November 2022

The Case of the Benin Bronzes: Exploring Repatriation in U.S. Museums

Kendra Voelz
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

THE CASE OF THE BENIN BRONZES:

EXPLORING REPATRIATION IN U.S. MUSEUMS

by

Kendra Voelz

A Thesis Submitted in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science

in Anthropology

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

December 2022

ABSTRACT

THE CASE OF THE BENIN BRONZES:
EXPLORING REPATRIATION IN U.S. MUSEUMS

by

Kendra Voelz

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2022
Under the Supervision of Professor W. Warner Wood

The Benin Bronzes are a grouping of an estimated 10,000 works made from brass, ivory, wood, clay, as well as other materials. These objects originated from the royal palace in Benin City, located in present day Nigeria in Africa. Within the last five years, beginning in 2017, discussions surrounding the repatriation of these artifacts from museums around the world have been reignited to a high degree where institutions are actively working towards researching and, in increasing numbers, repatriating the material to Nigeria. Through video and written interviews this thesis examines the thoughts and opinions of 11 professionals in museums across the United States about international repatriation efforts regarding the Benin Bronzes. The goal of this thesis is to understand what is currently occurring in the museum field. Through these interviews I was able to learn that 90% of my interviewees are actively researching their African collections and are open to returning them to the object's country of origin if it was obtained unethically or illegally. This is a crucial time in history as people in diverse museums in the United States and Europe are working together to return the Benin Bronzes to Nigeria.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to extend my gratitude for the guiding hand of my advisor, Dr. W. Warner Wood through the creation of this thesis through such a confusing time in the world as we muddled our way through a global pandemic. I would also like to thank Dawn Scher Thomae for her ideas, thoughts, and praise as I wrote this thesis.

To my friends, you're amazing. If we wanted to talk about our theses or to avoid the topics entirely, you helped keep me sane. To my family, thank you for the support and love throughout these years. Even if I never wanted to discuss this thesis, you were always there for me.

Above all, thank you to the people that I interviewed. Your insights into international repatriation in the United States were essential for helping me write this thesis.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

There has been a profound shift in power dynamics between museums and source communities, especially after former colonies gained independence. This change has created a stronger sense of ethical responsibility for museums that were once at the center of colonial empires as the voices of source communities have demanded to become more involved in how their heritage is studied, interpreted, and curated within these museums. These communities have also requested the return of their cultural heritage which resides in European and U.S. museums. One of the most well-known examples concerns the Royal Art of Benin (colloquially known as the Benin Bronzes). It consists of a group of more than a thousand cultural objects (the exact number is not known) that were taken as war booty from their home, in Benin City in present day Nigeria, in 1897 by the British in retaliation for a previous attack against their forces originating from Benin City.

The Benin Bronzes are a group of sculptures that include intricately decorated cast plaques, commemorative heads, animal and human figures, items of royal regalia, and personal ornaments (BBC News 2021). The Bronzes are works that are created from metal like their name suggests, but they are largely made from brass, rather than bronze. The grouping also includes pieces made of ivory, wood, clay, as well as other materials. These objects began to be created in the sixteenth century and are still being made to this day by specialist guilds that work within the Royal Court. Many of the works were commissioned by past *Obas* (Kings) for ancestral altars of previous *Obas* and Queen mothers (BBC News 2021). The people of Benin City use sculptures

of previous *Obas* busts to remember the deceased within the palace and as a demonstration of their lineage.

One key grouping within the Benin Bronzes are the plaques which once decorated the walls of the Benin Royal Palace and provided a historical record of the Kingdom (Sutton 2019). Today, these works are spread throughout the world, away from their original home and are a painful reminder to the people of Benin City of the power that Britain's colonial dominance held and still holds over them.

Plans have been created to build a museum in Nigeria called the Edo Museum of West African Art (EMWAA). Scheduled to open in 2025, EMWAA will house around 300 items on loan from European museums (Paquette 2021). This plan will only come to fruition only if the money can be raised to create the museum structure, both the British Museum and the German governments have pledged their help (Marshall 2020). At the very least, a new museum with Western standards in Nigeria will undermine the claim that Africans do not have an institution that can safely accommodate the material. This has been one of the commonly cited responses from Western institutions rationalizing why they would not consider returning the Bronzes. Currently, these artifacts are estimated to reside in more than 150 museums and galleries in Europe and North America (Hicks 2021: 3).

There are numerous debates surrounding the restitution of the material, often discussed in an "international" or "national" perspective. 'Restitution' is a term that describes the return of cultural artifacts to an individual, group, or nation with the goal of righting a wrong from the past (Herman 2021). The international perspective has been most visibly asserted by American Art Historian, curator, and museum director, James Cuno. It is the strongest theory in support of collecting nations keeping their cultural artifacts arguing that major museum provide an

important resource for safeguarding the world's heritage. Meanwhile the nationalist perspective focuses on living descendants and the nations of origins interests. This counter theoretical position is often used to support the return of works to their countries of origin, where they were created.

The Benin Bronzes are a unique case in the world of repatriation claims. The bronzes are documented to have been taken by force from the Benin City *Oba's* palace, and, as such, the argument goes, there should be no substantial arguments as to why they should remain within Western institutions, constituting substantial proof that the items were removed without approval. This thesis explores the current attitudes in select American museums regarding the repatriation of the Royal Art of Benin. The primary questions this project addresses are: 1) Will institutions in the United States of America follow European countries as they begin to repatriate African artifacts? 2) What are the ethical responsibilities that museums in the United States have towards returning these cultural pieces? 3) What is the current thinking of U.S. museum professionals on these issues?

Based on my research for this thesis, my argument is that museums need to actively work toward creating policies and make decisions on who would be handling international repatriation requests in their museums. Doing this would result in less confusion in U.S. museums (and among their publics) and a clear path forward for museum professionals. Based on my research, museums should develop policies for international repatriation efforts working with their respective source communities. In the case of the Benin Bronzes, who among contemporary Nigerians best represents the "source" is a controversial issue that has divided the Nigerian government and the current *Oba*, as both parties have laid claim to the items. Connecting with all concerned leaders (political and royal) would allow engagement and relationships to bloom

between museums in the United States and Nigerian stakeholders. My position is that the true aim in repatriating is, and should be trying to heal past wrongs through honest and positive actions in collaboration with the people who were and are affected.

Overview of This Thesis

Chapter Two focuses on the history of Benin City, Nigeria where the Benin Bronzes were plundered. The chapter describes what occurred in Benin City before the artifacts were plundered during the military battle of 1897. It also discusses why and how the British have been and continue to be resistant to the idea of returning the material that they took from Nigeria using the Parthenon Marbles as an exploratory case for comparison.

Chapter Three moves into the ethics of museums using standards developed and recognized by the International Council of Museums and the American Alliance of Museums, as well as the primary national organization of museum professionals in the United Kingdom, the Museums Association. These three professional organizations serve as guiding forces for museums around the world, offering best practices and procedures for repatriation and ethical responsibilities related to how this undertaking should be handled. This chapter also discusses how the popular movie *Black Panther* and the Black Lives Matter Movement and subsequent protests brought awareness to the public of the legacies of colonialism and history of social injustices in the United States to the forefront. Another topic that is examined is the exploration of how decolonization has become a currently "hot topic" being discussed and implemented within the museum world. Finally, Chapter two covers internationalist and nationalist theories guiding how museums approach the issue of repatriation as briefly discussed above.

Next, Chapter Four examines the current and differing approaches within Europe to cultural repatriation of the Bronzes to Benin City, Nigeria. This chapter describes what is happening in countries such as France, Germany, and the Netherlands. Digital Benin, an online digital platform that is gathering together information and photographs of pieces of the Benin Bronzes from around the world, is also discussed within this chapter.

Following what is happening in Europe, Chapter Four discusses what United States museums are doing with their cultural repatriation efforts. The chapter begins with a brief discussion into the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) which has been a guiding legal force in national repatriation efforts over the last thirty years and has largely fed the momentum for international returns in the U.S. Following this discussion, international repatriation efforts outside of the Benin Bronzes are provided as examples of situations where museums in the U.S. have made returns. Next, what some U.S. museums have decided to do with their Benin Bronzes is discussed, such as the Smithsonian Institution's new 'Ethics Policy.' Finally, I conclude with what the American Museum of Natural History has seen when they surveyed a variety of institutions throughout the world about repatriation policies specifically on destructive policies for human remains.

Chapter Five discusses and interprets the interviews that I conducted with 11 museum professionals who work with African collections in museums throughout the U.S. These professionals are from a variety of backgrounds such as art, natural history, and history museums, as well as a few who are employed at state and academic institutions.

This thesis concludes with a summary of results and delves into what conclusions can be drawn from talking with museum professionals throughout the country. Most importantly, it

explores what the future might hold for the Benin Bronzes currently residing in museums in the U.S.

CHAPTER TWO:

HISTORY OF BENIN CITY, NIGERIA: THE 1897 MILITARY BATTLE

Nigeria, specifically regarding their quest for the return of the Benin Bronzes, presents an interesting and complicated dilemma. The case of the Benin Bronzes initially appears as though it would be a straightforward decision for museums to return clearly stolen material but even after over 50 years of repeated requests by the Royal family and Nigerian government, this is not the case. In order to understand its complexities, I begin by exploring where and how this situation began.

In the beginning of European exploratory and later colonial contact with African peoples near Benin City, the Portuguese obtained their ivories from Serra Leone, but as the political climate grew unstable; they looked towards the Kingdom of Benin (Ross 2002). The first recorded encounter between Benin City and Europe was in 1486, when João Afonso de Aveiro, emissary of the Portuguese King, arrived in the city and paid respects to *Oba* Ozolua offering gifts such as guns and coconuts (Phillips 2021, 17). This was the start of a peaceful relationship that lasted for the next 400 years. In fact, the Portuguese are often portrayed in art from Benin City and are credited with being the catalyst for artistic production. As part of their trade caches, they brought heavy bracelets of copper, bronze, or brass that were melted down by Benin artisans and used to create some of the Benin Bronzes that we know today. Benin patronage structures were similar to what was occurring in Europe during the same period. Pieces would be commissioned from patrons (who were frequently royalty) with specific desires and conditions creating an aesthetic that was uniquely Portuguese and African (Ross 2002).

During the 19th century, Britain began to treat the Benin Kingdom as a colony (including present day Benin City) because the Kingdom had many commercial interests that intrigued them; soon the colonial power began to encroach on the African entity's borders. This came at a time when the Kingdom was experiencing internal controversy, which left them vulnerable to outsiders (Phillips 2021, 43). In 1888, *Oba* Adolo died – leaving the city with a new and untried person in power. Britain approached the new *Oba*—*Oba* Ovonramwen—with a treaty for trade in 1892, one that was very advantageous to the colonial country. However, that trade agreement was beyond Ovonramwen's understanding, since he could neither read nor write English (Phillips 2021, 43). Nevertheless, he signed it, thereby giving the British preferential access to trade. Once Ovonramwen discovered the threat this created for Benin City, he stopped complying with the terms, which increasingly upset the British (Gunsch 2013, 22).

In 1896, the British had nearly gained complete control over trade in the Niger delta, but *Oba* Ovonramwen stood in the way (Nevadomsky 1997, 18). James Phillips, a British official in the Niger Coast Protectorate, led an unarmed trading expedition to Benin City in January 1897. Against *Oba* Ovonramwen's wishes, several chiefs ordered the British expedition attacked. Six British officials and almost two hundred Africans were killed (National Museum of African Art Smithsonian Institution 2020). In retaliation, in one day, on February 18, 1897, the British attacked and the city of Benin fell to the British. In the process, the British set the city aflame (Zeijl 2016). Only a few buildings survived, and still exist within Benin City today. Afterwards, Benin City was nicknamed the "city of blood" (Zeijl 2016). This testifies as to how gruesome and bloody the takeover was for the people living there. Punitive expeditions were not unusual uses of force by imperial European powers and were deployed as a weapon inflicted upon regions that lacked military and technological power (Herman 2021). They were a tool for

punishing uncooperative rulers and were always justified in terms of a need to bring control through military power. Surprisingly, *Oba* Ovonramwen was not killed during the "punitive expedition" (actions that one might call a "military battle") and instead, was banished to Calabar town, southeast of Benin City (Zeijl 2016). From him, the royal line has continued and there is a present-day *Oba*—*Oba* Ewuare II—that lives within Benin City. While the term "punitive expedition" has been commonly used for this encounter, their actions were much more violent than simply an expedition and can more accurately be described as a military battle.

After the fire and carnage, British soldiers looted the city and collected, piled, and prepared the artwork and other war booty for export to England. This is evidenced through a photograph of soldiers sitting amongst numerous works of art, including relief plaques, figures and other castings as well as ivory tusks waiting to be deported (Figure 2.1) (Plankensteiner 2017, 137). The explanation provided by the British military was that the items were taken to offset the costs of the military force (Wood 2012, 121). The objects were given to the British Museum on loan by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

Figure 2.1
Photographic print of six seated Europeans (members of the British punitive expedition of 1897) in Benin City.
The men are surrounded by objects from the royal palace.

Photography: Dr. Robert Allman

Resource: britishmuseum.org

in England (Greenberger 2021).The Foreign Office only allowed the British to keep 200 pieces, while Dr. Felix von Luschan, who acted for the Berlin Museum of Ethnography, went on to collect more than 580 works from Benin City (Gunsch 2013, 23). From there, he sent German diplomats abroad to buy up the Benin works that were still located in Nigeria. He acquired 263 pieces using this method. By 1901, the majority of Benin City art was stashed in public and private collections within the United Kingdom, Germany, and Austria (Gunsch 2013, 23). Today, works taken from Benin City during the 1897 military battle are spread throughout the world through sales between museums and other collecting institutions as well as trade from past soldiers (Hickley 2021). While it is suspected that many of the works were stolen during the "expedition" or "military campaign," not all of the works from Benin City were obtained at that time. Some were purchased or gifted legitimately, which is why the importance of learning the provenance of the works is crucial. While this seems like an easy task, provenance records are not often available or always clear and taking the time and resources to search for an artifact's background is a challenge for many institutions and one which in many cases, produces no results. As the works spread throughout Europe, the fine quality astounded Europeans. They were shocked to see that African people, who they considered "primitive," could create such refined work as far back as the sixteenth century (Jenkins 2016, 141). The outlook of some Europeans toward what they considered African art was transformed.

