




Repairing the Damage of the Past: The Need for Museums to Repatriate Stolen Artifacts

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Abstract

During the Age of Imperialism, museums acquired countless artifacts from around the globe. Many of these objects were stolen from their cultures of origin by colonizing powers, who now viewed these items as their own property. Museums in the modern day must now reckon with the consequences of their past, as the descendants of colonized people demand the return of stolen artifacts. The opinions of museum professionals have started to shift in favor of repatriation over the decades, but there is still fervent debate over when and how, if ever, artifacts should be repatriated. Furthermore, even when museums want to repatriate artifacts, there are several obstacles, such as funding and logistics, that can hamper their efforts. Nevertheless, I believe that modern museums should attempt to repatriate unethically stolen artifacts whenever possible. Museums are more than capable of overcoming obstacles to repatriation by working with native cultures and ensuring that their wishes are met. Museums can learn more about artifacts by working with native groups. Repatriation also ensures that some form of justice is served in response to the crimes committed by colonial powers.

Dedication

To all of the friends, family, and colleagues who have helped me on my journey as a graduate student.

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I. Introduction:

Area of Inquiry:

From the 16th century to the early 1900s, powerful Western nations, including Great Britain, France, Belgium, Spain, and later the United States, dominated huge swaths of the globe, and ruled over other cultures as though they were lesser beings.¹ This was colonialism, “a political-economic phenomenon whereby various European nations explored, conquered, settled, and exploited large areas of the world.”² Colonialism is often only thought of as a thing of the past, but this type of thinking can be dangerous, especially for modern museum administrators and staff.

Colonialism had numerous horrible consequences for native cultures, including objects belonging to native cultures often being stolen by the invading powers, who now view these items as their own property. These artifacts were then typically sent to Western museums in order to be displayed and studied, with little to no consideration given to the objects’ significance to the people from their places of origin. This practice devastated numerous cultures across the world, as human remains and sacred objects were taken from their rightful owners.

Today, museums across western Europe and North America “are filled with treasures lifted during the age of empire and colonization.”³ It is important to understand that “colonialism has a major impact on museums and the way they are operated today.”⁴ Not only have Western

¹ “Western Colonialism | Definition, History, Examples, & Effects.” Encyclopedia Britannica.
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Western-colonialism>.

² Ibid.

³ “The Repatriation Debate: Should Museums Return Colonial Artefacts?” *The National*.
<https://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/art/the-repatriation-debate-should-museums-return-colonial-artefacts-1.908805>.

⁴ Genoways, Hugh, and Lynne Ireland. “The ‘ISMS’: Challenges for Modern Museums.” In *Museum Administration*, 320.

museums “inherited artifacts and traditions of collecting” as a direct result of colonialism, but they have also inherited many of the same attitudes of the colonial era, and that can have massive repercussions.⁵ Much of the research of early museums came from scholars who “operated from a ‘mind set’ of superiority. Many cultures being studied were seen as inferior, less cultivated, and less significant because the people from those cultures had attitudes, values, and beliefs that did not adhere to Western beliefs.”⁶ Some of the values and views of those early researchers have continued to permeate the museum field, and this results in Western museums presenting a biased and misunderstood version of history to its visitors, although there is a growing discourse that acknowledges this bias and is actively working to change the narrative.⁷

As many nations and tribes started to gain their independence from colonial powers in the latter part of the twentieth century, many cultures started to demand the return of their stolen objects.⁸ The term repatriation is usually used in the museum field to describe this return of objects to their places of origin. Most Western museums, however, had no desire to return these objects, as they believed they were too important to the respective missions of their institutions.⁹ Over time, while opinion has started to shift in favor of repatriation, there is still fervent debate amongst museum professionals over when and how, if ever, artifacts should be repatriated.¹⁰

The debate in regards to repatriation has raised many questions for people in the museum field. Should museums repatriate stolen objects to their cultures of origin? Will the repatriation

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Hunt, Tristram. “Should Museums Return Their Colonial Artefacts? 2019. *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2019/jun/29/should-museums-return-their-colonial-artefacts>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ “DO HISTORICAL OBJECTS BELONG IN THEIR COUNTRY OF ORIGIN? Four Historians Consider One of the Most Contentious Questions Facing the West’s Museums and Galleries.” 2019. *History Today* 69 (3): 8. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com/catalog.library.uarts.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edb&AN=134556305&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

of artifacts be challenging for museums? Will returning artifacts negatively impact museums and make it more difficult to educate visitors? Does repatriation really help native groups and repair the damage from the past?

Thesis Statement:

I believe that modern museums should attempt to repatriate unethically stolen artifacts whenever possible. Museums are more than capable of overcoming obstacles to repatriation by working with native cultures and ensuring that their wishes are met. Museums can learn more about artifacts by working with native groups. Repatriation also ensures that some form of justice is served in response to the crimes committed by colonial powers.

Glossary of Terms:

Repatriation: the act or process of restoring or returning someone or something to its country of origin, allegiance, or citizenship.

Colonialism: control by a sovereignty over a dependent area or people.

Decolonization: the undoing of colonialism, the latter being the process whereby a nation establishes and maintains its domination of overseas territories.

Artifact: an object made by a human being, typically an item of cultural or historical interest.

Western World: also known as the West, refers to nations in Europe, as well as countries of European colonial origin with substantial European ancestral populations in the Americas and Oceania.

II. Rationale:

Needs Statement:

Repatriation is an important subject because it affects people all around the world, as well as the museum field as a whole. Numerous cultures have been deprived of ancestral remains, or artifacts of great significance to them, and few people in the West seem to be aware or care about this problem. The objects that were stolen were often of great cultural value, since colonial powers typically looted religious sites and centers of political power. The impact of losing artifacts that were so important to their cultures, in addition to the countless other atrocities committed by colonial invaders, was traumatizing for the people who experienced it. That trauma has not gone away, as the descendants of those wronged by Western nations continue to be negatively affected by the consequences of what occurred. With their days of colonization now behind them, modern nations in Europe and North America are attempting to address the damage that they caused to various cultures around the world, although many people in those nations seem either unsure of how to accomplish this, or reluctant to even acknowledge the issue. Returning stolen artifacts to where they came from is an important step towards healing the damage that was caused by colonialism, as it will help people to feel a sense of closure about the loss of part of their culture, as well as allow former colonial powers the opportunity to make amends for some of their past crimes.

Repatriating artifacts also has the potential to fundamentally change the way museums operate going forward, and so this issue is of great importance to any and all museum professionals. Museums have long operated on the idea that they are the institutions best suited to preserve artifacts, and that allowing those artifacts to be cared for by anyone else would likely

result in their destruction.¹¹ While there is some truth to this way of thinking, it tends to ignore the question of how those objects came to be at the museum in the first place, and thus whether the museum has any right to actually own those items. Thankfully, museums in recent decades have begun to address this issue, such as by adopting policies against acquiring “objects or antiquities...unless the objects are accompanied by a pedigree—that is information about the different owners of the objects, place of origin, legality of export, and other data useful in each individual case.”¹² Some progress has also been made thanks to the passage of laws, such as The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, or NAGPRA. This federal law mandates that museums in the United States facilitate the return “of certain Native American human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony.”¹³ Although much progress has been made, there are still some museums and museum professionals who remain resistant to repatriating artifacts, and there is still little consensus on how, when, or even if repatriation should occur.¹⁴ As repatriation outside of NAGPRA becomes more popular, museums will have to stop viewing themselves as the best experts on artifacts by default, but instead be willing to work with representatives from other cultures and nations, who likely know more about those objects than the museum professionals do, and use these relationships to better educate the public about a more accurate version of history.

¹¹ Olsen, BJØRNAR J. 2018. “Manker’s List: Museum Collections in the Era of Deaccessioning and Disposal.” *Journal Nordic Museology / Nordisk Museologi*, no. 1 (January): 62–73. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.catalog.library.uarts.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=asu&AN=138193519&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

¹² “The Pennsylvania Declaration.” *Expedition Magazine - Penn Museum*.
<https://www.penn.museum/sites/expedition/the-pennsylvania-declaration/>.

