater, and Graymountain (San Juan Southern Paiute) said they should be handled gently with two gloved hands supporting their weight. Clark and S. Anderson (Shivwits Band of the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah) said that newer, sturdier cradles did not need to be handled as gently as older, more delicate cradles. Bulcreek and Thomas (Skua Valley Band of Goshute) expressed that laying the cradles flat on their backs in museum collection cabinets was likely sufficient for physical protection and preservation of the cradles.

Z. Anderson (Diné) spoke about the proper treatment of Diné cradles, which, unlike the basketry cradles of other Tribes interviewed for this project, are constructed of wooden boards tied together with leather lashings. They suggested untying the leather lashings and separating the boards into separate pieces, oiling the wood and leather, and either reassembling the cradle for museum storage, or storing the boards disassembled in bundles as is often done in Diné households. They recommended oiling the wood and leather every 20–40 years. They suggested that covering the cradles lightly with a cloth might be good for dust protection (though they did not feel this had the same spiritually protective function that some other consultants did), but worried that plastic coverings might impart gases onto the wood and leather. For very long term storage, Z. Anderson suggested wrapping the cradle in a layer of wax paper beneath cloth to keep the cradle from drying too much. Cradles, they said, should be laid flat in storage and should not be stacked on top of each other. When asked about moving or handling a baby carrier, they said “The same way you want someone to handle something that you built is how that you should treat everything here,” and provided the analogy of handling the objects the way you would handle a Lego piece you had built.

Most consultants did not have strong preferences for what other types of objects cradles should be stored with, though Z. Anderson (Diné) said they should not be stored with ceremonial objects (except baskets, which are both ceremonial and utilitarian), weapons, or grave goods. Clark and S. Anderson (Shivwits Band of Paiute Indian (Tribe of Utah) said storage of full-size cradles with baskets was probably appropriate while miniature cradles could be stored with toys and other children’s objects. No consultants personally objected to cradles from their culture being stored with cradles from other cultures. Coffey (Paiute-Shoshone, Reno-Sparks Indian Colony) suggested that, if possible, the artist or donor be consulted when determining where, how, and with what objects to store a cradle and whether it was alright to display the object. This is, unfortunately, impossible if the maker is deceased and/or the cradle was collected without details regarding the maker.

### 4.3 | Imaging and Research

All consultants said they were comfortable with photographs (and 3-D scans of cradles being produced, and most said it was acceptable for museums to display these images and share them publicly on the internet. However, Bullcreek, a Skull Valley Band of Goshute elder, said that she was comfortable with 3D scans (of Goshute cradles being produced, but that she did not believe they should be shared via the internet for non-Native people who are not viewing them at the museum. She felt that if non-Native people wished to view Goshute cradle scans, they should make an effort to come to the museum to view them on museum computers. She did feel that Goshutes and members of non-Goshute (Utah Tribes should be able to view the scans remotely. (Her son, Copen Thomas, a Skull Valley Band of Goshute man in his early twenties at the time of this interview, expressed no issue with sharing the images publicly with non-Native audiences via the internet, and thought museums should at least make the images available to students at Tribal schools who may

not be able to travel to the museum collection and get resources in person.

Pikyavit (Moapa Paiute), who is a weaver and basket maker, supported the production of photographs and 3D scans of cradles. He felt that sharing them publicly on the internet would be helpful for artists like himself and others who did not have the opportunity to learn cradle manufacturing skills and designs from a master. Grove (Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation and Hopi) was more comfortable with images being shared for research purposes than for display and marketing purposes; in the latter cases, he felt it was best to consult with the donor or creator before sharing images.

All consultants said they were comfortable with scholars doing cradle-based research. Bullcreek (Skull Valley Band of Goshute) did express, however, that it was important that the researcher care, beyond the level of an academic researcher, about the people whose objects were being studied. They should be compassionate and look at things more personally than many academic researchers tend to. She and Z. Anderson (Diné) were adamant that research and viewing of objects should not be done by a non-Native person with the intention of monetizing a Native art form or technology (e.g., a non-Native person founding a brand to sell traditional Native-style cradles).