Before British colonization, Nigeria was not a united country. Instead, it was made up of different ethnic groups and kingdoms that had their own societal and governance structures. Furthermore, it was not until the 1960s that Nigeria declared itself independent of Britain. Yet, are they, as well as other former colonies, truly free of British control? This seems dubious since they are still fighting for the history and culture that was taken from them, as for example, with

the Benin Bronzes. This has been a long-fought campaign: soon after gaining their independence, Nigeria began to seek the return of the Royal Art of Benin as a means to build a sense of national identity in their country through important historical objects. As of December 2022, the British government has still failed to recognize the 1897 punitive "expedition" of Benin City, as well as the many other punitive expeditions (that are perhaps also more accurately described as military campaigns) that they undertook during their colonial history (Hicks 2021, 50).

For Benin, the bronzes have become symbolic of everything that they lost when their culture (represented by these items) and autonomy was taken from them during British Colonial Rule (Chick and Brown 2019). Protection and restitution of cultural objects throughout the world, including Africa, has become more and more important as countries have won their independence (Klesmith 2013 – 14, 47). The return of the Benin cultural items are critical symbols in the struggle that aims to help the people of Nigeria to self-identify with their newly formed country. Nigeria is composed of 1.5 million people that have distinct ethnic traditions and, consequently, to try to build a sense of national identity in the country has been quite challenging. Chika Okeke-Agulu, a professor of African and African Diaspora Art at Princeton University, originally from southern Nigeria, stated, "These are not just decorative objects, but an archive of the history of a people; they document events throughout history. For a culture without a history of writing, looting these objects is like looting the national library, stealing the memories of a people" (Day 2021). Thus, this new democratic government, like most countries around the world, has been attempting to unite the country through the primary physical symbols associated with the region and their shared cultural heritage.

Today, the British government is still resistant to the return of this material, even with the continued efforts made by other European countries working with the Nigerian government. In an interview with Keme Nzerem, British Culture Secretary, Oliver Dowden said bluntly that the Benin Bronzes "properly reside in the British Museum" (Creef 2021). This is in stark contrast to Germany's former Minister for Culture, Monika Grüetters. Grüetters described why Germany was working to repatriate, "We would like to contribute to understanding and reconciliation with the descendants of people who were robbed of their cultural treasures during the colonial era" (Brown 2021). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention applies to cultural items that are illegally acquired three months after a state becomes part of the treaty (Godwin 2020, 154). The British government's stance is that they should, 'retain and explain,' controversial artifacts, rather than cede ownership. Smaller institutions in England disagree, claiming that the material should be examined for its provenance, if it is found to have arrived with ill-gotten means; it should be returned (Godwin 2020, 154). Nevertheless, the position I have come to is that Britain should still consider the moral and ethical reasons as to why these works should be returned. One of these reasons is underlined by the fact that the objects were not taken from a society that no longer exists. The Benin Bronzes were stolen from a thriving Kingdom in 1897, one that still exists today, there is a place where the artifacts have a home to return to and, in fact, the descendants of the original *Oba* are still living in Benin City.

One of the reasons that the British Museum is not considering the repatriation of the Bronzes is because of the British Museum Act of 1963 (Godwin 2020, 147). This Act dictates that the Museum Trustees are legally bound by fiduciary duty to preserve the Museum's collection and to only consider deaccession (permanently removing items from the museum's

collection) in extreme and specific circumstances. Under Section five of the Act, Trustees can only deaccession works under three circumstances.

(1) The Trustees of the British Museum may sell, exchange, give away or otherwise dispose of any object vested in them and comprised in their collection if –
    a. The object is duplicate or another object, or
    b. The object appears to the Trustees to have been made not earlier than the year 1850, and substantially consists of printed matter of which a copy made by photography or a process akin to photography is held by the Trustees, or
    c. In the opinion of the Trustees the object is unfit to be retained in the collections of the Museum and can be disposed of without detriment to the interests of students (British Museum 1963).

Being an unfit object seems quite subjective and does not leave clear guidance for the Trustees. On the other hand, objects on loan also have specific criteria associated with them, such as holding the interest of students, what the objects physical conditions are, and finally what, and if there are any risks in loaning the work. Each of these conditions needs to be considered before the works can be approved for a loan.

Figure 2.2: Cast, pendant mask – associated with Queen Ida

Resource: britishmuseum.org

The British Museum possesses around 950 pieces of the Royal Art of Benin. Currently there are only 100 on display (Phillips 2021, xx). One of these objects is especially illustrative of how resistant the British have been to repatriation: an ivory mask that is believed to portray

Queen Idia wearing a tiara of 10 miniature bearded Portuguese heads, inlaid with copper wire (Figure 2.2) (Phillips 2021, xx). The mask symbolizes the alliance between Benin City and Portugal. This artifact was taken during the 1897 military battle; and is known to be one of five objects taken out of a trunk kept in the *Oba's* bedchamber (Phillips 2021, xxiii). In short, this is a piece that was recorded by an unknown individual and has a distinct association in the memories of the Nigerians. Even so, Britain has historically refused to return it. During the 1970s, Nigeria requested to borrow the mask to display during an important international festival that celebrated African arts and culture. Britain denied their request, stating that its conservation and safety was not guaranteed (Phillips 2021, xxii). When loans are requested from museums in the U.S., it is a customary procedure to request a facility report. This report provides details on the humidity, light, and temperature control, as well as any safety measures. Nigeria was denied the loan because the British Museum did not believe that museum standards could be met for this item and it bears noting that such standard may be used as a barrier for return, including for the case of the Parthenon marbles.

The Case of the "Elgin Marbles"

Another country that has been struggling to gain return of poignant pieces of their past from the British Museum is Greece. The Parthenon Marbles—also known as the Elgin Marbles—are a group of sculpted marble friezes that originate from the top exterior of the Parthenon in Athens, Greece (Figure 2.3). Looting of the marbles was conducted by Thomas Bruce, who was the seventh Earl of Elgin. Bruce acted as the ambassador to the Ottoman Empire from 1801 – 1805 (Claus 2021). It is debated if Bruce had permission from the Ottoman Empire to take the "marbles." The British Museum insists that he did have permission, making it a legal action. Yet,

others—such as Greece—disagree. Estimates suggest that Bruce took around 247 feet of the carved frieze, half of what was still standing at the time (Claus 2021). After taking sections of the frieze, Bruce shipped it back to England and in 1816 sold it for 35,000 pounds to the British Museum. Even during the 1800s the ownership of the material was controversial. It was only after a Parliamentary select committee debated the legality of the ownership in 1816 that the British Museum accepted the work.

During this committee's review of the issue, Bruce argued that the British Museum would take better care of the work than he, or Greece could. In 1832, the marbles were relocated to the Elgin Room in the British Museum. This was the same year that Greece achieved their independence from the Ottoman Empire. Since then, Greece has repeatedly petitioned for the return of the marbles. In the 1980s Greece formally asked the British Museum to repatriate the marbles (Solomon 2021). They stated that the authorization for the marble's removal was approved by the colonial Ottoman Empire—not the Greek government and thus Bruce did not have the proper permissions.

Figure 2.3: Marble relief (Block XLVII) from the North frieze of the Parthenon. Athens, 438-432 BC.

Resource: britishmuseum.org

In 2021, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) made the momentous decision to urge for the repatriation of the Parthenon Marbles to Greece (Claus 2021). This support for return was something they had been unwilling to

provide previously. Greece's Cultural Minister, Lina Mendoni stated, "The committee urgently calls on the United Kingdom to review its position and enter into a discussion with Greece, recognizing that the issue is of an intergovernmental nature—in contrast to claims from the British side that it is a domestic matter for the British Museum—and mainly that Greece has a valid and legal claim to demand the return of the sculptures to their place of birth" (Claus 2021). Mendoni was asking the British government to revoke the responsibility of the Museum's Trustees to decide if the work could be repatriated. In essence she was arguing that the issue had become so significant that it needed to be considered from a government to government perspective. Greece is hoping that this will become a turning point.

This recommendation also addresses the repeated damage and questionable conditions at the British Museum. From 1938 to 1939 museum workers cleaned the Parthenon Marbles without proper authorization. Using copper tools, the workers removed what they believed to be dirt from the work. The 'dirt' was actually the honey-colored patina on the surface of the artifact (newmentor.net). During 2018, photographs of water leaking in the Greek galleries where the marbles were located, circulated throughout the Internet (Solomon 2021). In response, a British Museum spokesperson stated, "none of the sculptures have been damaged and the issue has been addressed" (Solomon 2021). Later in 2020, a report of a water leak was reported. This time the leak was located in the Assyrian galleries, but in close proximity to the Parthenon Marbles. *Art Newspaper* reported this occurrence. They stated that the damages to the building dated back to World War II when the galleries were hit during the bombing of London in 1940. A major renovation began in 2020 and continues into 2022. Safety concerns were reignited in 2021 after a heavy rainfall again brought water into the Greek Galleries (Solomon 2021). That water leaks

have now occurred three times near or in the Greek Galleries is incredibly concerning. It was after these occurrences that UNESCO urged the British Museum to reconsider their position.

On the other hand, Britain has claimed that returning the marbles would ultimately cause more damage to the work from the air pollution in Greece (newmentor.net). Yet, London has almost as much pollution as Greece. Another cause for concern that England raised was that there was nowhere safe for the works to be stored. In answer, Greece constructed the Acropolis Museum in Athens in 2009 for the marbles to safely be stored and displayed (Acropolis Museum 2019). Somehow these developments have not altered the British Museum's opinion that the Parthenon Marbles are safer in London.

Still, the United Kingdom government rejects UNESCO's recommendation. In a statement to *Artnet News* the British museum characterized its position as follows*:* "We disagree with the Committee's decision to adopt in the closing minutes of the session and are raising issues relating to fact and procedure with UNESCO… Our position is clear—the Parthenon Sculptures were acquired legally in accordance with the law at the time. The British Museum operates independently of the government and free from political interference" (Solomon 2021). This does not bode well for other countries who are seeking the repatriation of their artifacts when even an official recommendation from UNESCO has not swayed the British Museum's position to keep the Parthenon Marbles.

Concluding Discussion

Repatriation of the Benin Bronzes is clearly a topic that has been discussed for decades. The history of this issue is centuries deep and begins in the 15th century with the arrival of the

Portuguese. It continues from there as the British ‘discover’ the area and begin to dream of controlling the trade wealth of the nation. As Benin City would not bend to Britain’s dominance, Britain took over the area in 1897 during a military campaign. From there the soldiers took all the Benin Bronzes they could find, soon spreading the artifacts throughout Europe and the Americas as people began to understand that peoples they considered ‘primitive’ not to be so.

Since Nigerians gained their independence, they have been striving to have their cultural history returned to them. One of the institutions that they approached to have their material returned to them was the British Museum. The British Museum has continually refused to return the material citing the British Museum Act of 1963, which requires the Parliament to act in order to return the material. This is similar to the argument that the British Museum have made for the Elgin Marbles. Nigeria, however, has not been dissuaded from seeking the artifacts; instead they often cites ethical reasons as to why the Benin Bronzes should be returned to them.

CHAPTER THREE:

MUSEUM ETHICS PERTAINING TO CULTURAL HERITAGE RETURN

Ethics are a key factor when considering cultural repatriation requests. Janet Marstine explains, "Ethics codes and guidelines define appropriate behavior, establish responsibilities and offer means for self-assessment" (Marstine 2011, 7). The International Council of Museums (ICOM), and the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) have created their own ethical guidelines to help steer museums in the right direction. ICOM adopted their code of ethics unanimously in 1986 and revised them in 2001 and 2004 (ICOM n.d.). It's important to note ethics continually shift based on changing attitudes around them and museums need to strive to follow these perspectives. "The ICOM Code presents a minimum standard for museums. It is presented as a series of principles supported by guidelines for desirable professional practice" (ICOM n.d.). The code is broken down into several different sections including institutional standing, physical resources, acquiring, removing, and care for collections and other sections (ICOM n.d.). In the section that focuses on collection care, the code states, "Museums are responsible for the tangible and intangible, natural and cultural heritage. Governing bodies and those concerned with strategic direction and oversight of museums have a primary responsibility to protect and promote their heritage as well as the human physical and financial resources made available for that purpose" (ICOM n.d.). In the last 20 years there has been a profound shift in power relations between museums and source communities, especially after former colonies gained independence. This shift has created a stronger sense of ethical responsibility in museums toward

sources communities as source communities have demanded greater say in how their material culture is studied, interpreted, and curated within museums.

ICOM states that museums should be prepared to initiate dialogue for the return of cultural property to their source countries if there is legal claim (ICOM n.d.). They assert that this should be considered impartially based on scientific and humanitarian principles applied to local, national, and international guidelines. While AAM guidelines align with ICOM in stating that material should be returned if there is a legal basis, they also encourage people to do more. "Legal standards are a minimum. Museums and those responsible for them must do more than avoid legal liability, they must take affirmative steps to maintain their integrity so as to warrant public confidence. They must act not only legally but also ethically." Museums should cooperate when there are legal claims to have their material returned to them and more so they should pursue the return of artifacts for the integrity of their institution if they were obtained unethically. Janet Marstine encourages the use of contingency factors in museums as they examine how they frame their considering of ethics, "Contingency is commonly defined as a dependence on factors, circumstances and/or events in the future and thus suggests a lack of certainty" (2011: 8). This fits squarely with what museums are dealing with now in light of new requests to repatriate material. There is an uncertainty since there is no one "best" template or set of decision-making guidelines as to how to navigate these shifting perspectives on what constitutes ethical behavior and what is expected from them. As Marstine suggests these considerations are opening museums up for a systematic transformation (or at least review) of their social responsibility, transparency, and their shared guardianship of heritage (2011: 8).