¹³ “Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (U.S. National Park Service).”
<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nagpra/index.htm>.

¹⁴ “DO HISTORICAL OBJECTS BELONG IN THEIR COUNTRY OF ORIGIN? Four Historians Consider One of the Most Contentious Questions Facing the West’s Museums and Galleries.” 2019. *History Today* 69 (3): 8. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.catalog.library.uarts.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edb&AN=134556305&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

The issue of repatriation is related to my professional career because I want to work in history museums, institutions whose collections are often made up of many objects which were stolen from other cultures. If I want to work in an industry with this ethical dilemma, then I should strive to learn as much about the issue as possible, and determine how I can best address this problem. If repatriating artifacts will result in the museum field changing, rather than try to fight this change, I should embrace it and learn how I can best work in this new environment in order to engage with museum audiences, and educate them about the subjects that I am passionate about.

Literature Review:

My initial research has uncovered two distinct points of view on the issue of repatriation. One of the main arguments from my research is that stolen historical objects belong in their cultures of origin. Supporters of this argument believe that it is morally wrong for museums to not return stolen objects, and that returning these artifacts would help strengthen the heritage capacities of those tribes and countries looted during colonization. The authors of these sources were typically either young museum professionals or natives of the cultures whose artifacts have been stolen.

The author of “Repatriating Archival Sound Recordings to Revive Traditions: The Role of Klaus Waschmann Recordings in the Revival of the Royal Music of Bunyoro-Kitara, Uganda” discusses how he identified sound recordings from the 1940s and 50s of traditional folk music of Uganda, which were being kept in the United Kingdom. He then made copies of these recordings and distributed them among the people of Uganda, including the royal family and radio stations. These recordings then enabled musicians in Uganda to revive musical traditions which had been forgotten in previous decades. This story demonstrates the benefits of

repatriating something to the culture of its origin, and how enabling the people of that culture to have access to this knowledge will help them to preserve their traditions.¹⁵

“The Repatriation of Culturally Unidentifiable Human Remains” discusses the efforts of the Denver Museum of Nature and Science to return unidentified human remains to Native American tribes, and the obstacles that the museum needed to overcome in order to facilitate this return. Ultimately, while the process was not easy, by consulting with various tribes, the museum has been successful at repatriating native remains. This article demonstrates how it is possible for museums to work with native groups to repatriate artifacts, how indigenous cultures benefit from and are grateful for the repatriation, and how museum collections will not be decimated by the loss of certain artifacts.¹⁶

“The Effects of Repatriation on the Relationship between the Glenbow Museum and the Blackfoot People” is about the efforts of the Glenbow Museum in Canada to return sacred artifacts to First Nations. Throughout these efforts, the museum gained a better understanding of how native tribes view sacred objects to be living things, and the significance of the relationships between these objects and the people who care for them. This article shows how not only are museums able to repatriate artifacts, but that doing so can actually teach them about the importance of those artifacts and how they are viewed by their native cultures.¹⁷

¹⁵ Kahunde, Samuel. 2012. “Repatriating Archival Sound Recordings to Revive Traditions: The Role of the Klaus Wachsmann Recordings in the Revival of the Royal Music of Bunyoro-Kitara, Uganda.” *Ethnomusicology Forum* 21 (2): 197–219. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23271873>.

¹⁶ Colwell-Chanthaphonh, Chip, Rachel Maxson, and Jami Powell. 2011. “The Repatriation of Culturally Unidentifiable Human Remains.” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 26 (1): 27–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2011.540125>.

¹⁷ Conaty, Gerald T. 2008. “The Effects of Repatriation on the Relationship between the Glenbow Museum and the Blackfoot People.” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 23 (3): 245–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647770802234037>.

“FINDING THEIR WAY HOME-Twenty-Five Years of NAGPRA at the Penn Museum” is an article which explains how the Penn Museum has worked with various Native American groups in order to repatriate human remains, sacred artifacts, and other objects to the appropriate tribes. The article states that “the Museum has received 46 formal repatriation claims. Twenty-seven returns have been completed, resulting in the transfer of 252 sets of human remains, 750 associated funerary objects, 14 unassociated funerary objects, 20 objects of cultural patrimony, 22 sacred objects, and 2 objects claimed as both cultural patrimony and sacred.” The number of repatriations at the museum has likely increased in the time since the article was written. This article demonstrates the process for how museums can repatriate objects, while also highlighting the benefits that repatriation has for both the indigenous tribes and the museum.¹⁸

“Universal Museums, Museum Objects and Repatriation: The Tangled Stories of Things” discusses the debate on repatriation, and how it is often framed from a Western perspective rather than a universal one. The author considers the problems that this viewpoint creates for most arguments against repatriation, and ultimately concludes that repatriation is able to result in an increase in knowledge and understanding, rather than its destruction.¹⁹ Other literature includes “Museums and Restorative Justice: Heritage, Repatriation and Cultural,” which discusses the importance of repatriation in terms of restorative justice and righting the wrongs of the past,²⁰ and “Brexit: EU to Ask UK to Return Elgin Marbles to Greece in Trade

¹⁸ Williams, Lucy, Stacey Espenlaub, and Janet Monge. “FINDING THEIR WAY HOME-Twenty-Five Years of NAGPRA at the Penn Museum.” *Expedition Magazine - Penn Museum*.
<https://www.penn.museum/sites/expedition/finding-their-way-home/>.

¹⁹ Curtis, Neil G. W. 2006. “Universal Museums, Museum Objects and Repatriation: The Tangled Stories of Things.” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 21 (2): 117–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647770600402102>.

²⁰ Simpson, Moira. 2009. “Museums and Restorative Justice: Heritage, Repatriation and Cultural Education.” *Museum International* 61: 121–29.

Talks,” which addresses a recent dispute between the United Kingdom and the Greek government over the return of stolen artifacts.²¹

A contrasting argument that I found in my research is that museums are the only institutions qualified to preserve and protect artifacts, and that returning stolen artifacts to their cultures of origin would likely result in them being damaged or destroyed. Additionally, supporters of this argument believe that returning stolen artifacts would deny scholars and the general public from being able to learn from said artifacts. The authors who support this argument are almost all museum professionals who have a vested interest in continuing the status quo of museums in Europe and North America caring for artifacts from other cultures in their collections. They also ignore the possibility that native cultures have their own scholars and institutions that could preserve objects and educate the public about them.

“The Ethics of Deaccessioning” discusses the moral and ethical aspects of museums' deaccessioning works of art pieces and art collections. The author argues that every museum should establish a policy to deaccession items only to other museums. He fears that deaccessioned artifacts will be lost to the public forever, and that this goes against the preservation imperative of museums. This author's argument lacks any supporting evidence, however, which makes his argument seem like it is based on a hypothetical situation, rather than being a reaction to a genuine problem.²²

²¹ “Brexit: EU to Ask UK to Return Elgin Marbles to Greece in Trade Talks.” *Business Insider*.
<https://www.businessinsider.com/brexit-eu-to-ask-uk-to-return-elgin-marbles-to-greece-in-trade-talks-2020-2>.