### 4.4 | Display

None of the groups interviewed expressed that cradles should not be displayed in museums. However, both the San Juan Southern Paiute consultants and the Shivwits Band of the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah consultants said it was best to display cradles that were created to be display pieces rather than cradles that had ever held an infant, and the Shivwits consultants stressed that no cradles (stolen from graves should ever be displayed. (Grove (Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation and Hopi) agreed that there should be different considerations for displaying cradles that had been used by infants in the past versus those that had been made for display and trade; he suggests asking the person who is donating their previously used cradle whether they are comfortable with it being displayed. Z. Anderson (Diné) did not object to the display of cradles that had been used by infants in the past, as long as they had been ethically acquired. They stressed that it would be inappropriate to display any cradle that had been acquired unethically (i.e., stolen from its traditional owner or maker rather than purchased or donated by a reputable donor). Coffey (Paiute-Shoshone, Reno-Sparks Indian Colony) stressed that it is best to ask the artist or donor if they are comfortable with the item being displayed, whenever possible. Though consultants requested that spiritual protective measures be put in place for cradles in storage, none requested that such measures be taken for cradles on display.

### 4.5 | Terminology

Each consulted Tribe expressed their own preferences regarding proper cradle terminology, which should be respected in museum records and exhibit text panels regarding cradles associated with their group. For example, the Shivwits Band of

the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah (Paiute-Shoshone (Reno-Sparks Indian Colony), Moapa Paiute, and Hopi and Ute (Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation) consultants use the term *cradle board*, even for cradles that were made of basketry materials rather than wooden boards, and Coffey (Paiute-Shoshone, Reno-Sparks Indian Colony) also use the term *baby basket*. Z. Anderson (Diné) is not object to the term *cradle board* but prefers the term *baby carrier*, because it was more descriptive of the object's function.

Clark and S. Anderson (Shivwits Band of the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah) insist that the term *papoos* was inappropriate for infants and cradles from their group and many others. Some consultants share the traditional word for cradle in their Tribal language, which they felt would be appropriate to include in museum records and exhibit texts. For example, Pikyavit (Moapa Paiute) shares the term *kanoat*. Tallman, Egewater, and Graymountain (San Juan Southern Paiute) share their traditional Paiute term for cradles, which they suggest spelling *gkurn*, though they stress that the word was difficult to spell using the English alphabet. Others could not remember the traditional term off the top of their head but said they would like for that word to be included in the record and displays. Z. Anderson (Diné) personally felt the Navajo term for cradle objects should be included in museum records and exhibits but said that some Tribal members might object, feeling that the traditional word should remain for use by only Navajo people. Therefore, they felt it would only be appropriate to include the Diné term for cradles in an exhibit if a Diné consultant approving the production of the exhibit.

Several consultants, including Skull Valley Band of Goshute, Diné, Shivwits Band of the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah, and Hopi and Ute consultants, expressed that *toy* was not the appropriate designation for miniature cradles, as the small cradles were made for teaching, learning, practice, and display purposes rather than as play objects. Bullcreek and Thomas (Skull Valley Band of Goshute) prefer the term *doll cradle* or *tac ing cradle*. Coffey (Paiute-Shoshone, Reno-Sparks Indian Colony) suggests *doll cradle* and *display cradle*. Clark and S. Anderson (Shivwits Band of the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah) suggest *child's cradle*. Pikyavit (Moapa Paiute) approves of *doll cradle* and *miniature cradle* but did not consider *toy* inappropriate. Z. Anderson (Diné) suggests *model cradle* or *miniature cradle*. Groves (Ute and Hopi) prefer *miniature cradle*. Graymountain, Tallman, and Egewater (San Juan Southern Paiute) have no preference since they have not seen miniature cradles used in their culture.

## 5 | Discussion: Potential Issues and Difficulties

There are many challenges to respecting the wishes of Native people when it comes to the treatment of cradle objects and other Indigenous objects in museum collections. The primary difficulty facing NHMU is that the records of many cradle objects only list non-specific cultural demarcations in the museum's records, such as "Paiute" or "Goshute." Our interviews have shown that different bands and subgroups of the same broader cultural group may have different preferences for the treatment of their culture's cradles, as evident by the disparity between

preferences of the Shivwits Band of the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah, San Juan Southern Paiute, and Paiute-Shoshone (Reno-Sparks Indian Colony) consultants. Some objects in NHMU's collections are of ambiguous or uncertain cultural origin. There was disagreement among interview groups regarding to which specific culture some of the objects belonged, rendering it difficult to determine how such objects should be stored, handled, and displayed moving forward. Additionally, some objects have multiple cultural affiliations listed in their museum records, and once again rendering it difficult to determine which group's preferences the museum should adhere to when the preferences of different groups contradict each other.