Another museum group's ethical guidelines may help the challenging new trends that museum staff must face. The Museums Association is the only organization for the four nations within the United Kingdom. They state their purpose:

> We are a dynamic membership organization that campaigns for socially engaged museums and a representative workforce. We work ethically and sustainably and collaborate with partners where we have common aims and values. We advocate for and support museums and everyone who works in and with them so that the value and impact of museums and their collections is realized (Museums Association n.d.).

They further explain that they are an independent and not-for-profit entity that advocates for museums beyond the control of governments and funding influences. Their role in the United Kingdom is much the same as the American Alliance of Museums within the United States and they provide their own set of ethical guidelines for their participating museums to consider and adopt. They state that practitioners should carefully reflect and consult with others for further guidance on ethical issues. On repatriation, the Museums Association states that the situation should be dealt with both sensitivity and promptly with national and international requests (Museums Association n.d.). This is similar to the AAM's position regarding how institutions should act ethically. The Museums Association is encouraging sensitivity, not just the legality of these issues (what the AAM, quoted above calls the "legal minimum"). Discussing this idea further the Museums Association explains, "While policy and procedure is important, it should not obscure the ethical imperative to pursue repatriation and restitution in a proactive and collaborative way" (Museums Association n.d.). Again, this aligns with Marstine's idea of contingency in light of shifting factors and rising voices.

An important distinction to make with this discussion is the difference between ethics and legal issues. Tristram Besterman states, "Museum ethics is an expression of the continuing debate about the responsibilities that museums owe to society" (Besterman 2006, 431). Whereas

laws are the requirements/guidelines that are created by local or national governments that impose on institutions to comply with the law (Gerstenblith 2006, 442). Much of what is happening with international repatriation (such as with the base of the Benin Bronzes) is not driven by law or legal requirements but instead by a societal ethical shift that is urged on by ethical and moral guidelines emanating more generally from the public sphere and specific peoples making claims to their relationship to these contested museum collections items. This makes the situation even more challenging to navigate for museums, since different parties have their own innate bias and what they see as a rightful "claim" for the items. It is essential to remember that museums are also a party to these controversies as well as the competing claims. Each of the choices that they make contributes to the situation, good or bad, even if it those consequences are unintentional.

The Wider Social Climate Surrounding Repatriation

James Clifford describes such contested spaces (physical and ideological) as "contact zones." Further, he goes on to write that, "[a] "contact" perspective emphasizes how subjects are all constituted in and by their relations to each other. [It stresses] copresence, interaction, interlocking understanding and practice, often within radically asymmetrical relations to power" (Clifford 1997, 192). The situation with the Benin Bronzes is a prime example of this kind of situation as parties have come to museums making competing (sometimes with each other but more often with the museum) requests and concerns regarding their relationship to the items.

A shift is occurring, and museums face increasing claims from various parties asserting, on ethical and moral grounds, that they should possess the items, not the museum in question. Nigeria, as a previously colonized nation, has historically not had the power in this situation and

they are looking to gain it back by insisting that Western institutions recognize what these objects mean to them. Instead of relying on laws and governmental agencies imposing their laws on museums they are instead making calls to the ethical correctness of their position regarding repatriation. An example of an influential moment in the social space of public protests that changed, or at least challenged, the perspectives of some in regard to their ethical positionality that is peripherally aligned with calls to repatriate the Benin Bronzes is the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. The recent BLM movement and subsequent protests in 2020 have created a stronger platform for African voices to reclaim their material culture as more and more people of all colors advocate for their rights especially to be heard and seen in places like museums.

When the movie *Black Panther*—a superhero movie primarily based in a fictitious African kingdom—was released in 2018 it contained a scene that brings up issues of colonialism and restitution regarding an African artifact's display and ownership. This scene is set at the 'Museum of Great Britain,' a thinly veiled reference to the British Museum. The character Erik 'Killmonger' Stevens, who is from that African kingdom stands in front of a display case scrutinizing an array of African cultural material when the museum curator approaches him with a warm beverage (likely English tea) in hand. She begins to talk to him about the pieces on display in a patronizing tone. Killmonger quickly contradicts her, providing the correct provenance for the material. He tells her not to worry, he will take it off her hands. She becomes upset saying it is not for sale. Killmonger's tone escalates, asserting that the curator's ancestors originally stole it, and he is simply going to bring it back to its rightful home (Cascone 2018). In 2018, this movie helped the general public understand some of the conversations that have been going on for decades especially in regard to Nigerian "art" and the Nigerian quest to have their cultural items returned to them. It also renewed conversations in the academic field. The 2020

Black Lives Matter protests, likewise, aided in making more visible such issues and in inciting more requests for individual and group (and institutional) recognition of their identity as people of color.

While the Black Lives Matter movement began in fervor in the USA, it quickly spread throughout the world as forms relaying support and alliance as part of recognition, healing, and restitution in 2020. This has led to heightened attention to and requests for many "returns of heritage" including African artifacts that reside outside of their originating countries. The protests reignited repatriation campaigns by adding urgency to the matter, as well as helping to advance negotiations. In response several private collectors and museums have returned items (Reuters 2020) while many have not.

As for the specific case of the Benin Bronzes, while the British Museum is willing to work with Nigeria to create a museum in Nigeria to house Royal Art, they are still reluctant in other ways to push forward the return of the bronzes. After the *Black Panther* was released, the British Museum wrote to *Artnet News* stating, "The British Museum is not able to consider the proposal until there is a clear indication that this is officially desired by the relevant Nigerian authorities" (Cascone 2018). Representatives of the Nigeria federal government have made it abundantly clear to the British Museum that they wish the return of their works—but so have the descendants of the Nigerian royal family. As the same time, while the British Museum has the biggest collection of the Royal Art of Benin at roughly 900 pieces, they also have a perhaps largest hurdle to jump regarding a decision to repatriate--the British Parliament, that has some say in the issue as will be explored below.

Another shift occurring within the museum field is the issue of "decolonizing" museums at all levels including their collections, which plays right into the ethical standards of museums.

The Washington Post has defined decolonization as "a process that institutions undergo to expand the perspectives they portray beyond those of the dominant cultural group, particularly white colonizers" (Hatzipanagos 2018). The Abbe Museum in Maine added decolonization to their approach by including it in their strategic plan and has explained how they approach the issue as, "at a minimum, sharing authority for the documentation and interpretation of Native culture" (Abbe Museum 2015). Most museums agree that a wider range of voices need to be present within these institutions. Scholars from former colonies, such as Nigeria, have long recognized the importance of including Indigenous cultural traditions and recounting the histories of these peoples which have long been repressed and erased (Fairweather 2004; 1). Now, many museums, are attempting to follow this route and recognize the importance of sharing the works in their collection, not only as artifacts of past cultures, but also items that are part of contemporary societies with a continuing living history. Museums that hold material from communities other than their own are undergoing a radical shift in how they present and interpret materials that are tied or linked to colonialism and colonial history even to the point of considering whether they should continue to retain such items. So far, museums in the United States have primarily focused on showcasing Black and Latinx peoples, but other voices need to be considered in this era of change (Angeleti 2021). Part of this problem is that museums often treat people of color as minorities within their collections. Yet, is this truly always the case (Shoenberger 2022)?

In order to try and rectify this imbalance, more museums are hiring or inviting outside curators that are from those cultures to create and interpret exhibits. The rationale is that such people, as members of a particular culture themselves, are better able to contextualize the material both in terms of what it was and what it is now. In present day exhibitions there are

often works or written text that perpetuates the colonial view that certain culture have died out when that is often not the truth (Shoenberger 2022). Additionally, visiting or guest curators from source communities are being hired in greater numbers to help show and re-interpret other parts of a museum's collection. As an example, the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, Illinois has invited several Native American artists to showcase their artwork in the institution's Native American galleries. Not only is this an exciting way to bring in another voice, but it is also a wonderful way to support contemporary artists when people tend to think of Native art as solely historical. The invited artists included Bunky Echo-Hawk and Chris Pappan. Pappan, who is a local Chicago artist of Osage, Kaw, Cheyenne River Sioux, and mixed European descent. He created a series of works in the museum's Native North American Hall to help contextualize and reconsider the artifacts in the gallery. These objects had not been changed in terms of how they are exhibited since 1950 (Shoenberger 2022). In 2021, the Field premiered their renovations to the hall after working extensively with "an advisory committee of scholars and museum professionals from across the country and from diverse tribes and nations" (Shoenberger 2022). Institutions are also utilizing strategic plans to redevelop their collecting directives and overall auditing their museums to see how or in what ways they are or are not addressing inequalities. The AAM defines a strategic plan as, "…a mutually agreed-upon vision of where a museum is going and what it wants to achieve. It ensures this vision meets the needs of its audiences and community and requires that a museum identify how it will obtain resources to fulfill this vision" (AAM 2017). The document will lay out the museum's goals and other critical steps for the institution to take to realize those goals. As part of decolonizing efforts, guest curators, and recontextualizing strategic plans are directives that connect to a larger world view and

understanding of past histories especially how they relate to internationalist and nationalist theories.

Internationalist Versus Nationalist Perspectives

Internationalism articulates the strongest rationale supporting collecting nations seeking to retain cultural antiquities (Goepfert 1995, 507). These are often the countries that were the colonizers of developing countries, such as England and France. Internationalism is the idea that cultural objects belong to humankind since each cultural group has made contributions to world culture (Goepfert 1995, 507). Those taking this position claim that since the world is now a global entity, every person, as a citizen of the world, has a right to view the objects as part of a shared history. Traditionally, art and other cultural objects changed hands through trade and sale, sometimes through many people or countries, thus they are saying there is not a singular home for the objects. Instead, the objects can be created in one country and viewed in another. The strongest argument for this view is that they should be in an institution where they can be readily seen or accessible, on display, or retrieved from storage by large numbers of people—in other words that they are made accessible to the greatest extent possible. Through this conceptual framing of the issue, some western museums have taken the position that everyone throughout the world has a right to these objects as an heir. Thus, they should be housed within a nation that can care for them better and that everyone will, in theory, have easy access. "By focusing on preservation and global accessibility, internationalism seeks to exhibit the achievements of earlier cultures, to provide opportunities for study, and to satisfy general curiosity regarding world history" (Geopfert 1995, 507). One might argue that these custodian countries are still supporting a colonizer's perspective. In other words, they believe they are the best venues to

correctly preserve Africa's historic pieces because, presumably, African countries would be less able to make the items as widely available to an interested public. James Cuno corroborates this view by stating that "cultural property is a political construct, it is only presumed to have a special meaning for those that claim it" (Cuno 2011, 9). Cuno, for example, argues that Egyptian artifacts only became desired by their country origin when Egypt found it beneficial to having them, especially in relation to heightened tourism and political and financial gain. He goes on to assert that to assume that artifacts act within the political sphere of cultural property is a means to politicize them ultimately to gain or maintain power. Here again, one might point out that his position negates any emotional connection that people, and countries may have to these objects.

I see some major flaws with this viewpoint. Instead of recognizing the value that the objects had within their culture of origin, some western museums have had the tendency to ignore original context and put them on view for other reasons, such as for their artistic skill, aesthetic value, or as a means to illustrate the history and culture of another "foreign" country or people (e.g. the connections between contemporary European culture and the material culture of classical antiquity). The British Museum is often cited by western scholars as providing a prime example of this kind of decontextualization. While, for example the British Museum has an entire wall devoted to plaques from the Benin Bronze collection they are titled, "The Discovery of Benin Art by the West" (Chick and Brown 2019). The display does not mention that they were taken as war booty in the aftermath of a bloody military battle. Rather, it presents Britain (and the West) as the 'discoverers' of the fact that Africans, who were previously thought to be too 'primitive' for art, were in fact talented. This exhibition narrative supports the processes that foster the power imbalances inherent within colonialism.

One could argue that colonialism never ended, but rather altered its form; what some scholars refer to as "neocolonialism." (Afisi n.d.). ""These bronzes are more than art," says Ikhuehi Omonkhua, the chief exhibition officer of the National Museum of Benin City. "Keeping them abroad is like holding our ancestor's hostage" (Chick and Brown 2019). This statement alone refutes Cuno's position that countries are asking for the return of their artifacts solely for political power and the benefits of tourism. While those factors might also be at play, these historic and cultural artifacts hold more and deeper importance to Nigeria's people. In short, they were blatantly stolen and now they want them back. Additionally, since many of Benin's bronzes are kept in museums in Europe and the United States, they remain inaccessible geographically and financially to most Nigerians, descendants of the original creators of the objects, whose personal, familial, tribal, and national identity is based around it. It deserves considering just who among the public really has greater access to the Benin Bronzes in an English museum. It would seem that Nigerians benefit the least by having them made available to widest possible audience, as Cuno argues, when they are put on display in public places like London, England (Klesmith 2013 – 14, 52).

In contrast to this internationalist position is the nationalistic view. The nationalistic viewpoint focuses primarily on the interests of the nations of origin as well as living descendants (Klesmith 2013 – 14, 510). Generally, the argument is that those who are not decedents of the original owners should not control access to the objects and claim ownership over them especially since they were often obtained by plunder or through duress. The nationalistic view urges return of objects to their country of origin since many objects have left those countries illegally or against the will of their owners (Goepfert 1995, 510). Today, there is still a rampant problem in some countries regarding the thriving business of exporting (sometimes illegally)

their material culture. Those who support the internationalist viewpoint to this situation, while also pointing out that the nationalist position would just push more items into circulation through the black market and into private hands. Instead, they argue that to help prevent illegal exportation of cultural objects countries should create a stricter set of export controls (Goepfert 1995, 510). While this view does seem to be more favorable for repatriation of objects to their source country, it isn't the perfect solution either since it is untenable for most countries to try and stem the tide of such illegal activity.