²² Miller, Steven. 2018. “The Ethics of Deaccessioning.” *New Criterion* 37 (4): 32–34.
<http://Osearch.ebscohost.com.catalog.library.uarts.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=asu&AN=133268094&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

“Manker’s List: Museum Collections in the Era of Deaccessioning and Disposal” argues in favor of liberal collecting, and emphasizes the immense value and power of large museum collections. Furthermore, the article discusses how museums are spaces where things can be treated with care and dignity, and that repatriating objects would risk them being damaged. This article makes assumptions that native cultures are not able to care for repatriated artifacts as well as Western museums, but this is not the case if the museums work with those cultures. Additionally, the author cares so much about the value of objects to museum collections, that he does not consider that they might have more value to their cultures of origin.²³

“Walking with Elephants: Stories of Ivories in a Museum of Ancient Art,” is about how a museum chose to reinterpret controversial artifacts rather than repatriate them. This article discusses an art museum with a collection of work made out of ivory, a material which can no longer be legally acquired. The museum, rather than get rid of the artwork or hide it from the public, chose instead to reinterpret the objects with information about the ivory trade and how these works came to be at the museum.²⁴ Another source, *Museums and the Future of Collecting*, discusses how collecting is a key function of museums and the concern of objects being omitted from collections due to ethical reasons. This source’s author believes that it is vital for museums to keep artifacts in their collections, no matter how the museum got them, in order for the objects to be studied and preserved.²⁵

²³ Olsen, BJØRNAR J. 2018. “Manker’s List: Museum Collections in the Era of Deaccessioning and Disposal.” *Journal Nordic Museology / Nordisk Museologi*, no. 1 (January): 62–73. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com/catalog.library.uarts.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=asu&AN=138193519&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

²⁴ Castronovo, Simonetta, and Anna La Ferla. 2018. “Walking with Elephants: Stories of Ivories in a Museum of Ancient Art.” *Curator* 61 (1): 197–222. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cura.12239>.

²⁵ Knell, Simon J. 2016. *Museums and the Future of Collecting*. Vol. Second edition. New York: Routledge. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com/catalog.library.uarts.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1480331&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

Some of the literature I found features debates among multiple people who have differing views on repatriation. These sources are “DO HISTORICAL OBJECTS BELONG IN THEIR COUNTRY OF ORIGIN? Four Historians Consider One of the Most Contentious Questions Facing the West’s Museums and Galleries,”²⁶ and “The Repatriation Debate: Should Museums Return Colonial Artefacts?”²⁷

Several sources from my research focus on the indigenous perspective on repatriation, including “The Return of the Ahayu: Da: Lessons for Repatriation from Zuni Pueblo and the Smithsonian Institution [and Comments and Replies].” This article discusses how the Zuni Pueblo successfully convinced several institutions, including the Smithsonian, to repatriate sacred objects called Ahayu: da, also known as war gods, to their tribe. The authors explain the details of the repatriation process, as well as “valuable lessons for museums and tribes as they begin discussing the return of cultural property legislated by” NAGPRA.²⁸ This source demonstrates how native groups and museums can work with one another to negotiate how to best handle the repatriation of objects, as well as explaining how the efforts of native groups and museums contributed to the passage of NAGPRA.

“OKG Interview with Native American Activist Suzan Shown Harjo” also explores repatriation from a native perspective, by examining the work of activist Suzan Shown Harjo. Harjo (Cheyenne and Hodulgee Muscogee) is an expert on repatriation who helped campaign for

²⁶ “DO HISTORICAL OBJECTS BELONG IN THEIR COUNTRY OF ORIGIN? Four Historians Consider One of the Most Contentious Questions Facing the West’s Museums and Galleries.” 2019. *History Today* 69 (3): 8. <http://0-search.ebscohost.com/catalog.library.uarts.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edb&AN=134556305&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

²⁷ “The Repatriation Debate: Should Museums Return Colonial Artefacts?” *The National*. <https://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/art/the-repatriation-debate-should-museums-return-colonial-artefacts-1.908805>.

²⁸ Merrill, William L., et al. 1993. “The Return of the Ahayu: Da: Lessons for Repatriation from Zuni Pueblo and the Smithsonian Institution [and Comments and Replies].” *Current Anthropology*. 34 (5): 523-67. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2744272?seq=1>.

the passage of NAGPRA and educates the public about the history of “Native American rights and their bloody history.”²⁹ This history includes grave robbing, which Harjo said “goes hand in hand with a dominate society that characterizes minorities as not being the true heirs to their ancestral culture, leaving culturally sensitive items up for grabs to steal and display in museums.”³⁰ This discussion about Harjo’s hard work explores how native activists have been instrumental in advocating for repatriation and explaining why it is necessary to repair the damage caused to indigenous people.

Current mass media reporting surrounding the repatriation of artifacts tends to frame the topic as an ongoing debate amongst museum professionals. A recent example of this are the many articles that were written about the government of Greece demanding the return of the Elgin Marbles and other sculptures³¹ from the British, who stole them over two hundred years ago.³² In modern times, mass media has tended to side with those in support of repatriation, especially as more diverse voices are given platforms to express their opinions. This is not only true of journalism, but also of popular culture, as television shows and films like *Black Panther* help to inform the general public about the issues concerning museums and repatriation.³³ As the debate over returning objects becomes more well known, museums will likely start to face more

²⁹ Murg, Wilhelm. 2016. “OKG Interview with Native American Activist Suzan Shown Harjo.” Oklahoma Gazette. <https://www.okgazette.com/oklahoma/okg-interview-with-native-american-activist-suzan-shown-harjo/Content?oid=2948932>.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Karavasili, Paulina. “Four of The Finest Ancient Greek Sculptures Kept in Museums Away From Their Motherland.” *Greek City Times*. <https://greekcitytimes.com/2020/11/07/greek-sculptures-away-motherland/>.

³² “Brexit: EU to Ask UK to Return Elgin Marbles to Greece in Trade Talks.” *Business Insider*. <https://www.businessinsider.com/brexit-eu-to-ask-uk-to-return-elgin-marbles-to-greece-in-trade-talks-2020-2>.

³³ “What Black Panther Gets Right About the Politics of Museums.” 2018. Hyperallergic. <https://hyperallergic.com/433650/black-panther-museum-politics/>.

pressure about what to do, not just from other museum professionals, but from museum visitors, local communities, and politicians.

III. Current State:

Case Studies:

The following case studies each demonstrate reasons why museums should embark on repatriating their collections. These particular cases were chosen because each one provides a different example of what can be repatriated, the process by which objects can be repatriated, and the various benefits that repatriation can have for cultures and institutions. Furthermore, each case examines different countries and cultures, so different laws apply to each case.

The Denver Museum of Nature and Science:

The Denver Museum of Nature and Science (DMNS) is a prime example of how museums can consult and collaborate with indigenous groups to repatriate artifacts. Like many museums in the United States, the DMNS had acquired dozens of Native American artifacts, including “67 unaffiliated human remains.”³⁴ The museum lacked the information needed in order to connect any of these remains to any federally recognized tribe:

Most of these 67 remains came to the museum in discomfoting circumstances-burials disturbed out of idle curiosity and skulls and scalps purchased at trading posts. The majority of these donations have only vague information about their geographical, historical, or cultural contexts, which would provide evidence for a reasonable determination of cultural affiliation under the law.³⁵

³⁴ Colwell-Chanthaphonh, Chip, Rachel Maxson, and Jami Powell. 2011. “The Repatriation of Culturally Unidentifiable Human Remains.” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 26 (1): 29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2011.540125>.

³⁵ Ibid.

The thoughtless nature by which indigenous remains ended up at the DMNS and other American museums is a consequence of the mindset of Manifest Destiny, or imperialism by another name. Manifest Destiny, the belief that the United States was fated to expand its power and control, led many white settlers to view the native people of this continent as merely obstacles to their goal of colonizing the land, rather than as fellow human beings.³⁶ It is for this reason why human remains of Native Americans were often treated as mere objects of curiosity, rather than as deceased individuals deserving of respect, and this is why museums across the United States contain indigenous remains with few records indicating where they came from or which tribe they belong to.

In 2008, the DMNS “received its first National Park Service NAGPRA grant to consult with 84 tribes on the culturally unaffiliated human remains in its collection from the greater Rocky Mountain region,”³⁷ and began working with these tribes in order to determine how to repatriate these remains:

A hard copy letter was sent to each tribe, announcing the grant and seeking initial input. Several months later, tribal political officials and traditional leaders were formally invited to consult and participate in planned inter-tribal meetings. A hard copy letter was sent to every tribe, and then museum staff followed up with calls and emails. Those tribes that could not participate in the inter-tribal consultations were still included in all subsequent decisions, as conversations proceeded via telephone, email, and fax.³⁸

³⁶ “Manifest Destiny.” HISTORY.

<https://www.history.com/topics/westward-expansion/manifest-destiny>.