An additional challenge for museums determining culturally appropriate practices for cradle handling, as well as any considerations involving Tribal objects, is whether to adhere to the wishes of a culture's elders or younger generations when opinions between the generations differ. When such disagreements arise, the museum must decide which generation's preferences to prioritize. Whether it is best for museums to adhere to the preferences of elders or younger generations is beyond the scope of this project but should be the subject of future research efforts in consultation with Tribes.

Another issue with determining proper cradle treatment is that it is sometimes difficult or impossible to know whether a cradle was actually used to hold an infant or was only used as a display piece. When this is the case, relevant Tribes should be consulted to ask if they feel it is appropriate to display the cradle.

Most consultants expressed that not everyone in their culture would agree with their opinions on culturally appropriate cradle practices. When consulting with Indigenous people about museum collections, it is important to keep in mind that the consultation represents the opinion of only one or a sample of individuals from a group of people with diverse opinions. When possible, multiple individuals from a group should be consulted.

Indigenous North American cradles exist in museum collections outside of North America, where the responsible curator and/or collection manager may not have regional expertise or a precedent of building relationships with North American Tribes. We encourage curators globally to work to build relationships with the Indigenous groups whose traditional objects they house, whether via virtual consultation, the facilitation of Tribal visits to the museum, or curator visits to Tribes on their homelands. To determine the proper group to consult for imperfectly provenance objects, we encourage international curators and collections managers to consult existing resources regarding ethnically patterned diversity within object classes. For cradles of the American West, specifically, we suggest the following resources on cradle identification: Greenwald (2017), Bibby (2004), Broughton (2019), and Farmer (2013), as well as digital museum collections such as NHMU's. If reference documents are insufficient, the senior author on this paper, a curator at NHMU, welcomes inquiries regarding cradle Tribal affiliation. Once the regional or Tribal affiliation of the object has been identified, curators should reach out to the appropriate Tribe. We recommend reaching out to the Tribe's cultural resources manager and/or Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO). If the Tribe has a museum or cultural center, reach out

to its director. Before sending the Tribal object list and descriptions of all objects within the enquiring museum's collections affiliated with that Tribe. Photos should be sent to the Tribe only upon request, as some Tribes may wish to avoid accidental viewing of objects for which there may be a cultural prohibition against viewing.

## 6 | Conclusions

Consultation with Indigenous people is essential to ethical, responsible museum treatment of Indigenous objects and accurate representation of Indigenous objects and culture to museum audiences. Through interviews at NHMU, consultants for this study contributed invaluable insights regarding both physical and intangible considerations for the handling, storage, and display of cradle objects. In addition to informing updated practices for NHMU's treatment of cradles, insights from interviews also provided cultural context regarding the significance of these objects. Every Tribe interviewed had different beliefs and preferences regarding the proper handling of their cultural cradles in museum collections. This study therefore demonstrates that it is not sufficient to take broad Indigenous perspectives into account when considering best treatments for cradle objects; rather it is essential to respect the nuances and diversity of cultural groups' perspectives to ensure that objects of different provenance receive culturally appropriate care.

When possible, it is best to consult the artist or creator of an object. When this is not possible, it is important to consult members of the cultural group with which an object is affiliated. As different bands and subgroups of broader cultural entities (e.g., the San Juan Southern Paiutes, the Shivwits Band of the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah) have different perspectives, it is important to consult members of the most specific cultural entity to which an object can be attributed. Over the course of these interviews, it has become clear that museum workers need to take into account the history and use of each individual object in their collections when making decisions regarding display, handling, and storage. Finally, it must be stressed that it is not enough to merely gather information from consultants; museums must implement changes to their handling, storage, and display strategies, and update their collections records based on the insights gained from consultation.

### Author Contributions

All participating Tribal consultants had the choice to opt in or out of co-authorship; all consultants consented to their insights being included in this article at the time of the interview and were offered the chance to review the text prior to publication. Several Indigenous consultants opted in to co-authorship and are listed as authors in alphabetical order. Consultants who did not opt in to co-authorship are thanked in the acknowledgments.

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### Ethics Statement

Project protocols were approved by the University of Utah IRB (IRB W #00161156).

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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