Many source countries do not have enough funds, security, or support to preserve and care for every object or even its associated documentation. Archival items too are at extreme risk especially in countries with unstable governments. In 2005, for example, the Guatemalan Police in Guatemala City discovered in a warehouse built and maintained by the Institution of the Procurator for Human Rights, an archive that contained almost 80 million pages that detailed murders, tortures, and kidnappings during the Guatemalan Civil War that occurred between 1960 and 1996. These important papers were found in terrible condition. Some were strewn across the floor, while others were stuffed into garbage bags, damaged by water, and even soiled by vermin. Today, the Guatemalan Police archivists are still trying to obtain proper resources to preserve the documents from more damage (Van Bokkem 2017). This is just one case where historical records have been compromised due to a lack of funds. This, however, is not just a problem outside of the United States. There are several instances in museums around the world where staff are struggling to care for the millions of artifacts and documents collected or accepted for donation to their institutions by their predecessors in the institution. Almost all museums and archives are "full," and few have the staff and other resources to assure their continued survival.

Despite clearly conflicting agendas both internationalist and nationalist positions support equally valid and legitimate interests (Goepfert 1995, 511). Museum professional of both perspectives are liable to create situations leading to damage or loss, or lack of access if they are taken to either extreme. Instead—it might be a compromise—a combination of these two perspectives might be what would result in the best outcome for both parties. As of yet such a compromise position has not been widely and clearly articulated but be may as more and more institutions begin to repatriate artifacts to their countries of origin, if only to relieve the pressure of their own storerooms and archives.

Concluding Discussion

While there are legal claims that the Benin Bronzes should be returned to Nigeria since they were taken by force, there are ethical claims to the issue as well. ICOM, AAM, and the Museums Association all have created ethics policies that emphasize the importance of considering ethical claims when the material is examined within a museum's collection. These considerations are sometimes in contrast to the laws that are enforced by local and national governments. Sometimes such laws do not support the return of material to the country of origin. In such cases, they must rely instead on calls for the ethical consideration of their requests.

What is deemed to be ethical as society changes? Two great examples of this are through the Black Lives Matter movement and the movie the *Black Panther.* Each led the general public to become aware of the unequal treatment of people of color and spurred them to support and call for equality of these peoples with renewed vigor. Such calls have included the return of cultural material from collections, which goes hand in hand with the decolonization movement

that is happening in museums. Another important topic to be aware of are the differing viewpoints that people use when arguing for or against the return of cultural artifacts, the international and national perspectives. The international position is most commonly used to argue for keeping material in Western collections, since, the argument goes, the widest possible public should be able to experience a global perspective. Whereas a national perspective, on the other hand, emphasizes supporting the interests of countries of origin and that they should have the material returned for them, for the purposes of creating a national identity, for example, that allows people to heal and come together. Each of these discussion points are brought to the forefront as repatriation is considered within Europe and the United States.

CHAPTER FOUR:

REPATRIATING THE BENIN BRONZES:

INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL CONTEXTS

The return of cultural heritage, often known as repatriation or cultural restitution, is not a new idea. It may seem that it's a more recent phenomenon, but it's primarily because it has been in the forefront of popular media for the last few years. As African countries gained their independence from colonial powers the newly independent entities began a quest to have their cultural heritage returned to them. Over the last several decades countries have begun to shift their stance in favor of policies that seek justice for actions that are now considered unethical, immoral, and unjust (both in Europe, as well as the United States) pertaining to the return of African heritage. Initially, most United States museums only observed what was happening in Europe, likely waiting to determine the best method by which to proceed. But as the years have gone by, institutions within the United States have taken a seemingly more active role as a result of their own stance as well as pressure from other countries and the media.

International Repatriation

More and more European countries are coming forward with plans to research the collections in their museums in order to better understand if any of their artifacts were taken by force from their country of origin. These countries include, but are not limited to, Germany, France, the

Netherlands, and some institutions in the United Kingdom. France was one of the first countries to take the lead in creating plans to return heritage items from its various museum collections after doing research to confirm provenance. On November 28, 2017, the President of the French Republic stated, "Starting today, and within the next five years, I want to see the conditions put in place so as to allow for the temporary or definitive restitution of African cultural heritage to Africa" (Phillips 2021, xxii). This proclamation was startling since not even a year prior a small number of artifacts held in France were denied return by President Macron to Benin City. Initially, there had been an agreement to return twenty-six objects, mainly royal statues from the Palace of Abome which was formerly the capital of the Kingdom of Dahomey, to Benin (The Local France 2018). This moment marked a dramatic shift since President Macron wanted to take an aggressive stance, not just for France but also to influence other countries toward the repatriation of objects to Africa.

After making his declaration in 2017, President Macron commissioned a report by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy that was published in 2018. The report was a proposal for a new system for repatriating artifacts to the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa (Herman 2021). Felwine Sarr is a philosopher, economist, and a musician and presently teaches at the University of Gaston-Berger in Saint Louis, Senegal (French Culture 2021). Savoy is a professor in the Department of Art History at the Technische Universität Berlin. Currently, she is the Chair for the department of Modern Art History/Art History as Cultural History (Collège de France). The authors focused specifically, in their report, on pieces in the French museum's collections that were taken by military force (Herman 2021). While works taken during such "punitive expeditions" were once considered lawful, the new stance is that does not make them morally and ethically faultless in the present day. This declaration also aligns with the American Alliance

of Museums position as discussed previously. The results of their work helped to identify the types of works that were good candidates for repatriation to their countries of origin. Two years after the government commissioned the report—in 2020—the French legislature unanimously passed a bill that allowed for the repatriation of twenty-seven artifacts that were originally looted from Benin City and Senegal (Packard 2020). These returns relate directly to the work that was stolen from the palace of Abomey (Rea 2020). The piece returned to Senegal is a saber that once belonged to an anti-colonial military commander (Rea 2020). The Senate also declared its intention to form a national council that would be solely dedicated to adjudicating future restitution cases.

These 26 works, pillaged by General Dodds from Benin in 1892, were in fact returned to Nigeria in 2021 after they were displayed for the last time at the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris (Michel 2022). The wooden throne of *Oba* Ghezo and three *bacios* (protective vodun figures) were among several of the pieces that were returned to Benin City (Surtees 2022). The works went on display in a government building in Cotonou, Benin. The first day that the display was open, over 1,000 people came to view the pieces. “I can identify with these objects,” said Narcisse Ore, a 30-year-old hotel worker, “They fill me with emotion. This is a revolution for the good of generations to come” (Surtees 2022). This is a wonderful example of the powerful emotive impact these pieces can have on Nigerian citizens when they are able to see their heritage returned. From this event people were able to gather numerous firsthand accounts of just what these pieces mean to the people of the region, especially in relation to generational healing.

The Netherlands also released a report to then Dutch Culture Minister Ingrid van Engelshoven in 2021 from the Special Advisory Committee on the National Policy framework for colonial collections. This account pushes the Netherlands to recognize the injustices of stolen

artifacts and return, "…any cultural objects looted in former Dutch colonies if the source country so requests" (Packard 2020). Another country making large steps towards repatriation of pieces identified as Benin Bronzes is Germany. They have established a comprehensive framework for the restitution of objects taken during the country's colonial period. Released in 2019, the document is titled 'Framework Principles for Dealing with Collections from Colonial Contexts' (Herman 2021). Germany's Ministry of Culture, state ministers, and museum directors have agreed to 'substantive returns' of Benin Bronzes from the country's museum collections (Monks 2021). German museums have the second largest holdings of Benin Bronzes after the British Museum in England and Germany has begun to repatriate the works in 2022.

During the autumn of 2021, the German government and the Nigerian National Commission for Museums and Monuments signed a memorandum of understanding. It lays out a timetable for restitution of artifacts that reside in German institutions that were looted from the Royal Palace of Benin during the British military battle of 1897 (Hickley 2021). This accord is a monumental step for Nigeria in the return of the Benin Bronzes, since it clears the way for a formal contract. The accord explains the process of how 1,100 Benin Bronzes that reside in German museums will be returned to Nigeria in the second quarter of 2022 (Hickley 2021). As of the end of October 2022 (at my writing of this thesis) the works have not yet been repatriated from Germany to Nigeria but the Foundation of Prussian Cultural Heritage and Nigeria's National Commission for Museums and Monuments have signed a document transferring their ownership from the Ethnological Museums Collection in Berlin to Nigeria (*Reuters* 2022). This deal covers 512 objects, the first of which is still planned to be returned to Nigeria in 2022 while a third of the artifacts will remain in Berlin for a minimum of ten years and be displayed in the Humboldt Forum in Berlin with the opportunity for the loan to be extended (Ibid).

The accord creates the framework for joint projects in archaeology, education, and museum infrastructure between the two countries and Germany agreed to help with the construction of the Edo Museum of West African Art that is being built in Benin City (Hickley 2021). Before its construction began, architect David Adjaye created plans for a pavilion that will serve as a temporary home for the artifacts. Interestingly, upon Nigeria's request, some of the bronzes will remain in Germany after ownership is transferred (Hickley 2021). Since there are works that will be remaining in Berlin it has eased some worry that critics have voiced that repatriation would result in European museums becoming devoid of artifacts. This action suggests that Nigerians may be open to the idea of loans of the material in the future to other organizations, evidence of a new form of collaboration between African and European museums.

It is a significant development that, as part of this healing process, works are returning to Nigeria permanently, rather than just on loan. This action demonstrates a type of power shift between countries and affects how Nigeria is viewed in other countries hoping for similar reconciliation. With loans, the lending country is still holding onto power of possession through the continued ownership of the objects, yet when ownership of the items is restored to Nigeria, a difference power balance is struck. Osaisonor Godfrey Ekhator – Obogie, historian and researcher at Nigeria's Institute for Benin Studies applauds Germany's plans saying that Germany is, "leading in the global restitution movement" (Hickley 2021). I believe that this agreement will have large consequences for German museums, and that it will resonate throughout Europe and beyond.

Recently, it was confirmed that the Nigerian government has created an independent trust known as the Legacy Restoration Trust (LRT) to receive the work. This trust consists of the royal family in Nigeria, the Edo State government, the Federal government, and international

stakeholders (Brown 2020). This is the first indication that the Nigerian government and the royal family would work together to receive items. Before, the two entities were quite divided on who would or could receive the pieces.

Not all is settled, however, while the details of the plan are still being developed with Germany, a dispute between Nigerian leaders may endanger them. Early in July of 2021, *Oba* Ewuare II called all 'well-meaning' people to an emergency meeting in Benin City. Hundreds of people answered his call and assembled in the palace courtyard. During this meeting, the *Oba* warned of an 'artificial group' that was attempting to redirect the return of the Bronzes from a Benin Royal Museum, to elsewhere (BBC News 2021*)*. The group he spoke of is the Legacy Restoration Trust (mentioned above), which has support of Edo State Governor Gaodwin Obaseki and—as previously stated—had plans to put the Bronzes in the new museum being built, the Edo Museum of West African Art. insisted that the works needed to come back to where they were taken from, as the *Oba* is "the custodian of all the cultural heritage of the Benin Kingdom" (BBC News 2021*)*.

The *Oba*'s argument is quite persuasive, but awkwardly, there have been delegates from his family sent to sit on the board of LRT. Specifically, his son and heir Ezelekhae Ewuare. While the *Oba* should know about these plans and the talks that have been occurring, he pressed that he knew nothing about them. One of the reasons that German officials—as well as other European institutions—had embraced LRT was because they thought that the trust and the *Oba* were working together. It is unclear how this disagreement came to be and what may result from the emergency public meeting. It seems likely that years of distrust between the Nigerian government and royal family have surfaced again. Ultimately, Nigeria's federal government has legal responsibility for the return of the bronzes. They will take possession of the artifacts but

would prefer to do so in collaboration with the royal family. The *Oba* stated that he would never concede on the question of ownership. He believes the works belong to him and his family. Yet, even after this dispute occurred, Germany and other countries are moving forward with returning what is perceived from other perspectives to be the cultural heritage of the country to the national government. These artifacts that will likely eventually reside in the Edo Museum of West African Art despite what *Oba* Ewuare II has stated (BBC News 2021).

Part of Germany's declaration will require the country's museums in possession of the bronzes to establish and document their provenance. Subsequently, these details will be published online on a new website—titled *Digital Benin*. *Digital Benin* launched their site in November 2022. This platform showcases 5,246 objects across 131 institutions in 20 countries (Digital Benin 2022). To explain what their website is doing they explain, "Digital Benin brings together all objects, historical photographs and rich documentation material from collections worldwide to provide a long-requested overview of the royal artefacts from Benin Kingdom looted in the late nineteenth century. The historic Benin objects are an expression of Benin arts, culture and history, and were originally used as royal representational arts, to depict historical events, to communicate, to worship and perform rituals" (Digital Benin 2022). To my knowledge, a website such as this, that gathers together data internationally, and then publishes it to the public on one platform, is the first of its kind. This format, too, has tremendous implications for the type of information that it can and plans to provide. The platform also has different categories for visitors to explore, including: Ẹyo Otọ, catalogue, institutions, provenance, map, oral history, Itan Edo, and Media (Digital Benin 2022).

Ẹyo Otọ is a section that describes the objects and their Edo designations. Here visitors the website can listen, view, and read about the artifacts use, production, and function. Next, the

catalogue allows you to search and explore data of the listed objects from institutions within 20 countries. The institution category lists the objects from the 131 instructions that have a holding of Benin objects within their collection. It highlights a majority of the Benin Bronzes and other Royal material removed from Nigeria in one place with the information that the collaborating institutions have for the items. Provenance explores the roles, biographies and object relations of names found within the institutional records. The map sections presents a map of current day Edo south (ancient Benin Kingdom) and Benin City itself and then allows the user to compare the current locations of the artifacts spread throughout the world. The oral history presents a section of Benin people sharing their knowledge and cultural traditions to be preserved for generations to come. Next, Itan Edo explains the history of the Benin Kingdom. Finally, the website shares a media section. There visitors can view 3D objects as well as print out a coloring book and language cards of Ẹyo Otọ and watch an introductory video. All of these sections provide an exciting wealth of information for viewers to explain and learn about these important objects.