³⁷ Colwell-Chanthaphonh, Chip, Rachel Maxson, and Jami Powell. 2011. “The Repatriation of Culturally Unidentifiable Human Remains.” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 26 (1): 30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2011.540125>.

³⁸ Ibid, 30-31.

Eventually, two groups were formed to meet and discuss repatriation, with 41 tribes consulting on remains from the Western Rocky Mountains, and 43 tribes consulting on remains from the Eastern Rocky Mountains.³⁹

The first meeting of the Rocky Mountain West was “attended by 20 tribal officials representing 15 federally recognized tribes meeting together ‘virtually’ in Santa Fe, Phoenix, and Denver.”⁴⁰ Following a lengthy discussion, the tribes agreed that “four Pueblo tribes-Acoma, Hopi, Zia, and Zuni, with Hopi taking the lead-would shoulder the responsibility for repatriation and reburial,” and the tribes would “seek to secure a reburial site in the Four Corners area.”⁴¹ After the meeting, museum staff “secured official letters of support for the proposed disposition,” and later “presented the disposition agreement to the NAGPRA Review Committee, which unanimously consented to the proposed disposition and forwarded it to the Secretary of the Interior for his consideration,” who granted his permission.⁴²

The first Rocky Mountain East consultation was attended by “20 tribal officials representing 12 tribes in Oklahoma City and Denver.”⁴³ Since several remains had been labeled Cheyenne/Arapaho by the museum, the tribes present at the meeting asked that the museum consult further with these tribes:

Unfortunately, since none of the Cheyenne or Arapaho tribes were able to attend the inter-tribal summit, museum staff set out to consult with the Arapahoe Tribe of the Wind River Reservation, Wyoming; the Northern Cheyenne Tribe of the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation, Montana; and the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, Oklahoma. While

³⁹ Ibid, 30.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 31.

⁴¹ Ibid, 32.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

the two northern tribes would concur with any plan that allowed for the remains' expeditious reburial, the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, Oklahoma, wanted to see the remains in person.⁴⁴

After tribal representatives visited DMNS, "the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, Oklahoma, informed museum staff that they would like to be the lead tribe on the disposition agreement, with the goal of reburying the remains near the Sand Creek Massacre site. A disposition agreement was drafted, and letters of support from the consulting tribes were sought and received."⁴⁵

The repatriation efforts of the DMNS should serve as an example for how other institutions should consult with native groups. The museum enabled the tribes to give their say on how they wanted these remains to be treated and where they thought they should be buried. The staff at DMNS took the suggestions of the tribes seriously, and listened to their requests, such as when the Rocky Mountain East group asked the museum to consult with the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes. These consultations ensured that as many voices as possible were heard, which is important because "tribes consistently insist that the museum acknowledges the rights of tribes in this process."⁴⁶ Tribal representatives are just as concerned with the process of repatriation, as they are with the result, so it is vital that museums involve them as much as possible in repatriation if they want their support. Furthermore, repatriating and reburying these remains enabled them to be given the dignity and respect that human beings deserve, rather than simply being treated as objects to be studied.⁴⁷ The repatriation efforts of the DMNS have

⁴⁴ Ibid, 32-33.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 39.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

helped, in small part, to address and repair the damage that was inflicted upon Native Americans throughout recent history, and one can hope that other institutions will do the same.

The Glenbow Museum:

The repatriation efforts of the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Canada serve as an example of how museums can gain a better understanding of artifacts by forming relationships with native groups. The museum's collection contains artifacts from all over the world and today stands as "a human history museum, an art gallery, a library, and archives that cares for over 1.3 million objects."⁴⁸ The museum also contains an extensive collection of First Nation artifacts, or objects related to the indigenous people of Canada. These artifacts arrived at the museum through various means:

Material from regions more distant from Calgary, such as the Northwest Coast, the Arctic or the southern Plains, were often purchased from commercial dealers or collectors, although some donations were also made. During the 1960s and 1970s museum staff made collecting trips to First Nations communities in southern Saskatchewan and Alberta where they bought a variety of items, including sacred material, directly from the residents. Sometimes the reasons for selling were recorded and these range from a need for money to a concern that the sacred bundles were no longer safe, and that few people were learning the ancient traditions.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Conaty, Gerald T. 2008. "The Effects of Repatriation on the Relationship between the Glenbow Museum and the Blackfoot People." *Museum Management and Curatorship* 23 (3): 247. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647770802234037>.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

The Glenbow Museum may argue that it legally acquired these artifacts, however, “First Nations people who visit (the) collections sometimes express concern that some of this material was acquired inappropriately or from individuals who did not have the right to dispose of it.”⁵⁰

One group that took special issue with certain artifacts in the museum’s collection were the Blackfoot people, a linguistic group comprised of the “Kainai, Piikini, and Siksika” tribes.⁵¹ The Blackfoot objected to the museum’s possession of holy bundles, which are collections of sacred items meant to enable the Blackfoot to connect with the intangible; “i.e., with the Spirits and their power.”⁵² The bundles are also used in a “seasonal ceremonial cycle” in which their power is renewed, and part of the reason why the Blackfoot do not want holy bundles in the Glenbow is because “Bundles which are not celebrated each year, such as those in museum collections, represent a break in the communication line” with the Spirits.⁵³

The Glenbow did not truly understand the significance that bundles had for First Nations when they originally acquired them. By the end of the 20th century, “most of the ethnological exhibits had not changed since they were first installed during the late 1970s. Artifacts were exhibited as objets d’art, with minimal explanation and no context.”⁵⁴ This started to change in the 1990s, as the museum began loaning holy bundles to spiritual leaders from tribes who wished to use the bundles in various ceremonies. In order to ensure that the bundles would not be damaged or lost, museum staff asked to be invited to witness the ceremonies, to which the spiritual leaders agreed. By attending these ceremonies, the staff at the Glenbow were able to learn about how important the bundles and other holy objects were to the Blackfoot people. The

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid, 252.

⁵² Ibid, 248.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 250.

museum was also able to gain the trust of the Blackfoot people by working with them and learning to understand their point of view.⁵⁵

By the end of the 90s, the discussions between tribes and the Glenbow had shifted from loans to repatriation. Eventually, the museum signed a “Memorandum of Understanding (M.O.U.)” with the Kainai tribe in 1998.⁵⁶ The significant outcomes of this agreement were:

First, Glenbow became more involved in Kainai repatriation efforts. Second, Kainai, Piikini, and Siksika were more than willing to assist Glenbow in the development of a permanent gallery reflecting their culture and history, as well as produce a book and school-focused web site...The third important outcome was the passage of the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act by the Alberta Legislature in 2000.⁵⁷

The relationships forged between the Glenbow Museum and the Blackfoot people ultimately helped to lay the groundwork for the repatriation of sacred First Nations’ objects at museums all over Canada.

The efforts of the Glenbow Museum to return sacred objects to the Blackfoot people demonstrates how museums can gain a better understanding of artifacts by working with native cultures. By allowing native tribes to have access to holy bundles and use them in ceremonies, the Glenbow was able to learn about how these items are meant to be used, and how native tribes view sacred objects to be “living things.”⁵⁸ The significance of holy bundles was not conveyed by how they were being interpreted by the Glenbow, and keeping them in the collection denied the Blackfoot people access to a key aspect of their culture. Furthermore, by forming

⁵⁵ Ibid, 251.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 252.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 247.

relationships with native tribes and gaining their trust, the museum was able to create a new exhibition and other resources that can better educate the general public about First Nations.⁵⁹ Additionally, the return of holy bundles to the Blackfoot people has allowed them to continue to practice their beliefs in a fashion that was previously disrupted by the actions of colonizers, and has helped to repair some of the damage caused to First Nations in the past.⁶⁰ The Glenbow Museum shows how repatriation can teach museums more about an artifact and its respective culture than simply having the object in its collection.

