about relationships to the not so distant past of Chicano politics. In both cases, ethnically specific museums struggle to envision their future audiences as they continue to serve the communities from which they emerged.

David Shneer is associate professor of history at the University of Colorado at Boulder. He is the author of Through Soviet Jewish Eyes: Photography, War, and the Holocaust *(Rutgers University Press, forthcoming in 2010).*

Response

Casandra Hernandez

David Shneer's article raises important questions about the role of ethnic museums in the construction and expression of ethnic identity in the United States. His insights about Jewish museums are in many ways relevant to the Hispanic/Latino community of Phoenix, which feels itself significantly underrepresented and misrepresented in established museums. As the former president of Chicanos Por la Causa expressed, a proposed Latino cultural center is meant to "show the other side of the community that we're not just gang bangers and other things that they think we are." Many questions have emerged about this center: Who will it serve? Why are so many Hispanic-operated museums in the country favoring the term *Latino* as opposed to *Chicano, Mexican,* or *Hispanic?* What are the politics of *Latinization* for U.S. Hispanic-operated museums?

As Shneer notes and as the Phoenix case study exemplifies, there are many tensions in the establishment and operation of any ethnic museum.

1. Empowerment vs. commoditization: Do ethnic museums construct ethnic identity in ways that empower minority communities to see themselves as equal citizens? Or do they construct it in ways that are easily digestible and marketable to a broad consumer audience?

2. Self-reflection vs. cheerleading: Do they function as spaces where communities can be self-critical or are they ethnic cheerleaders? Is ethnic cheerleading justified if it empowers a community that is the target of discrimination?

3. Insider vs. outsider audience: Do ethnic museums teach their home communities about themselves? Or do they educate a broader American audience about the value of cultural diversity?

4. Plurality vs. essentialism: Do ethnic museums reduce fluid and complex identities to essentialist voices? Or do they embrace diversity within their own communities?

As an organizer of the *Exhibiting Ourselves* symposium, I join Shneer in arguing for more responsive and visionary ethnic museums, and for the development of new critical approaches to cultural representation in museums and cultural centers.

Casandra Hernandez is education and programs manager at the Deer Valley Rock Art Center and organizer of the 2009 symposium, Exhibiting Ourselves: Representing Cultures in Museums and Cultural Centers.

Listening for Jews in the History of the Blues

Ari Y. Kelman

Some people make pilgrimage to famous delis trying to taste or to remember Jewish life. Others go on walking tours looking for traces of Jewish life in neighborhoods like the Lower East Side, Fairfax, or Maxwell Street. Some go to synagogue to hear strains of ancient texts, and others dig deep into the earth hoping to find Jewish history cast in pottery, bone, or bronze. I listen for hints of Jewish life on wax, vinyl, and shellac in places like 2120 South Michigan Avenue: the home of Chess Records.

Chess Records is one of the most important, most influential record labels in popular music. During the 1950s and 1960s, it defined the sound of Chicago blues, and its label was responsible for an avalanche of great music. Among the artists who began their careers at Chess: Muddy Waters, Chuck Berry, Howlin' Wolf, Willie Dixon, Bo Diddley, and Koko Taylor. As if that weren't enough, those artists wrote, recorded, and released the music that inspired the generation of white British musicians who helped define rock and roll. (The British Invasion owes itself to Chess Records, and the Rolling Stones built their entire career on trying to sound like Muddy Waters.) At the risk of overstating: without Chess Records rock and roll may never have developed, and it certainly would not sound the way it does today.

So, on the first warm day of late spring in 2009, I found myself at 2120 South Michigan Avenue in Chicago, the home of Chess Records from 1956 until 1965. In a space I had heard but not before seen, I didn't find a celebration of the music or the label. Instead, I found a muted acknowledgment of a history behind the music—a story of Jews and African Americans, of unfinished business, of royalties, and American culture. 2120 South Michigan Avenue isn't a shrine, it is an exhibit of cultural contradictions.

Chess Records, famously, was owned by two Jewish brothers: Leonard and Phil Chess. It was one of a number of Jewish-owned "independent" labels that emerged during the late 1940s and early 1950s in almost every city with a Jewish population: Cincinnati had King, Los Angeles had Modern and Aladdin. Newark gave us Savoy, and Commodore, Old Time, and Atlantic were all based in New York. And almost all of these labels specialized in music by and for African Americans.

This was at the time when Billboard and Cash Box, the two largest music industry magazines in the U.S., kept separate charts for "pop" music and "race" records. Basically, this method of record keeping divided white audiences from black, but the Chess Brothers understood that African American communities represented a market that most of the major labels (Decca, Columbia, and RCA) would not touch.

Leonard Chess, the first of the brothers to enter the recording business, freely admitted that he didn't know anything about music, but once sold on the blues by a young Muddy Waters, he grew in his