Generally, the international museum community has been encouraging transparency about collections for a long time. Since most museums are stewards of their collections for the public, this seems to me to be a great opportunity for them to share the artifacts and related documents currently residing in their collections with the world. Kokunre Agbontaen-Eghafona, a professor of cultural anthropology at the University of Benin stated to *Art Newspaper,* "The looting was like a book being torn to pieces and then the pages were put in different places. Gathering them together in one place is great" (Harris 2022). Interestingly, the website also includes a disclaimer for sensitive content, it states,

> Digital Benin collates digital material from institutions, and some of this material is inherently colonial and contains words, terms and phrases that are inaccurate, derogatory and harmful towards African and African diasporic communities. Catalogue transcriptions, book titles, exhibition titles and museum titles may contain harmful terms. We recognize the potential for the material to cause physical and mental distress as well as evoke strong emotions. Owing to the scale of the collection's data, a process to implement sensitive-content warnings in the displayed data is still incomplete. The material within the catalogue does not represent Digital Benin's views. Digital Benin maintains a strong anti-colonial, anti-racist position and affirms its support for centering the humanity of historically marginalized and disenfranchised community (Digital Benin 2022).

Germany and Nigeria have also launched a 'knowledge-exchange' platform that will encourage collaboration between the countries' museums (*Digital Benin* 2021). Each of these parts of the declaration seem to be leading to a new and exciting possibility for a collaborative relationship between the countries, as well as their museums, and could serve as a template for other countries to seek a third party that brings museums, the royal family, private collectors, academics, and others together. Barbara Plankensteiner, who is the director of the Museum am Rothenbaum in Hamburg, leads the Digital Benin initiative and is a founding member of the Digital Benin Group (Hickley 2021). Her team consists of Dr. Feliity Bodenstein, Lecturur in Heritage Studies, Sorbonne Universtie Paris; Dr. Jonathan Fine, Head, Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz; and Dr. Anne Luther, Expert for Digital Humanities (Markk 2020). This core team is also working with object specialists and scholars from Nigeria, Europe, and the USA. Additionally, the project has outside support from the Ernst von Siemens Art Foundation. The Ernst von Siemens Art Foundation is a foundation based in Munich, Germany that is dedicated to the promotion of visual arts (Dutch Culture). They supplied funding in the amount of €1.2m (an equivalent of $1,196,034 in the United States) (Hickley 2021). While the project is currently based in Hamburg, the long-term aim is for the project to be based at the future Royal Museum in Benin City (Hickley 2021).

Outside of the European countries mentioned above there has been some movement in English institutions outside of the British Museum. Jesus College, University of Cambridge became the first British institution to repatriate one of the Benin Bronzes to Nigeria in October 2021 (Khomami 2021). That this news comes from an institution in Britain is an encouraging development in since English government offices have been outspoken about keeping this type of material in the country. Nevertheless, Jesus College is a private institution, which allows them to make decisions on their own without involving the English Parliament in contrast to the British Museum. The work is a bronze cockerel, titled the *Okukor* (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 Bronze Cockerel - Okukor
Photography: Chris Loades
Resource: bbc.com

The *Okukor* was first removed from public display in 2016 after students protested that the work was looted and should be returned to Nigeria (Khomami 2021). After these protests, the college set up a group known as the Legacy of Slavery Working Party. This team was comprised of fellows, staff, and student representatives tasked with exploring the historical, legal, and moral status of the college's ownership of the bronze. Through their research, the team found that the statue was indeed looted from the Royal Court of Benin and was given to Jesus College in 1905 by the father of a student (Khomami 2021). From this research, in 2019 the college announced the decision to return the bronze and carried out this promise in 2021.

The British Museum has historically been known to be resistant to returning any objects in their collection. This reluctance has been published about extensively, especially pertaining to the Elgin Marbles, discussed previously, and the Benin Bronzes. Some members of the British government support this stance, yet not all do. Bell Riberiro-Addy—a Member of Parliament (MP)—said in a statement directed towards the British Museum, "You've got the loot of empire and you're hoarding it because you don't even have it on display and those really, really patronizing arguments about [source communities] not being able to take care of them properly. What is that exactly supposed to mean?" She continued, "It's so rude and condescending and actually a form of racism in itself because it's this idea of people that look a certain way and from certain countries not being good enough to do certain things" (Today UK News 2021). This is a bold statement from a member of parliament. Riberiro-Addy comments are stark but her words are gaining momentum with younger Brits, in particular. I think it will be interesting to see if her comments will result in any change in the British Museum, or if they will be disregarded like the perspectives of others who have spoken out about return through the decades. Riberiro-Addy is of Ghanian descent, so topics such as this may be "closer to the heart" for her. In the past a spokeswoman for the museum stated, "We believe the strength of the British Museum resides in its breadth and depth, allowing millions of visitors an understanding of the cultures of the world and how they interconnect over time — whether through trade, migration, conquest, or peaceful exchange" (Today UK News 2021). Clearly, this is a succinct expression of the internationalist position described previously. Riberiro-Addy is not the only Member of Parliament (MP) that has been outspoken about this issue. Bernie Grant, who was one of Britain's first black MPs, led a sustained campaign in the 1990s that appealed for the Bronzes to be returned. However, this movement did not result in their repatriation.

One justification (from the internationalist perspective) of an encyclopedic museum is to be a depository of artifacts of global importance representing multiple communities for guests to view and consider. Yet should museums be displaying these artifacts, regardless of their global importance, if they were obtained in a manner that is considered unethical by today's standards? Those aligning with the nationalist position would, as we have seen, argue that not only should they not be displayed, but they should also be returned to their original countries of origin.

I would also ask, if resistance to repatriation is based on being able to share these objects with a larger audience, shouldn't exhibition and interpretation be factors to consider? A museum's exhibit plays a key role in the interpretation of historical knowledge, and, hopefully, will be viewed by visitors of diverse ages and backgrounds, each of whom brings their own world view and knowledge to the museum. As the American Historical Association states, there are a few key issues to keep in mind when creating a display that is ethical, mindfully created, and relevant:

1. Exhibits should be grounded in scholarship, marked by intellectual integrity, and subjected to rigorous peer review. Evidence considered in preparing the exhibit must include objects, written documentation, oral histories, images, works of art, music, and folklore.
2. At the outset of the exhibition process, museums should engage stakeholders in any exhibit and may wish to involve their representatives in the planning process.
3. Museums and other institutions funded with public monies should be keenly aware of the diversity within communities and constituencies that they serve.
4. When an exhibit addresses a controversial subject, it should acknowledge the existence of competing points of view. The public should be able to see that history is a changing process of interpretation and reinterpretation formed through gathering and reviewing evidence, drawing conclusions, and presenting the conclusions in text or exhibit format (American Historical Association 2017).

In the past, African people were treated as though they were less civilized and developed than people who lived in Europe or who were descendants of Europeans. This point of view included

the types of materials that were created by them and displayed within museums, particularly art and natural history museums.

The Renaissance turned a new eye to a fashionable outlook on collecting 'curiosities' beginning the trend of curiosity cabinets. This was a place, such as a parlor, where trinkets and novelties and specimens from nature were accumulated and displayed over generations (Klemm n.d.). The artist, culture, and function of the items were generally not recorded or thought to be important. But cabinets were oriented into roughly four categories, artificialia, naturalia, exotica, and scientifica (Google Arts & Culture n.d., Simmons 2016). Artificialia is a grouping of objects that were created or modified by humans. Naturalia includes creatures as well as natural objects. Exotica groups together exotic plants and animals. Finally, Scientfica orients scientific instruments into one area (Ibid). Moving into the nineteenth-century, many curiosity cabinets were donated to natural history museums and categorized into flora, fauna, or skeletal remain collections. The first purpose-built museum was designed by Wilhelm Egkl. It was constructed between 1563 – 1567 to showcase the paintings of Wilhelm IV and Albrecht V (Simmons 2016, 86).

The age of Enlightenment aligned with the beginning of the scientific revolution in the early 1600s. Aggressive imperial expansion dominated Europeans mindset. They traveled throughout the world, one area being the west coast of Africa. This is when the unspeakable horrors of the African slave trade also began, and in conjunction with these "encounters" African artifacts were obtained and spread throughout the world (Simmons 2016, 93). Slowly during the Enlightenment the modern museums we know today emerged. They had a different role from curiosity cabinets in that they were treated as a social excursion with a select grouping of people, but often the general, uneducated public was not allowed entry (Simmons 2016, 132). The

exhibitions were not labeled or explained and so the public often felt alienated resulting few being interested enough to want to visit these newly formed establishments.

In the United States African Art began to seen within the country beginning in the early 1900s; New York City became a place to find African "art" (material culture from Africa that the "art world" was begin to take interest in aesthetically) as there was a shift and such items became trendy (Biro 2013, 92). Within Europe, African art entered the art scene as Pablo Picasso and Maurice de Vlaminck "discovered" African masks at a flea market and began to create artwork inspired by the pieces (Errington 1998, 64). Nelson Rockefeller aided in making African, Oceanic, and Native American artwork visible and legitimized with the opening of the Primitive Art Museum in 1957 (Errington 1998, 67). While the museum was only open for roughly 20 years all the work was moved to the Metropolitan Museum afterwards and installed in a hall that is still there to the present day (Errington 1998, 67). Moments like these helped to drive interest in collecting African material culture as "primate art" for museum and private collections and are important to understand how items like the Benin Bronzes ended up in so many art museums and private collections around the world.

Natural history museums often showcase them contextually with other material from Africa. Often the artifacts will be displayed closely together without an explanation of their origin or history. Whereas art museums have often exhibited them as standalone art objects within a vitrine with few details about their original context. Both museums derived from Western concepts as to how the material should be displayed, often leaving out any information as to how the pieces were used, created, obtained, or what they mean to the people who created them. In all these cases, African material culture (and the Benin Bronzes themselves) made their

way into many major museums with little regard for how they may have left Benin City in the first place—something that has begun to change only recently.

Repatriation in the United States

After, President Macron made his declaration in 2017 to look into returning cultural objects from French collections to African countries it seemed as though the whole museum world held their breath to see what would happen next. What could these mean developments for other museums in Europe and the United States that held colonial collections? Institutions have been making progress within their collections to do more research as they plan for what should and might happen next. While it seemed that museums in the United States were slower to address this process, international repatriation of these items only began in earnest in the USA in late 2021 and 2022. The return of cultural heritage to source communities is not a new idea in museums and repositories in the United States but certainly the current visibility of the issue of repatriating the Benin Bronzes is a recent development.

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was enacted into law only a little over thirty years ago, in 1990 (Colwell 2017, 6). NAGPRA allows for the reclamation of skeletal remains, funerary, sacred, and communally owned objects. It is the duty of a designated staff member within museums (and other institutions) to determine the validity of Native American requests (Colwell 2017, 7). NAGPRA initially required 1,500 museums and dozens of federal agencies to create a list of these types of objects within their collections, send them to Federally recognized Native American Tribes, and publish them in the Federal Register. From these lists, Tribes could choose to make a claim for the objects to be returned to them or

have them kept at the museums and determine with staff how they should be cared for. Some descendant communities often have recommendations on how cultural objects should be cared for, stored, and handled. Today, nearly 670,000 funerary objects, 120,000 unassociated funerary objects, and 3,500 sacred objects have been returned (nps.gov n.d.). Skeletal remains are also a significant part of NAGPRA with around 10,000 remains that have been united with their tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations (O'Dell 2015). Native American repatriation efforts within the USA are far from perfect; NAGPRA itself could become a stronger law and it is currently going through another amendment process with a public commentary period last through January 2023. Yet, while the law has imperfections, it has become a model for other repatriation movements throughout the world for the return of Indigenous cultural heritage and ancestral remains within the same country. NAGPRA has also influenced international repatriation efforts from the United States to other countries.

International repatriation has also increased within the United States. In 2021, officials in the United States returned a total of 921 artifacts to Mali, Africa (McGreevy 2021). This cache of goods was first brought to authorities' attention in March 2009 when an illegal shipment was intercepted at the Port of Houston on Texas' Gulf Coast. While they were listed as replicas some questioned their authenticity as they appeared to be authentic ceremonial and mortuary objects (McGreevy 2021). While many of the items were returned before 2021, the bulk of it was returned after the State Department issued a grant to Mali that financed the repatriation of the objects and for their display within Mali (McGreevy 2021). While this example is within the governmental sphere of control because it was seized at a U.S. port, other types of returns are occurring throughout the United States as well. In July 2021 New York City's Brooklyn Museum returned over 1,305 pre-Hispanic artifacts to the Museo Nacional de Costa Rica in San

Jose. This was the museum's second repatriation effort involving the Central American nation; an earlier return occurred in 2011 (Bresler 2021). In December 2022, around 200 artifacts from museums throughout the United States were returned to Italy (Bresler 2021). This was thanks to the provenance research completed by Manhattan District Attorney's Office. More than half of the pieces had been attributed to a single antiquities dealer known as Edoardo Almagià (Bresler 2021). For decades Almagià had been accused of smuggling artifacts illegally. Each of these recent examples indicate that people throughout the country are becoming more sensitized to the possibility of items removed illegally from the country of origin. Museum staff and others outside of the profession are making concerted efforts to trying to understand the background of how certain materials were received and then evaluating if an item should remain in the collection of an institution or be returned to their country/community of origin.

Even while many museums in the U.S. have experience with NAGPRA, discussions about the repatriation of Benin Royal Art in the United States appears to be developing at a slower pace than what is happening within Europe. Recently there have been movements by institutions who are working towards repatriation but continue to focus their repatriation efforts on Native American material, which they are legally required to do. While there is no legal requirement to do so, some museums in the U.S. are beginning to research their African collections to determine if there are any cultural heritage items that might be Benin Royal art. The interviews I conducted with museum professionals throughout the country discussed in the next chapter confirmed that they are in the early stages of review. Others, who often have more resources, are further along the process and have already made strides. The Smithsonian Institution, for example, announced this year (2022) that they are going to return 39 of their Benin Bronzes. Which specific pieces have not been made public as of this date (Stevens 2022).

Their collection ranges from brass plaques, carved elephant tusks, ivory leopard statues to wooden heads. Before this announcement was made, the Smithsonian had removed the works from display five months prior. While this is a landmark case in the return of the artifacts in North America, a Smithsonian spokesperson cautioned that the Board of Regents first must approve deaccessioning of the items (Stevens 2022). They also cautioned that while the material may eventually be displayed in Benin City, some items are likely to remain within the Smithsonian on a long-term loan from Nigeria. This would still represent a large shift in power regarding ownership and how the works would actually be perceived by the museum staff, and the public, as well as the Nigerian people.