The Klaus Wachsmann Recordings at the British Library:

The repatriation of archival sound recordings to the people of Uganda is a unique example of the significant impact that repatriation can have on a culture. Many institutions across the world, in addition to collecting physical objects, have also “established several archives of recordings...with the purpose of preserving materials for teaching, study and research.”⁶¹ This is also true of the British Library in London, England, and among its archives are recordings of traditional music from Uganda. These recordings were made by Klaus Wachsmann, a researcher who “studied musicology and comparative musicology.”⁶² As part of Wachsmann’s research, he traveled throughout Uganda to collect musical instruments and “Between 1948 and 1954 he made over 1500 recordings, documenting at least some traditions from most culture groups in the country.”⁶³

⁵⁹ Ibid, 252.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Kahunde, Samuel. 2012. “Repatriating Archival Sound Recordings to Revive Traditions: The Role of the Klaus Wachsmann Recordings in the Revival of the Royal Music of Bunyoro-Kitara, Uganda.” *Ethnomusicology Forum* 21 (2): 197. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23271873>

⁶² Ibid, 199.

⁶³ Ibid.

These recordings were eventually deposited at the British Library, where they were mostly forgotten until the 21st century, when the library “digitized them and made them available online...However, these recordings could initially only be accessed and downloaded by institutions within the United Kingdom that had signed a license with the British Library.”⁶⁴ This limited access meant that few people even knew of the recordings’ existence, so it was pure luck when Samuel Kahunde, “an ethnomusicology student at the University of Sheffield,” came across the Wachsmann recordings online.⁶⁵ Kahunde then argued to the British Library how the “repatriation of music would be beneficial to the cultural heritage communities” in Uganda, and the library agreed.⁶⁶ Of special importance to Kahunde was his native kingdom of Bunyoro-Kitara, which was “struggling to restore its traditions.”⁶⁷

Bunyoro-Kitara was one of several kingdoms which were amalgamated into the country of Uganda by the British government during the age of imperialism. Shortly after Uganda gained its independence in 1962, a “power struggle developed between the central government” and individual kingdoms, which resulted in the “abolition of all kingdoms in 1967.”⁶⁸ Following this, “royal music and dance was not performed in Bunyoro for 27 years,” since the monarch had been stripped of his title.⁶⁹ The consequences of almost three decades without traditional music being performed are evident in modern Uganda:

The royal music and dance of Bunyoro has been obscure to most of the people in Bunyoro and the rest of the world partly because it was not performed for 27 years after the abolition of kingdoms. The younger generation have had no opportunity of acquiring

⁶⁴ Ibid, 200.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 201.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 202.

these musical skills because there was no venue for transmission of the royal traditions. It is apparent that several skilled performers have died, thus creating a vacuum of knowledge and skills.⁷⁰

Although the kingdoms have been restored by the Ugandan government, many traditions have seemingly been lost forever. However, the Wachsmann recordings have enabled some traditions to be revived.

In 2008, copies of the “Wachsmann royal recordings collected from Bunyoro-Kitara in 1949” were given to the king and royal family of Bunyoro-Kitara in the form of CDs.⁷¹ Other CDs were given to the royal musicians, who were able to use the recordings to teach themselves songs that they had never heard before, and they then performed those songs at royal ceremonies. Copies of the recordings were also given to local radio stations in the region, as well as to interested people, which has made the music accessible to the people of Bunyoro-Kitara.⁷²

The repatriation of the Wachsmann recordings has been influential on the people of Bunyoro-Kitara. These recordings have given many Ugandans access to a part of their history that many feared had been forgotten, and is helping them to rediscover old traditions. This has had the result of repairing some of the damage done to Bunyoro-Kitara, since traditions that had once been outlawed have now returned and been embraced by the people.⁷³ The effort to revitalize traditional royal music in Bunyoro-Kitara is an example of why repatriation is so important for many cultures, since it helps to preserve traditions and educate future generations.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid, 203.

⁷² Ibid, 206.

⁷³ Ibid.

Interviews:

As part of my research, I reached out to several professionals and experts on repatriation and decolonization in museums. These interviews provided me with information that was not apparent in the literature and case studies that I read. What follows is a brief summary of these conversations and my main takeaways from each.

Stacey Espenlaub: NAGPRA Coordinator at the University of Pennsylvania

I had the privilege to speak with Stacey Espenlaub and ask her about her work at the University of Pennsylvania as their NAGPRA coordinator. Her job is to ensure that the University is complying with NAGPRA, which includes overseeing the repatriation of human remains and other objects to Native American tribes. I learned that the NAGPRA coordinator used to be a part-time position at the University, but has since been made a full-time position. Stacey stated that “In my experience over the past almost 20 years now, the University has been supportive, they’ve worked with us to work through different claims and repatriation efforts, supporting us to travel out to communities, as well as supporting communities in terms of providing lunch during consultation visits.”⁷⁴ The University has clearly made an effort to support repatriation, but there are unfortunately still obstacles to the process.

When I asked Stacey what the biggest issue affecting repatriation was, she identified a lack of funding as the main obstacle:

Funding is certainly a big obstacle to carrying out the NAGPRA process. The University supports us by having a fulltime position, but NAGPRA is a severely underfunded mandate by the government. So, when we do host repatriations or we want to travel, or tribes would like to travel to us, it makes it very difficult, especially for us here on the

⁷⁴ Espenlaub, Stacey. “Interview with Stacey Espenlaub.” Interview by Seth Berkowitz. May 5, 2020.

East Coast, because there aren't many tribes on the East Coast. As a result, many tribes need to travel a long way with multiple people. This can be very expensive. I participated in a consultation in Oklahoma hosted by three Lenape/Delaware communities. In this instance they received a NAGPRA grant to support travel expenses for participants. And our university can help us in that way, but many tribes, museums, and small historical societies do not have that ability. There are grants that you can apply to for repatriation and consultation, but it's not a lot of money.⁷⁵

Like all aspects of museum work, repatriation requires money in order to be possible, but it is often challenging for museums, let alone tribes, to acquire the necessary funds. This issue alone can make the repatriation of objects difficult, but it is not the only problem. Stacey also mentioned that "I think another obstacle would be that it's often difficult with people changing positions, both at the museums and the tribes, to keep momentum going sometimes, or potentially not getting responses. This works both ways, but definitely that's an issue as well."⁷⁶ Communication can also be an issue when it comes to repatriation, especially considering that it requires the coordination of numerous people at both the museum and the tribe.

Despite these issues, the benefits of repatriation at the University of Pennsylvania are evident. Stacey brought up the University's "Native American Voices"⁷⁷ exhibit as an example of the impact that her work has had:

A lot of that would not have been possible without some of the relationships that we've created because of NAGPRA. So that exhibit included our museum curator, but there were also three native curators who worked on that, and then there were probably about

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

40 other native artists, students, anthropologists, lawyers, educators, poets and writers, and healthcare professionals who participated in some way in creating that exhibition.⁷⁸

The repatriation efforts of the University helped them to earn the trust of and form connections with native experts who then collaborated with the museum to create a new exhibit that could better educate visitors about indigenous cultures in the Americas. This demonstrates how repatriation can benefit museums and native cultures alike.

I asked Stacey if she still has to deal with museum professionals who are resistant to her work or who are afraid that museums will lose much of their collections because of NAGPRA, and she responded:

Not every object meets the definitions of the law and tribes are very careful about the objects that they're asking or requesting for repatriation. The process is not always simple or easy, but after 30 years people are seeing what the benefits of it can be and how museums are changing in such a way that potentially make them more relevant than they've ever been.⁷⁹

It seems that when it comes to NAGPRA, most people in the museum field have come to recognize the benefits of the law and realize that their fears about repatriation have proven to be unfounded. My discussion with Stacey helped me to better understand how museums support repatriating objects under NAGPRA, the obstacles that still impact these efforts, and the benefits that NAGPRA has had for museums.