Since announcing the repatriation of this material, the Smithsonian also released a new "Ethical Returns Policy" on April 29, 2022 (Ludel 2022). This policy allows each of the institutions that comprise the Smithsonian Institution to modify the ethical returns policy to align with their collections and particular concerns. In this policy the Smithsonian firmly states that morality should supersede the legality of ownership—something that is clearly in line with AAM guidelines. There seems to be a growing consensus that these cases need to be thought through with a modern moral compass, rather than the rules and perceptions prevalent when the material was obtained. "My goal was very simple: [the] Smithsonian will be the place people point to, to say 'This is how we should share our collections and think about ethical returns'," stated Lonnie G. Bunch III, the Smithsonian's Secretary. He further explained, "The Smithsonian is this amazing wonder—this gift not just to the country but to the world. It's really important that we provide leadership" (Ludel 2022). To commit to a policy this monumental, regarding the voluntary and proactive return of African (and other) material, is an entirely new milestone for

museum in the U.S. It will be interesting to see how this develops in the museum field and what the related repercussions will be.

In another recent case, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City returned three looted objects to Nigeria: two sixteenth century brass plaques and a fourteenth century Ife Head (Angeleti 2021). The institution also signed an agreement to partner with the Nigerian government to work together on both art loans and scholarly endeavors (Villa 2021). As of my writing of this thesis, it is unclear if more artifacts will be sent back to Nigeria. The Met's Director, Max Hollein stated, "It shouldn't be only limited to the question of the Benin Bronzes. It can go much farther. We are looking forward to creating these much stronger bonds. It is about scholarly exchange, having joint ideas about how we can support each other" (Villa 2021). Both the Smithsonian Institution and the Metropolitan Museum of Art are leading institutions in the United States. Hopefully, their actions will inspire others to follow their lead and engage in their own repatriation efforts. Perhaps other museums have been engaging in similar efforts but are not quite as public about it, simply doing their due diligence and researching the provenance of their holdings is their intent to the repatriate Benin Bronzes?

To my knowledge, while most institutions have not fully created an international repatriation policy, the American Museum of Natural History has been making efforts to collate information on international policies; specifically surveying regarding policies of destructive testing on human remains. Overall they found that there have been no plans publicly available:

> The following institutions have no publicly-available policy on destructive testing of collections of any kind, but do have publicly-available policies on access to the museums' collections in general. In both cases, requests are considered on a case-by-case basis. The former institution has a form on the website for potential researchers to fill out and return, while the latter has nothing.
>
> - Museum Victoria, Victoria, Australia (pg. 4)

- The Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada (pg. 4)

While this is not exactly what I am considering with cultural artifacts it is a positive step in that there is a United States museum that is trying to understand how to formulate an international policy.

Concluding Discussion

As we have seen, cultural repatriation is not a new issue, instead it is something that only feels new as it has become increasingly visible through the popular media. This 'new' issue gained momentum in 2017 when France's President made a promise to start returning artifacts to African over the next five years. He made good on his promise and other European countries have followed France, including Germany and the Netherlands, as well as others. From those beginnings, Germany has gone on to create the Digital Benin platform. Digital Benin is revolutionary as it gathers together data on the Benin Bronzes from institutions around the world, together on one website that is freely accessible to anyone that has internet access. To my knowledge nothing like this has been created before.

Within the United States, there has been considerable focus on repatriation, but mostly because of the legal requirements instituted through NAGPRA beginning in 1990. NAGPRA has had its hiccups along the way but is one of only a few legal frameworks worldwide guiding repatriation that has been enacted by a national government that has seen some success. The United States, while slower to respond than Europe, has also begun to see international returns being made to Nigeria from the Smithsonian Institute as well as the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In the next chapter, I explore questions regarding international repatriation through interviews I conducted with several museum professional throughout the United States that

represent natural history and art museums. I did so in order to get a better understanding of the current status and attitude toward the return of the Benin Royal art in museums throughout the country.

CHAPTER FIVE:

ATTITUDES TOWARDS REPATRIATING THE BENIN BRONZES IN U.S. MUSEUMS

Over several months during the summer of 2022, I conducted video and written interviews with eleven museum professionals throughout the United States. To protect my interviewee's identities, I will refrain from using their names or any other identifiers that may suggest who they are or the identity of the museum where they work. I will be referring to each individual by the number in which I conducted their interview. Each interviewee was asked 13 questions (see Appendix A) with the opportunity to tell me anything else at the end of the interview that we did not discuss.

I used several methods to find participants. First, I researched museums throughout the U.S. that had a holding of the Royal Art of Benin and either emailed them directly or sent a message to the general email, hoping to be connected with someone responsible for the African collection. Several museums contacted me with a standard response that they are doing research on their collection and, at this time, are not doing any interviews or discussing their research. My second method was to request people to interview through an email listserv, Museum-L. This resource connected me with individuals that either have Benin Bronzes within their collection or those that have African material that they are currently researching. Talking to and corresponding with these people allowed me to obtain a general knowledge of what different institutions are doing throughout the U.S.

Discussion of My Interviews

To understand the role of each of the people I talked with, I asked, "What does your role entail in setting policy and making decisions about repatriation?" Overall, each of my interviewees had different ways that they participate in repatriation in their museums. For example, Interviewee One's primary function is in relation to the collection management policy. Whereas Interviewee Four described that while they do work on international repatriation programs, they explained their role as a jack of all trades in this situation. Interviewee Seven described leading the efforts for national repatriation, the decisions are made by an internal NAGPRA committee, and they suggest policy but generally these type of efforts are guided by their Registrar. Interviewee Seven also described their role as being responsible for constructing and collating the evidence for repatriation and presenting it to a committee. Understanding these various roles in several institutions was beneficial since it allowed me a broader perspective on repatriation in the museum world in the U.S. I then followed up to inquire if their institution had Royal Art of Benin within their collections. As I previously stated, the majority of them did. Two of the eleven did not but did have material from Africa. Interviewee Eight specified that the material in their collection was not from the 1897 punitive expedition. Instead, it seemed that their works were created in Benin City at a later date for the tourist trade, but they may have been created by artisans/artists belonging to similar guilds.

For those that do have Benin Bronzes in their collection I inquired as to whether they had them on display, and if there was any text that explained the item's history. Interviewees One, Five, and Eight reported that they do not have any on display, while the others said they do. Interviewee Four explained that there are a few on display in their African gallery. Near the

pieces there is text that explains what happened in the Kingdom and what it was before, clearly describing the role of the military battle. Interviewee Ten stated that there was one work on display but with no text because they do not regularly include labels in their gallery spaces, while going on to describe that, at one time, there had been further explanation. Interviewee Eleven explained that there is a sign nearby that describes the event; and they added that it looks newly installed, which leads them to believe that it was created in response to the circumstances surrounding the increased attention on the return of the Benin Bronzes.

Then to understand their general viewpoint on the repatriation efforts that are happening within Europe, I asked, "I am sure you heard how European museums, such as France and Germany will be and have returned cultural heritage to African countries—what do you think of this? Each person seemed to be quite open and welcoming of this development, several interviews remarked about how what is happening is not strictly new. Interviewee Two stated, "So, you know we have to be methodical, but what is happening is long overdue. I don't feel excited that it's happening because this is what should have been happening. This is what should have happened." Interviewee Three expanded on this perspective with a similar statement,

> I think it's been a long time coming and I think in many ways it's a logical next step and I think the fact that now it's not an occasional conversation, but a sustained one that is actually gaining a lot of momentum and that has many people sit around the table and exchange ideas. It is a significant development and I think that at this point what is happening on the American side is that museums are talking to one another and museums are asking and looking at one another for leadership and guidance.

Interviewee Three brings up an interesting point—everything that is happening is new for all who are involved. While repatriation has occurred in the past, it is not something that is very common—especially internationally. This is a larger development that is now worldwide and there is no precedent.

In response to this question multiple people brought up the importance of the relationships that are being built as one of the outcomes of these efforts. This is a great reminder that while items are going back to their countries of origin one of the key elements that is happening is that museums are attempting to repair past wrongs and renewing and create friendships with a people who have been scorned. Interviewee Eleven stated, "I think it's a good thing, actually facing history and looking at these collections and returning—it's a good thing."

My next several questions focused on the role of the governing power within each institution. I asked, "What is your museum's position on the repatriation of the Royal Art of Benin within the museum collection to their countries of origin?" This question got mixed responses, no one came outright to say that their board was against repatriation, but there were several that were unsure what it was, or if their board had a clear position. Interviewee Eight stated that their board has no formal position, they explained that their museum's mission is to serve the global community by recognizing the injustices that led to these collections and that they are ready to take healing and restorative action if and when it would be appropriate. In contrast, Interviewee Four explained how their board has been very supportive. They are aware of each deaccession that is made and have been slowly educated along the way as to why something should be deaccessioned, so that they are not surprised when it is formally asked of them. Overall, this type of reaction was what I expected. As with museum professionals, museum boards are still in a learning process and since many board members do not come from the museum world, they may have more learning to do to understand what this all means to them and their institutions.

Following this question, I asked if their institutions had created a policy or formal statement about repatriation and if they had, would they be willing to share it with me. This

question had a clear answer from everyone, no, there have been no specific policies created for international repatriation. Several pointed to their collection policies with a section devoted to NAGPRA guidelines or other generalities for deaccessioning in the collection that could be used during a repatriation scenario. But there was nothing specific for deaccessioning that would lead to international repatriation efforts. Interviewee Nine stated that they have been making efforts to create one. Interviewee Seven had the most specific policy for repatriation, they said, "Our museum has an established NAGPRA Policy and Procedures handbook, but we do not have one for international requests yet, but it is being discussed." They went further and shared the repatriation section from their handbook. It states:

> Repatriation is the return, to official governmental authorities, of material which was acquired under circumstances that render them invalid for the Museum to claim. This includes material which cannot be alienated, appropriated, or conveyed by an individual from a group such as items of historical, traditional, or cultural importance to a group or of sacred nature. The Museum recognizes that it holds objects, to which it may not hold rightful ownership and, based on an appropriate request and review, may repatriate that material.

Generally, while each of these interviewees described that their institution did not have a policy, it seems that there was general acknowledgement that while they do not have one, it would be helpful to develop one. This would certainly allow a guiding hand in these circumstances and help plan for the future.

My follow-up question asked if there were any established procedures for repatriating objects to their country of origin or if it was handled on case-by-case basis. This again was met by a unanimous response, each person answered that at present any international repatriation requests would be considered on as a case-by-case basis. Again, this was the type of answer that I had expected. International repatriation requests, overall, are not a common situation for an institution to find itself in, and since there are no established policies, each case would need to be

examined individually to understand what the best course of action would be. This is often the case for NAGPRA, in that each case needs to be examined for its own requirements. The majority of people I spoke with brought up NAGPRA and their experience with it as a comparison. Therefore, it would be understandable if moving forward they would want to structure their approach and process based on their NAGPRA experience.

To get an understanding of repatriation as a whole in each individual's institution I asked, "What is your board's position on repatriating cultural material of any kind?" Interviewee Four, Five, Seven, and Ten explained how their board members rely on what the museum leadership recommends. Interviewee Seven stated, "Our Board, at present, trusts our leadership, so if recommendations are made for repatriation domestically or internationally, they have never vetoed a request or had a concern about our decision." The others were not able to give a clear indicator what their board position would be, so refrained from answering the question.

Next, I asked, "Regarding the circumstances in which the Royal Art of Benin came to your museum, do you think it matters in your decision to repatriate or not how the material came to your museum?" Overall, this question resulted in a lot of responses that were surprising for me as well as thought-provoking. Interviewee One and Two explained that it is still a case-by-case process for them, it depends on how the item in question came to their museum. They explained that for them this is a huge part of the conversation. Interviewee Three pressed, "Yes, of course it matters. It's the ethical reason why people repatriate." Whereas Interviewee Four contrasted these previous positions, they stated, "Oh no, it doesn't matter at all because it's not our decision if something was taken illegally from anyone… it doesn't matter at all how it ended up in your collection because you are the rightful owner." Interviewees Five, Six, Seven, and Eleven agreed with Interviewee Four. Interviewees Eight and Nine stated that they want to do some more

research on their collection before they publicly state if the works have an ethical reason to be returned or if they were obtained legally and ethically correctly (although it bears noting that there is some conflation of legal requirements and ethnical positions in some of their responses). Interviewee Ten took a more global, international stance in their answer. They explained that how the work came into their collection is only part of the story. Before they can deaccession a work, the benefits to the collection and for museum guests need to also be considered. They went on to describe that they believe that it is important to include objects for guests from different countries throughout the world. This question is a great example of how there may be little consensus around a current topic with many different perspectives surrounding it.

My next question asked, "Since museums in the United Sates would at times purchase artifacts, do you believe they should be reimbursed for any expenses if they are repatriated to Nigeria?" Ten of the eleven interviewees agreed that in the end countries of origin should not pay for the return of the material. Interviewee Four explained,

> It's hard, but ultimately no. The museum should be the one paying to have it shipped back, including any other expenses. I think there are creative ways that institutions can start raising funds for more repatriation. Donors could be unaware of their provenance, explain the situation to them could lead them to financially supporting the return of the artifacts."

Interviewee Five had similar thoughts, they said, "I know it's a tricky question, my feeling is, and this is just from my perspective, but my thought is no because they [the museum] should have done their due diligence initially. But I think that even if something is acceptable at some point in the past, we need to rethink." Interviewee Five went on to further state that to make them pay for the return of the work would almost create a hostage situation. Interviewee Ten was an outlier to this question, they asserted that there is no way to answer to this question. They explained that so far only a few items throughout the world have been returned to Nigeria and so,

at this point in time, there is not a set plan laid out for these types of repatriations. They went on to say that as the size of the returns increase, so will the costs and they believe who will ultimately pay for the return of the material will be hammered out during negotiations. Interviewee Eleven agreed with the majority of the group that the country of origin should not have to pay for the return, but they did acknowledge that at some point there would need to be a pragmatic conversation surrounding payment. “The answer is basically no, I don’t believe that there should be reimbursement if this is going to be a form of restitution or healing.” But, they added, “I’d love to see some sort of federal funding.”

Next, I asked, “How do you think this will affect museums within Europe and the Americas regarding the repatriation of colonial captured material?” This question provoked several thoughtful answers. Interviewee One stated, “I am personally leery of these broad-brush approaches of just categorically saying that it came in during this period [of the British punitive expedition of 1897].” Interviewee One explained how important it is to do research and understand their institution’s collection before blindly giving items back to Nigeria and Benin City. Their position was that while much was taken during this expedition, it does not mean that all of it was, and there may have been some items that were obtained by museums through legitimate means. Interviewee Seven explained,

> Museums will not close because of cultural heritage returns and it will have no impact on visitation. I think this effort provides museums with other and more current stories to tell and helps both sides move through the tragic aspects of their respective histories towards a renewed relationship model. I don’t think healing happens overnight, but actions speak louder than words and it’s a move in the right direction.

Interviewee Seven is here addressing an issue that is often brought up when museums discuss returning objects. There are those who worry that if one item is returned, then soon there will be no more items in museums to come and visit. From the perspective of Interviewee Seven,

healing needs to happen, and should, and this is one of the ways that it can begin. Interviewee Eight supported Sevens position stating,

> The best outcome would be a collaborate event that brings European and United States museums together with African institutions in a collaborative effort of healing. [I] could see some institutions being resentful, as well as some patrons/audience members who are relatively uneducated on the subject.

Those that are "uneducated" on the subject could learn from participating museums to see why this is happening at this moment in history and what it means through interpretation and programs.

Subsequently, the following question I posed to my interviewees brought up some thoughtful responses, it read, "Do you believe there is a 'right' moment for repatriating cultural artifacts? Why, or why not?" With this question the consensus leaned towards there not necessarily being a right moment, but a time when you are being led in one direction. Interviewee Four explained,

> I think there's a moment whereas a field you're moving in a certain way, so I think now is a perfect moment, because when it's in the headlines you're feeling pretty taken to the task and we've had board members even say in the past year that they saw this in the paper and wonder if this is something we're doing.

Hearing this statement, to my thinking, really aligned with what I discussed previously in this thesis. The case of the Benin Bronzes has become popularized in the media and public culture more broadly which is making the public more informed with many voices demanding that something happen—which is extremely persuasive. Interviewee Seven's answer aligns with Four's response, they said,

> There may be a better, perhaps not a right time for both the country of origin (unstable governments, war, etc.) and the museum (funding, staff) or country ([i.e. country of origin above] that is returning the material. Right now, in the Age of Decolonization, these requests finally align with the many initiatives that have existed for decades but now the voices are louder, the general public has more empathy and awareness, and the people at

> the top are listening. No one wants bad press that will affect their current or potential funding sources or avenues.

In contrast to the thought processes behind the idea that the public has helped to encourage these developments, Interviewee Ten stated that there isn't a set time, instead you should work hard to understand your collection and build relationships. Again, they explained that the relationship is the important part of the process rather than the actual return.

My last question asked if their institutions had been involved in either domestic or international repatriation processes. Overall, I rarely needed to ask this final question as it came up organically through conversations. Each person's institution had been involved in repatriation in some manner, most often this meant through NAGPRA, but for some this did mean internationally. Among the museum professional I interviewed, they have repatriated material internationally to places such as Australia, Italy, Kenya, and New Zealand. In the cases where it was international, the majority of the museums were approached by the country of origin to consider repatriation. I ended these conversations by asking if there was anything else they would like to tell me or discuss, no one had any follow up statements.

Concluding Discussion

These conversations allowed me to gain insight into the community of museum professionals that reside in the U.S. on the repatriation efforts that they are working toward regarding the Royal Art of Benin; as well as what they are witnessing throughout the world. They are all working in an industry that is deeply involved with the public and thus they need to adapt to what is happening in the world around them. Overall, the people I talked to align with a nationalistic viewpoint. While these 11 museum professionals are not intended to be a representative "sample" of museum professionals in the US, the outcome of this research does

point to overwhelming support (over 90%) for repatriation of the Benin Bronzes. This point will be further explored in my concluding discussion in the next and final chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

While researching the repatriation status and efforts of the Royal Art of Benin it became clear to me that this is a very timely and evolving topic, not only through the many articles that were published on the subject from the onset of when I began researching it in 2019, but also through the conversations I had with my participants and the people I discussed this topic with in my daily life. The Royal Art of Benin was looted nearly a century and a half ago, but it is only within the past several years that repatriation has risen to the public consciousness and has become a serious priority in museums. It was not until French President Macron spoke in 2017 on the subject that the general public and the government of other countries began to move forward with repatriation of the Bronzes. Clearly, national leadership is an important consideration when attempting to make sense of recent developments around this issue, but not the only one.

I believe that one of the most influential aspects of this development was the public and their impact through popular media such as the movie *Black Panther,* and the Black Lives Matter movement that surged to one of its highest points in the summer of 2020 after the death of George Floyd. Even after these developments that in some cases included calls for the return of the Royal Art of Benin, there were some setbacks (since it is much easier to decry injustice that to solve it) as to where the material would be housed if it was returned to Nigeria. After Nigeria announced its intention to create a museum, repatriation efforts began to be discussed in a higher frequency.

Historical and Contemporary Developments

While the case of the repatriation of the Benin Bronzes appears to be straightforward, it clearly is not. Europe's first encounter with Benin City began with the Portuguese in 1486. Their relationship was relatively peaceful for around 400 years, but sadly it did not endure when the British arrived during a time of internal instability with Benin City. Benin City fell to colonial Britain in one day in 1897. The royal line continued as *Oba* Ovonramwen was banished to Calabar town and it continues to this day.

From the ruins and among the dead of the city, the British soldiers looted and collected the artwork to return to England, supposedly as a means to offset the costs of the military battle. They were then given to the British Museum on loan by the Secretary of State Foreign Affairs in England while others were sold to other British and German institutions as well as private dealers throughout the years. Today, in Nigeria the bronzes have become a symbol of what was lost during British Colonial Rule. The British Museum has one of the largest holdings of the Royal Art of Benin throughout the world and they have been absolute in their refusal to repatriate citing the British Museum Act of 1963 which dictates that the Museum Trustees are legally bound to deaccession only in necessary circumstances. This Act also been used to rationalize the British position on the Parthenon Marbles, another well-known case for repatriation, as well as repatriation requests from other countries.

Guiding forces with the United States for ethics include the International Council of Museums (ICOM) as well as the American Alliance of Museums. ICOM encourages museums to prepare to initiate dialogue for the return of cultural property to source countries if there is legal claim. In contrast, AAM encourages museums to look beyond the legal requirements and asserts

that there are ethical reasons to act. Both internationalist and nationalist perspectives can affect the way that people approach repatriation but progress has been made during the most recent wave of repatriation efforts.

United States museums have been slower to follow European museums in efforts to return material, yet they, like the Smithsonian Institution, have been making strides. Others have been making public announcements, such as the Fowler Museum in California, that they are researching their collections to better understand their holdings and considering what their next move should and will be.

One cannot ignore the impact in the United States regarding the return of cultural heritage through Nazi looted art and NAGPRA over the last 30 years. As a result, international repatriation has also increased to countries beyond the United States and to Europe with documented returns to countries such as Mali and Costa Rica.

The Perspective That Emerges from My Interviews

Through the conversations I had with individuals around the United States I was better able to understand what museum professionals are working toward and what they are considering now. Out of the eleven individuals I spoke with, the majority of them had Royal Art of Benin in their collection or had African material they believed could be attributed as a Benin Bronze. Ten of eleven individuals felt strongly about returning material if it was requested of them, while the eleventh took a more global perspective in wanting to first consider their visitors and what it would mean to them if items were returned. They felt strongly that the visitors to their museum should be able to experience items from around the world when they come to their museum. This type of statement is oriented with the internationalist viewpoint discussed earlier. Whereas the

others aligned more closely with a nationalistic perspective, that the material should be returned to its country of origin. This perspective among my interviewees was what I expected. It aligned with both popular and scholarly writing that has focused on professionals who are working toward decolonizing their collections.

Another insight from the interviews that also was unsurprising was that the interviewees took each repatriation requests on case-by-case basis and they did not have a policy in place for international returns. Several interviewees did mention that they should or are working toward creating one, which is a great step toward having something solid in place if and when they are asked to return material. The majority of people I talked with also do not think that the country of origin should compensate museums for the return of the items, but again, there was an outlier interviewee that pointed out that there is a point where a pragmatic conversation should happen about who will pay the costs for repatriation. They believe that this should be discussed during consultation if items are being returned to Nigeria.

Most museums are nonprofits, and as such do not have unlimited financial and other resources to be able to easily return works internationally. Several interviewees brought up the idea that creative conversations could start to take place, such as looking toward donors for support. They believe that donors may not realize the background of such donated or purchased material and may even feel an obligation or a sense of goodwill to help cover expenses to return material once they realize that it was obtained through illegal or unethical means. Another interviewee mentioned that they hope, as these conversations continue to take place, that the federal government will recognize the importance and the relationship that could be created through return and begin to provide grants for international repatriation efforts. As of now there

are no grants or means to support these efforts through the U.S. Federal Government that I, or my participants were aware of.

An important commonality that appeared during my conversations with my participants is the importance of relationships that are a result of repatriations. While the actual return of the artifacts is important in its own right, and is a start to the healing process for the wounds that colonization created, it is only a beginning. These relationships can help to repair the damage that our ancestors created. Relationships can be defined on many different levels including between governments, institutions, museum professionals, and even the public. They can be beneficial for years to come through learning and sharing from everyone's experience with this issue. It is an opportunity that should not be put to the wayside in consideration.

The repatriation case of the Royal Art of Benin is an interesting one, with more complexities, and less resolutions, than one might first expect. Before any artifacts can be returned, museum professionals first need to conduct research and understand exactly how the items were obtained by the museum. For many, these decisions are new and can result in unexpected findings. These changes may impact exhibits, policies, and programs but efforts need to be made to achieve systemic change. Museums have to remain flexible to navigate these new situations. A common theme throughout my conversations was how one of the most important aspects of these repatriation requests are the relationships that are being created through the return of these pieces. Building relationships is the component of the repatriation process that will help to heal those near and far and allow people to build on and begin to trust in order to move forward. Time cannot erase past events that were hurtful and traumatic but helping to return a sense of national and community identity is something that can only increase trust in

museums as they continue to change and evolve, truly listening and respecting those raised voices that ask for the return of what is rightfully theirs.

Moving forward I encourage museums and their staff to start creating policies and statements for what they would do if they were approached by countries and other parties with repatriation requests. As of now, everyone I spoke to is approaching this on a case-by-case basis and while I do not necessarily think this is a bad thing since every situation has different elements to it, many are unprepared to even identify who in their institution would be responsible for addressing these requests. The American Museum of Natural History surveyed museum's websites for polices regarding human remains, through their research they found that people often are not listing their polices to make them available for the public at large. I am suggesting that museums begin to create committees within their museum and with their trustees to decide what the best way forward would be and then to identify staff members with the responsibility to handle these requests. For quite some time now, museums have been emphasizing the importance of transparency as key and I believe that this is an element that should be central to how museums move forward on this issue as well. International repatriation is largely new for everyone, and it is important to remember that museums are still learning and adapting as they always have been. It will continue to take years of trial and error through which museums will learn from each other and those whose cultures they are caring for. While this will never be a smooth process, developing a set of best practices for museums can and should begin now.

APPENDIX A: Interview Questions

1. If you have Royal Art of Benin in your museum's collection, can you tell me how many may be in your collection and anything about their history?
2. I am sure you heard about how European museums, such as how France and Germany will be and have returned cultural heritage to African countries—what do you think of this?
3. What is your museum's position on the repatriation of the Royal Art of Benin within museum collections to their countries of origin?
4. Has your museum created a policy or a formal statement about repatriation?
    a. Would you be willing to share it with me?
5. Are there any established procedures for repatriating objects to their country of origin, or is it a case-by-case basis for your institutions?
6. What is your board's position on repatriating cultural material of any kind?
7. Regarding the circumstances in which the Royal Art of Benin came to your museum, do you think it matters in your decision to repatriate or not on how the material came to you museum?
8. Since museums in the United Sates would at times purchase artifacts, do you believe they should be reimbursed for any expenses if they are repatriated to Nigeria?
9. What does your role entail in setting policy and making decisions about repatriation?
10. How do you think this will affect museums within Europe and the Americas regarding the repatriation of colonial captured material?
11. Do you believe there a 'right' moment for repatriating cultural artifacts? Why, or why not?

12. Has your institution been involved in international or domestic repatriation? If so, can you discuss this process and outcomes?
13. Do you currently have any Royal Art of Benin on display, if yes, is there text that explains their history?
14. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about this topic?

Bibliography

"AAM Code of Ethics for Museums." American Alliance of Museums. January 15, 2018. Accessed April 02, 2021. https://www.aam-us.org/programs/ethics-standards-and-professional-practices/code-of-ethics-for-museums/.

Adams, Geraldine Kendall. "Black Lives Matter: One Year on." Museums Association. May 25, 2021. Accessed October 19, 2021. https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/analysis/2021/05/black-lives-matter-protests-one-year-on/.

Angeleti, Gabriella. "North American Museums Face a Reckoning on Indigenous Rights." The Art Newspaper - International art news and events. The Art Newspaper - International art news and events, December 3, 2021. https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/12/02/museums-face-reckoning-on-indigenous-representation.

Angeleti, Gabriella. 2021. "The Met Repatriates Looted Benin Works." The Art Newspaper - International Art News and Events. November 22, 2021. https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/11/22/met-returns-looted-benin-works.

Afisi, Oseni Taiwo. n.d. "Neocolonialism | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy." Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Accessed October 22, 2022. https://iep.utm.edu/neocolon/.

Bakare, Lanrae. "Regional Museums Break Ranks with UK Government on Return of Benin Bronzes." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, March 26, 2021. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/26/regional-museums-break-ranks-with-uk-government-on-return-of-benin-bronzes.