Ian Thompson: Preservation Officer of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

I had the opportunity to talk with Ian Thompson, the Preservation Officer of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. We discussed how Ian works with the Choctaw Nation and museums to

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

repatriate objects. In order to get objects repatriated to them, the Choctaw Nation often has to create a body of evidence indicating why specific human remains or objects belong to their respective tribe. This includes “bringing together a robust swath of information that relies on oral history, language, and class themes.”⁸⁰ They then have to send that information to museums and hope that the staff at those institutions agree with their assessment.⁸¹

Ian explained how this process of asking for the repatriation of objects can prove challenging for the Choctaw Nation and other tribes:

One of the obstacles that we face is, of course, a lot of institutions, even 30 years after NAGPRA, haven’t completed their inventories. If they haven’t completed the inventories, that means there’s no possibility of us doing a repatriation...Thirty years after the law was passed, there’s still a huge number of collections that are noncompliant.⁸²

This can prove to be frustrating for tribes who have requested the return of objects and human remains from museums, only to be told by many of those institutions that they still have not finished going through their collections. An additional source of frustration for Native Americans seeking the repatriation under NAGPRA is:

The law is written such that we can repatriate human remains considered culturally unaffiliated if they come from our treaty lands or Aboriginal land or something like that. However, the institution is not required to repatriate associated objects that go with those. So that means, you know, a lot of institutions like to hang onto their funerary objects because it brings notoriety and income from using things like that. A lot of institutions

⁸⁰ Thompson, Ian. “Interview with Ian Thompson.” Interview by Seth Berkowitz. April 30, 2020.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

like to take a narrow definition of what cultural association is and drawing upon more than a hundred years of anthropological literature.⁸³

This issue means that oftentimes, even when a tribe is successful in getting human remains returned to them, a museum may still keep funerary objects that were associated with the body.

After hearing about the obstacles that tribes can face when trying to get museums to repatriate objects, I asked Ian about an example of a positive experience he and the Choctaw Nation had when working with a museum in regards to repatriation:

A relationship that we have had with a museum in particular was with the Smithsonian when we repatriated the remains of a woman. We don't know her name. We know that she was the daughter of chief, a former Choctaw by Mobile. Her remains were taken from the Earth, bound by the anthropologist that was about as rationalistic as you can possibly get. I mean, he wrote to the top foundation, 'We see the Choctaw Nation every day in the streets of Mobile, scarcely advanced a degree beyond beasts of the field.' That was the viewpoint of the man who desecrating the grave. So, one hundred and fifty years later, we worked with the Smithsonian through the process to repatriate the remains. And we did. And one of the people who works in the repatriation office is one of our tribe members, although she didn't grow up in Oklahoma. So, through this, we were not only able to repatriate this deceased woman's remains, but we were able to build a stronger connection with our own person who was there in that office during their repatriation burial.⁸⁴

This story demonstrates how museums and native tribes can work together to address the mistakes of the past and form new relationships in the present. Not only did the Choctaw Nation

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

get the remains of a woman returned to their tribe, they also made a connection with a member of their tribe who worked in the Smithsonian, which will likely prove helpful in the future when the tribe and museum want to work together again. My conversation with Ian taught me about some of the obstacles facing Native American tribes trying to get museums to repatriate human remains and objects, but it also showed what it can look like when tribes and museums work together.

Daryl Jorgenson: Museum Supervisor with the Minnesota Historical Society

I had the chance to speak with Daryl Jorgenson, the Museum Supervisor with the Minnesota Historical Society. We discussed Daryl's work with decolonization and how the Minnesota Historical Society has worked with the Dakota, Ojibwe, and other tribal nations.⁸⁵ For example, we talked about how Historic Fort Snelling at Bdote is updating and changing how it interprets the history of the area. The site is now placing more of a focus on the 10,000 years of history of Native Americans living in this area, instead of only discussing the history of white settlers.⁸⁶

When discussing these updates to sites and exhibits at the Minnesota Historical Society, Daryl went into more detail on how the institution has worked to decolonize narratives by working with members of native communities:

Besides people who work for us who are from those communities, we also have people who aren't employed by the institution. They're from those communities, but they sit on what is essentially an advisory council. They're not part of the institution, but they influence what we do in a lot of cases. I would say those two groups are especially helpful when it comes to projects like Fort Snelling, where it's an interesting history.

⁸⁵ Jorgenson, Daryl. "Interview with Daryl Jorgenson." Interview by Seth Berkowitz. September 24, 2020.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

There's over ten thousand years of human history at that site. They've been good at telling the variety of stories that exist there, but I would say they've been better at it in recent years as they work towards decolonizing their story. There are people who years and years ago, if they recall their family trip to Fort Snelling, they would probably remember soldiers marching around and maybe they'd run into a fur trader or something there. But the story was much more focused on those people who came in the 1820s. And now I think there's definitely more of a focus on expanding that story and bringing in the voices of the people who were there for hundreds and thousands of years before the soldiers from the US military showed up.⁸⁷

Daryl's explanation shows how collaborating with native tribes has changed the story that is being presented at sites like Fort Snelling, so that it now more accurately depicts the full history of the area, and not simply the perspective of white settlers. This is important for museums to keep in mind when educating the public.

In addition to decolonizing museum narratives, Daryl discussed the need for museum professionals to decolonize their way of thinking:

I think that some people need to recognize that when they're doing their work, and that's part of decolonizing your thought process. No matter how qualified you are, you could have your PhD and you could absolutely know it all. You could tell that story yourself, but maybe you shouldn't. So, we worked with our internal groups and we also had some people from the Dakota and Ojibwe communities working with us on writing this. It's been a very positive experience.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Daryl makes the argument that the “experts” on a particular culture or tribe might not necessarily be the best ones to present that group’s stories, but instead that should be handled by members of that culture. For instance, Daryl talked about how the Minnesota History Center created an exhibit called “Our Home: Native Minnesota.”⁸⁹

We had people from the Dakota and the Ojibwe community write these stories. They helped us put together the exhibit. The exhibit itself is presented in three languages. It's Dakota, Ojibwe and English, which again, I think is another step towards decolonizing in providing access through way of presentation. I think that's a really, really cool example of how our institution as a whole has done this working together with those community groups.⁹⁰

The efforts of the Minnesota Historical Society to decolonize its narrative and collaborate with the Dakota and Ojibwe tribes shows how museums can benefit from working with people from native cultures and allowing them to have a say in how they are portrayed in exhibits and programming. Additionally, repatriation is a key aspect of decolonization, since it also enables cultures to influence how museums interpret their objects and traditions.

IV. Thesis Project:

Description:

The mission of my thesis project is to explain why I believe that museums should attempt to repatriate unethically stolen artifacts whenever possible. This means not only when repatriation is required by laws like NAGPRA, but in any instance when an object was acquired by a museum without the permission of its tribe or nation of origin. My thesis discusses my arguments for why museums should return stolen artifacts, and the numerous benefits that

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

repatriation can have for both native cultures and museums. These arguments include that repatriating artifacts ensures that some form of justice is served in response to the crimes committed by colonial powers, that museums are more than capable of overcoming obstacles to repatriation by working with native cultures and ensuring that their wishes are met, and that museums can learn more about artifacts by working with native groups.

My thesis also refutes many of the arguments made against repatriation, such as that museums are the only institutions qualified to preserve and protect artifacts, that returning stolen artifacts to their cultures of origin would likely result in them being damaged or destroyed, and that returning stolen artifacts would deny scholars and the general public from being able to learn from said artifacts. While my thesis argues why museums should repatriate objects, it does not argue how exactly museums should go about doing this or how museums will raise the funding necessary to carry out repatriation efforts. Although these issues are important, they are not the focus of this paper, and should be explored in future research.

The main goals for my thesis are to: 1.) persuade readers that repatriating stolen artifacts is important for native cultures and can result in a positive outcome for museums, 2.) explore how changes in the museum field have affected repatriation, and 3.) suggest several best practices for how museums can overcome obstacles hampering repatriation efforts. These best practices for museums include increasing funding for repatriation efforts, collaborating with native groups, cataloging unethically collected objects, creating repatriation training programs for museum employees, and listening to young museum professionals and experts from native cultures. My thesis also informs readers about the history of how museums have acquired objects from the spoils of colonization, the debate regarding whether or not museums should return

stolen artifacts, and different ways in which museums have gone about repatriating objects and working with various nations and native tribes.

I designed my thesis for general audiences who may not be familiar with the lasting impacts of colonialism, and thus are not aware that many museum collections are filled with stolen artifacts. With this audience in mind, my thesis attempts to explain every significant aspect of the repatriation debate, including how Western museums acquired many of their objects, why so many cultures and countries want those items to be returned to them, and why many museums have been reluctant to do so. However, while my thesis was designed to be accessible to most readers, it was also aimed at museum professionals in particular. While workers in the museum field are likely already familiar with how museums collected stolen artifacts and that many cultures want those artifacts back, they may have only heard certain arguments in regards to the debate over repatriation. For this audience, my main focus was to explain my unique arguments in favor of repatriation, which they may not have heard before. Hopefully, my arguments have succeeded in persuading museum professionals that museums should repatriate stolen artifacts, and has encouraged them to advocate for repatriation at their respective institutions.

Methodology:

My methodology for my thesis involved reading numerous articles and other literature about repatriation, and the different arguments made both for and against it. I examined several case studies of repatriation efforts at multiple institutions in different parts of the world, in order to get a better sense of the how repatriation can be handled in a variety of ways. I then contacted several museum professionals who had experience with repatriating artifacts, decolonizing museum narratives, and collaborating with native cultures. Interviewing these experts helped to

answer questions I had about repatriation, which could not be answered by the literature alone.

All of my research enabled me to collect my findings about the obstacles continuing to hurt repatriation efforts, as well as the changes to the museum field which are encouraging these same efforts. Furthermore, my takeaways from the literature review, the case studies, and the interviews all form the basis for my conclusions about how museums can overcome obstacles hampering repatriation efforts.

V. Findings:

My research has shown me that there are unfortunately still a number of obstacles for repatriation in the present. There are many complexities that can occur when it comes to repatriation, such as when a native culture is extant and it is unclear who objects should be returned to, or if there is ever a situation in which a native group does not want a museum to repatriate artifacts which were collected unethically. It would be impossible to explore and examine every nuanced issue related to repatriation, so I have identified and will be going into detail about what I believe are the most pressing obstacles to repatriation efforts: lack of funding, distance, museums not cataloging their collections, and stipulations related to gifts and endowments.

The main issue continuing to impact repatriation is a lack of funding.⁹¹ NAGPRA and other mandates from governments are underfunded, since repatriation is obviously not the main concern of most politicians. This puts the onus for funding repatriation efforts on museums and native cultures, neither of which have much money to spare. Most museums, especially smaller institutions, are constantly struggling to raise the funds needed just to keep themselves open, and so there is often very little money left over for the cost of repatriating artifacts.⁹² The

⁹¹ Espenlaub, Stacey. "Interview with Stacey Espenlaub." Interview by Seth Berkowitz. May 5, 2020.

⁹² Ibid.

transportation costs alone are often too much for many institutions, let alone impoverished tribes and nations.⁹³

Distance is an obstacle to repatriation as well, since Western museums are often far away from where their artifacts originated. Having objects from Nigeria be displayed in a museum thousands of miles away in Great Britain, for example, can make it challenging for people from that culture to have access to it.⁹⁴ Even just within the United States, it can be difficult for a museum on the East Coast to coordinate with a Native American tribe located hundreds of miles away in Oklahoma or even further to the West.⁹⁵ Distance can make communication between museums and native groups frustrating, since meeting face to face can become a lengthy and expensive endeavor. This has been somewhat remedied by technology, such as video conferences, that allows for meetings to take place over great distances. However, this solution is imperfect and comes with its own issues, and assumes that all parties involved have access to webcams and reliable internet connections.⁹⁶ Furthermore, technology cannot solve the basic issue that the greater the distance between an institution and a country or tribe, the greater the cost will be to transport an object from one location to the other.⁹⁷

Another obstacle still impacting repatriation is the fact that some museums have not gone through all of their collections in order to determine which objects could potentially be repatriated. Thankfully, many institutions have made the effort to do just that, especially in the United States where NAGPRA requires museums to catalogue any Native American human

⁹³ Thompson, Ian. "Interview with Ian Thompson." Interview by Seth Berkowitz. April 30, 2020.

⁹⁴ Vox. "The British Museum Is Full of Stolen Artifacts." *YouTube* video, 9:32. August 5, 2020.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hoTxIRWvp8&feature=youtu.be>.

⁹⁵ Espenlaub, Stacey. "Interview with Stacey Espenlaub." Interview by Seth Berkowitz. May 5, 2020.

⁹⁶ Colwell-Chanthaphonh, Chip, Rachel Maxson, and Jami Powell. 2011. "The Repatriation of Culturally Unidentifiable Human Remains." *Museum Management and Curatorship* 26 (1): 27-43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2011.540125>.

⁹⁷ Espenlaub, Stacey. "Interview with Stacey Espenlaub." Interview by Seth Berkowitz. May 5, 2020.

remains or funerary objects which could potentially be repatriated.⁹⁸ However, this law only applies to certain items and in one particular country, so it does not solve the overall issue, but only addresses one particular facet of it. When it comes to objects not required to be catalogued by NAGPRA or similar laws, some institutions have not felt motivated to determine what items in their collections could potentially be returned to their cultures of origin, nor do they feel compelled to share what information they do know with native cultures. This can be upsetting for native groups which cannot begin the repatriation process until museums inform them if certain objects are located in their collections.⁹⁹

Stipulations and legalities related to gifts and endowments can also cause obstacles to repatriation. Many artifacts in museum collections are donated with various stipulations, such as how the object can be displayed. Sometimes, donors will stipulate that an object can never be deaccessioned by a museum, and this can create issues for repatriating artifacts. If the act of repatriating an object would violate a donor's wishes, then a museum may need to argue in court over their reasoning for doing so, and there is no guarantee that the court will rule in the museum's favor.¹⁰⁰ Of course, if there is clear evidence that an artifact was stolen, and thus the donor never truly had legal ownership of the object, then their stipulations are meaningless. These issues can be frustrating, since they can prolong the repatriation process in legal battles while native cultures must continue to wait for the return of that which was taken from them.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ "Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (U.S. National Park Service)."
<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nagpra/index.htm>.

⁹⁹ Thompson, Ian. "Interview with Ian Thompson." Interview by Seth Berkowitz. April 30, 2020.

¹⁰⁰ Cohen, Patricia. 2013. "Museums Grapple with the Strings Attached to Gifts." *The New York Times*. sec. Arts. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/05/arts/design/museums-grapple-with-onerous-restrictions-on-donations.html>.

¹⁰¹ Scher, Robin. 2019. "Better Safe Than Sorry: American Museums Take Measures Mindful of Repatriation of African Art." *ARTnews.Com*. <https://www.artnews.com/artnews/news/african-art-repatriation-american-museums-12750/>.

While it is disappointing that these issues continue to plague repatriation efforts, I have also learned about many positive changes in the museum field. Thankfully, the overall trend in recent decades has been that museums are making more of an effort to support repatriation. For instance, some institutions have created departments dedicated to handling repatriation, established full time positions for NAGPRA coordinators, and set aside funding for repatriation efforts.¹⁰² These efforts are significant because it shows how repatriation has gone from a peripheral issue to a stated goal and priority of many museums in only about thirty years.

Another significant change is that museums has begun to work more with other cultures to help decolonize museum narratives in exhibitions and programs. This is important because it ensures that the voices of tribes and nations are being heard by museum staff and that the full story of those cultures are being told by the institution.¹⁰³ Additionally, museums that are more willing to collaborate with other cultures and listen to what those groups want from the museum, are also more willing to repatriate objects that those cultures want returned to them.

The biggest change impacting repatriation, however, is the new generation of museum professionals. One should first acknowledge and appreciate the work and efforts of a variety of people who have put in many years of hard work, and recognize that modern repatriation efforts (by native communities, museum professionals, and many others) are built on decades of activism and work. The work of these individuals has laid the groundwork for repatriation, and those at the forefront of these efforts are training the newer generation of museum professionals.¹⁰⁴ This new generation of young museum professionals have been educated on NAGPRA and other similar mandates, since many of them are younger than these laws, and so

¹⁰² Espenlaub, Stacey. "Interview with Stacey Espenlaub." Interview by Seth Berkowitz. May 5, 2020.