Barkan, Elazar. “Aesthetics and Evolution: Benin Art in Europe.” African Arts 30, no. 3 (1997): 36–93. https://doi.org/10.2307/3337497. 36.

"Benin Bronzes: Nigeria Dispute Jeopardises Return of Artefacts." BBC News. July 21, 2021. Accessed October 20, 2021. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-57914111.

"Biography." Collège de France- Cultural History of Artistic Heritage in Europe, 18th – 20th Century (International Chair). September 22, 2021. Accessed October 19, 2021. https://www.college-de-france.fr/site/en-benedicte-savoy/Biography.htm.

“Benin Dialogue." MARKK. August 12, 2020. Accessed September 23, 2021. https://markk-hamburg.de/en/benin-dialogue/.

Besterman, Tristram. 2010. “Chapter 26: Museum Ethics.” In *A Companion to Museum Studies*, edited by Sharon MacDonald. London: Wiley-Blackwell.

“British Museum Act 1963.” 1963. Britishmuseum.org. 1963. https://www.britishmuseum.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/British-Museum-Act-1963.pdf.

Brown, Kate. “In a Historic Move, France Has Taken a Major Step towards Fully Restituting 27 Looted African Objects to Senegal and Benin.” Artnet News. Artnet News, July 16, 2020. https://news.artnet.com/art-world/france-objects-benin-deaccession-1895202.

Brown, Kate. “In a 'Historic Milestone,' Germany Will Begin to Return Benin Bronzes from Its Public Collections to Nigeria in 2022.” Artnet News, April 29, 2021. https://news.artnet.com/art-world/nigeria-germany-benin-bronzes-1963143.

Cascone, Sarah. "The Museum Heist Scene in 'Black Panther' Adds Fuel to the Debate About African Art Restitution." Artnet News. March 31, 2018. Accessed May 12, 2021. https://news.artnet.com/art-world/black-panther-museum-heist-restitution-1233278.

Claus, Patricia. “UNESCO Urges Return of Parthenon Marbles to Greece.” GreekReporter.com, September 30, 2021. https://greekreporter.com/2021/09/30/unesco-urges-return-parthenon-marbles-greece/. Accessed April 24, 2022.

“Cleaning Scandal.” n.d. Www.parthenon.newmentor.net. Accessed December 6, 2022. http://www.parthenon.newmentor.net/cleaning.htm#:~:text=Cleaning%20of%20the%20Parthenon%20Marbles.

Clifford, James. 1997. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late 20th Century*. Harvard University Press.

“Code of Ethics for Museums.” n.d. Museums Association. Accessed October 28, 2022. https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/ethics/code-of-ethics/.

“Code of Ethics.” n.d. ICOM. Accessed October 28, 2022. https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/code-of-ethics/.

“Collections, Part Three.” n.d. Museums Association. Accessed October 28, 2022. https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/decolonising-museums/supporting-decolonisation-in-museums/collections-3/.

Creef, Mike. "British Culture Secretary Believes Stolen Benin Bronzes from Nigeria "properly Reside" in British Museum." The Black Wall Street Times. September 27, 2021. Accessed October 19, 2021. https://theblackwallsttimes.com/2021/09/27/british-culture-secretary-believes-stolen-benin-bronzes-from-nigeria-properly-reside-in-british-museum/.

Cuno, James Bash. *Who Owns Antiquity?: Museums and the Battle over Our Ancient Heritage*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Day, Michael. "Benin Bronzes: Britain Still Clings to the Benin Bronzes, but Academics Say It Is on the Wrong Side of History." Inews.co.uk. July 24, 2021. Accessed September 23, 2021. https://inews.co.uk/news/world/benin-bronzes-british-museum-culture-wars-george-osborne-chair-nigeria-history-1116173.

"Digital Benin." Digital Benin. Accessed October 19, 2021. https://digital-benin.org/.

“Ernst von Siemens Art Foundation.” n.d. Dutch Culture. Accessed December 6, 2022. https://dutchculture.nl/en/location/ernst-von-siemens-art-foundation.

Errington, Shelly, and Inc Netlibrary. 1998. *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and Other Tales of Progress*. Berkeley: University Of California Press.

Fairweather, Ian. “Anthropology, Postcolonialism, and the Museum.” Social analysis 48, no. 1 (2004): 1–4.

"Felwine Sarr." French Culture. Accessed October 19, 2021. https://frenchculture.org/books-and-ideas/authors-on-tour/10523-felwine-sarr.

Gerstenblith, Patty. 2010. “Chapter 27: Museum Practice: Legal Issues.” In *A Companion to Museum Studies*, edited by Sharon MacDonald. London: Wiley-Blackwell.

Godwin, Hannah R. “Legal Complications of Repatriation at the British Museum.” Washington international law journal 30, no. 1 (2020): 144–170.

Goepfert, Karen. "The Decapitation of Rameses II." *Boston University International Law Journal* 13 (1995): 503-26. Accessed July 10, 2020.

Greenberger, Alex. "The Benin Bronzes, Explained: Why a Group of Plundered Artworks Continues to Generate Controversy." ARTnews.com. April 02, 2021. Accessed

September 23, 2021. https://www.artnews.com/feature/benin-bronzes-explained-repatriation-british-museum-humboldt-forum-1234588588/.

Gunsch, Kathryn Wysocki. “Art And/or Ethnographica?: The Reception of Benin Works from 1897-1935.” African arts 46, no. 4 (2013): 22–31.

Herman, Alexander. *Restitution: The Return of Cultural Artefacts*. PDF. London: Lund Humphries Publishers Ltd, September 30, 2021.

Hatzipanagos, Rachel. 2018. “The ‘Decolonization’ of the American Museum.” Washington Post. October 11, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2018/10/12/decolonization-american-museum/.

Hickley, Catherine. “Digital Benin: A Milestone on the Long, Slow Journey to Restitution.” The Art Newspaper - International art news and events. The Art Newspaper - International art news and events, September 28, 2021. https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2020/06/08/digital-benin-a-milestone-on-the-long-slow-journey-to-restitution.

Hickley, Catherine. "And so It Begins: Germany and Nigeria Sign Pre-accord on Restitution of Benin Bronzes." The Art Newspaper - International Art News and Events. October 15, 2021. Accessed October 19, 2021. https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/10/15/germany-and-nigeria-sign-pre-accord-on-restitution-of-benin-bronzes.

Hickley, Catherine. "Global Survey: Where in the World Are the Benin Bronzes?" The Art Newspaper. April 29, 2021. Accessed September 23, 2021. https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/will-museums-give-the-benin-bronzes-back..

"Home | Acropolis Museum." 2019. Theacropolismuseum.gr. 2019. https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en.

Home." National Museum of African Art Smithsonian Institution. Accessed November 08, 2020. https://africa.si.edu/exhibitions/current-exhibitions/visionary-viewpoints-on-africas-arts/the-raid-on-benin-1897/.

Jenkins, Tiffany. 2016. *Keeping Their Marbles : How the Treasures of the Past Ended up in Museums ... And Why They Should Stay There*. Oxford; New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Khomami, Nadia. "Cambridge College to Be First in UK to Return Looted Benin Bronze." The Guardian. October 15, 2021. Accessed October 19, 2021. https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/oct/15/cambridge-college-to-be-first-uk-return-looted-benin-bronze.

Khomami, Nadia. "Cambridge College to Be First in UK to Return Looted Benin Bronze." The Guardian. October 15, 2021. Accessed October 19, 2021. https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/oct/15/cambridge-college-to-be-first-uk-return-looted-benin-bronze.

Klemm, Peri. "The Reception of African Art in the West (Article)." Khan Academy. Khan Academy. Accessed August 14, 2022. https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-africa/african-art-introduction/african-art-europe/a/reception-of-african-art-in-the-west2.

Klesmith, Elizabeth A., "Nigeria and Mali: The Case for Repatriation and Protection of Cultural Heritaggoe in Post-Colonial Africa," Notre Dame Journal of International & Comparative Law 4, no. 1 (2013-2014): 45-76.

Ludel, W. (2022, May 4). *Smithsonian adopts new 'ethical returns policy' to handle artefacts with problematic histories*. The Art Newspaper - International art news and events. Retrieved June 12, 2022, from https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/05/04/smithsonian-new-ethical-returns-policy

Markk. (2019, August 11). "Digital Benin." MARKK. Accessed August 14, 2022. https://markk-hamburg.de/en/digital-benin-2/.

Marstine, Janet. 2011. The Contingent Nature of the New Museum Ethics. In *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics: Redefining Ethics for the 21st Century Museum*, ed. J. Marstine. Routledge, 3-24.

McGreevy, Nora. "The U.S. Returns More than 900 Stolen Artifacts to Mali." Smithsonian.com. Smithsonian Institution, December 1, 2021. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/us-returns-more-than-900-artifacts-to-mali-180979138/#:~:text=On%20Monday%2C%20officials%20in%20the,West%20African%20country%20of%20Mali.

Michel, Nicolas. "Restitution of African Art: Despite the Controversies, Macron Keeps His Promise." The Africa Report.com. The Africa Report, April 12, 2022. https://www.theafricareport.com/191427/restitution-of-african-art-despite-the-controversies-macron-keeps-his-promise/.

Monks, Kieron. "Germany to Return Looted Benin Bronzes to Nigeria." CNN. April 30, 2021. Accessed May 12, 2021. https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/benin-bronzes-germany-restitution/index.html?utm_source=fbCNNi&utm_campaign=africa&utm_medium=socia

l&fbclid=IwAR0xNnUuKRi4zX0SUBglNGbduGva0g7uo8M7AlFTS0975g4d17kfrBHXAUU.

Nevadomsky, Joseph. “Studies of Benin Art and Material Culture, 1897-1997.” African arts 30, no. 3 (1997): 18–92.

O’Dell, Peggy. 2015. “Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation.” Www.doi.gov. July 1, 2015. https://www.doi.gov/ocl/hearings/112/NAGPRA_061611#:~:text=As%20a%20result%20of%20NAGPRA.

Packard, Cassie. 2020. “After Years of Repatriation Debates, France’s Benin Restitution Bill Approved.” Hyperallergic. https://www.facebook.com/hyperallergic. November 10, 2020. https://hyperallergic.com/598752/restitution-france-benin-bronze-bill/.

Phillips, Barnaby. *Loot: Britain and the Benin Bronzes*. London: One World Publications, 2022.

Plankensteiner, Barbara. "Chapter Six: The Benin Treasures: Difficult Legacy and Contested Heritage." In *Cultural Property and Contested Ownership: The Trafficking of Artefacts and the Quest for Restitution*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2017. 137.

“'Racist And Condescending' – MP Slams Refusal To Return Benin Bronzes.” *Today UK News*, 30 Dec. 1969, https://todayuknews.com/politics/racist-and-condescending-mp-slams-refusal-to-return-benin-bronzes/.

Rea, Naomi. “France Has Approved the Return of 27 Artworks to Benin and Senegal, Signaling What May Be a New Era for Restitution.” Artnet News, November 5, 2020. https://news.artnet.com/art-world/france-senate-restitution-africa-1921184.

Reuters. 2022. “Germany Signs Deal to Give Ownership of Benin Bronzes to Nigeria,” August 25, 2022, sec. Europe. https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germany-signs-deal-give-ownership-benin-bronzes-nigeria-2022-08-25/#:~:text=Germany%20signs%20deal%20to%20give%20ownership%20of%20Benin%20Bronzes%20to%20Nigeria.

Shoenberger, Elisa. “What Does It Mean to Decolonize a Museum?” Museum Next, February 24, 2022. https://www.museumnext.com/article/what-does-it-mean-to-decolonize-a-museum/.

Simmons, John E. 2016. *Museums: A History*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Solomon, Tessa. “How Did the Parthenon Marbles End up in the British Museum?” ARTnews.com. ARTnews.com, October 7, 2021. https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/parthenon-marbles-british-museum-restitution-1234605904/.

“Standards for Museum Exhibits Dealing with Historical Subjects (Updated 2017): AHA.” Standards for Museum Exhibits Dealing with Historical Subjects (updated 2017) | AHA, 2017. https://www.historians.org/jobs-and-professional-development/statements-standards-and-guidelines-of-the-discipline/standards-for-museum-exhibits-dealing-with-historical-subjects.

Stevens, Matt. “Smithsonian to Return Most of Its Benin Bronze Collection to Nigeria.” The New York Times. The New York Times, March 8, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/08/arts/design/smithsonian-benin-bronze-nigeria.html.

"Strategic Institutional Plan." 2017. American Alliance of Museums. December 6, 2017. https://www.aam-us.org/programs/ethics-standards-and-professional-practices/strategic-institutional-plan/#:~:text=Strategic%20planning%20produces%20a%20mutually.

Surtees, Joshua. "'They Fill Me with Emotion' ... Benin Celebrates the Return of Its Looted Treasure." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, February 22, 2022. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/feb/22/art-benin-looted-african-nation-french-army-priceless-artefacts-treasure.

"The Cabinet of Curiosities." n.d. Google Arts & Culture. Accessed October 25, 2022. https://artsandculture.google.com/theme/the-cabinet-of-curiosities/4QKSkqTAGnJ2LQ?hl=en.

Van Bokkem, Rachel. 2017. "History in Ruins: Cultural Heritage Destruction around the World | Perspectives on History | AHA." Www.historians.org. April 1, 2017. https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/april-2017/history-in-ruins-cultural-heritage-destruction-around-the-world.

Villa, Angelica. "Met Signs Loan Exchange Agreement with Nigeria: 'It Shouldn't Be Limited to the Benin Bronzes'." ARTnews.com. ARTnews.com, November 22, 2021. https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/met-nigeria-loan-exchange-agreement-benin-bronzes-1234611007/.

"What Is Decolonization?" 2015. Abbe Museum Strategic Plan. September 4, 2015. https://abbemuseum.wordpress.com/about-us/decolonization/.

Wood, Paul. “Display, Restitution and World Art History: The Case of the 'Benin Bronzes'.” Visual Culture in Britain 13, no. 1 (2012): 115–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/14714787.2012.641854. 121.