¹⁰³ Jorgenson, Daryl. "Interview with Daryl Jorgenson." Interview by Seth Berkowitz. September 24, 2020.

¹⁰⁴ Espenlaub, Stacey. "Interview with Stacey Espenlaub." Interview by Seth Berkowitz. May 5, 2020.

they enter the museum field already supportive of repatriation. As older museum professionals eventually retire, these younger professionals are able to take their places and begin to influence the attitudes and beliefs of institutions.¹⁰⁵ Over time, as more and more museum employees favor repatriation, museums will likely throw more support behind repatriation and make more of an effort to collaborate with other cultures.

VI. Conclusion:

I believe that modern museums should attempt to repatriate unethically stolen artifacts whenever possible. As has been shown throughout my research, museums are more than capable of overcoming obstacles to repatriation by working with native cultures and ensuring that their wishes are met, such as how the Denver Museum of Nature and Science¹⁰⁶ and the University of Pennsylvania¹⁰⁷ worked with native tribes to repatriate human remains. Museums can learn more about artifacts by working with native groups, like how the Glenbow Museum learned more about holy bundles from the Blackfoot,¹⁰⁸ or how the Minnesota Historical Society learned more about the Bdote site by working with local tribes.¹⁰⁹ Repatriation also ensures that some form of justice is served in response to the crimes committed by colonial powers, as seen by the revitalization of traditional music in Bunyoro-Kitara¹¹⁰ and the return of human remains to the

¹⁰⁵ Thompson, Ian. "Interview with Ian Thompson." Interview by Seth Berkowitz. April 30, 2020.

¹⁰⁶ Colwell-Chanthaphonh, Chip, Rachel Maxson, and Jami Powell. 2011. "The Repatriation of Culturally Unidentifiable Human Remains." *Museum Management and Curatorship* 26 (1): 27-43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2011.540125>.

¹⁰⁷ Espenlaub, Stacey. "Interview with Stacey Espenlaub." Interview by Seth Berkowitz. May 5, 2020.

¹⁰⁸ Conaty, Gerald T. 2008. "The Effects of Repatriation on the Relationship between the Glenbow Museum and the Blackfoot People." *Museum Management and Curatorship* 23 (3): 245-59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647770802234037>.

¹⁰⁹ Jorgenson, Daryl. "Interview with Daryl Jorgenson." Interview by Seth Berkowitz. September 24, 2020.

¹¹⁰ Kahunde, Samuel. 2012. "Repatriating Archival Sound Recordings to Revive Traditions: The Role of the Klaus Wachsmann Recordings in the Revival of the Royal Music of Bunyoro-Kitara, Uganda." *Ethnomusicology Forum* 21 (2): 197-219. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23271873>.

Choctaw Nation.¹¹¹ I plan to share my research, findings, and conclusions by publishing my thesis as an article in an academic journal.

My research revealed two distinct views when it comes to repatriation. Much of the literature I read argued in favor of returning stolen artifacts, and believed that museums had a moral obligation to do so.¹¹² The authors who made this argument often explained how repatriation benefits both native cultures and museums, and can result in an increase in knowledge and understanding.¹¹³ An opposing argument that came up in my research is that museums are the only institutions qualified to preserve and protect artifacts. Supporters of this argument believe that returning stolen artifacts to their cultures of origin would likely result in them being damaged or destroyed,¹¹⁴ and would also deny scholars and the general public from being able to learn from said artifacts.¹¹⁵ This ignores the fact that native cultures have their own scholars and institutions that could preserve objects and educate the public about them. While the authors who argued against returning stolen artifacts were typically museum professionals with a vested interest in preserving the status quo, most of the authors in favor of repatriation were either young museum professionals or natives of the cultures whose artifacts have been stolen.

I analyzed several case studies which demonstrate reasons why museums should embark on repatriating their collections. The repatriation of unaffiliated human remains by the Denver

¹¹¹ Thompson, Ian. "Interview with Ian Thompson." Interview by Seth Berkowitz. April 30, 2020.

¹¹² Simpson, Moira. 2009. "Museums and Restorative Justice: Heritage, Repatriation and Cultural Education." *Museum International* 61: 121–29.

¹¹³ Curtis, Neil G. W. 2006. "Universal Museums, Museum Objects and Repatriation: The Tangled Stories of Things." *Museum Management and Curatorship* 21 (2): 117–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647770600402102>.

¹¹⁴ Miller, Steven. 2018. "The Ethics of Deaccessioning." *New Criterion* 37 (4): 32–34. <http://Osearch.ebscohost.com.catalog.library.uarts.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=asu&AN=133268094&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

¹¹⁵ Olsen, BJØRNAR J. 2018. "Manker's List: Museum Collections in the Era of Deaccessioning and Disposal." *Journal Nordic Museology / Nordisk Museologi*, no. 1 (January): 62–73. <http://Osearch.ebscohost.com.catalog.library.uarts.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=asu&AN=138193519&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

Museum of Nature and Science (DMNS) shows how museums should consult with native groups. The DMNS took the time to listen to the concerns and requests of various native tribes, ensuring that as many voices as possible were heard, which resulted in the remains being reburied in locations which were approved by all parties involved.¹¹⁶ The repatriation of sacred objects by the Glenbow Museum to the Blackfoot people demonstrates how museums can gain a better understanding of artifacts by forming relationships with native groups. By allowing native tribes to have access to holy bundles and use them in ceremonies, the Glenbow was able to learn about the true significance of these objects, which shows how repatriation allows museums to learn more about artifacts and their respective cultures.¹¹⁷ The repatriation of the Klaus Wachsmann sound recordings at the British Library to the people of Uganda shows the impact of providing people access to a part of their history that had nearly been forgotten. These recordings have helped to revitalize traditional royal music in Bunyoro-Kitara, which shows how repatriation can preserve traditions and educate future generations.¹¹⁸ These case studies all demonstrate the various benefits that repatriation can have for both native cultures and institutions, and explain why museums should support repatriation.

I interviewed several professionals and experts on repatriation and decolonization in museums, which provided me with information that was not present in my other research. I spoke with Stacey Espenlaub about her work as the NAGPRA coordinator at the University of

¹¹⁶ Colwell-Chanthaphonh, Chip, Rachel Maxson, and Jami Powell. 2011. "The Repatriation of Culturally Unidentifiable Human Remains." *Museum Management and Curatorship* 26 (1): 27-43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2011.540125>.

¹¹⁷ Conaty, Gerald T. 2008. "The Effects of Repatriation on the Relationship between the Glenbow Museum and the Blackfoot People." *Museum Management and Curatorship* 23 (3): 245-59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647770802234037>.

¹¹⁸ Kahunde, Samuel. 2012. "Repatriating Archival Sound Recordings to Revive Traditions: The Role of the Klaus Wachsmann Recordings in the Revival of the Royal Music of Bunyoro-Kitara, Uganda." *Ethnomusicology Forum* 21 (2): 197-219. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23271873>.

Pennsylvania, and learned how museums are supporting the repatriation of objects to indigenous tribes under NAGPRA. We also discussed the obstacles that still impact repatriation efforts, and the benefits that NAGPRA has had for museums, such as the creation of the “Native American Voices” exhibit at the University.¹¹⁹ My interview with Ian Thompson, the Preservation Officer of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, taught me about Ian’s experiences working to repatriate objects to the Choctaw Nation and other tribes. I learned about some of the obstacles facing Native American tribes trying to get museums to repatriate human remains and objects, but Ian also explained what it can look like when tribes and museums work together.¹²⁰ I also spoke with Daryl Jorgenson, the Museum Supervisor with the Minnesota Historical Society, and we discussed the efforts of the Minnesota Historical Society to decolonize its narrative and collaborate with the Dakota and Ojibwe tribes. Our conversation taught me how museums can benefit from working with people from native cultures and allowing them to have a say in how they are portrayed in exhibits and programming.¹²¹ These interviews all gave me a better insight into the current state of repatriation at museums.

The findings from my research reveal that there are still many obstacles hampering repatriation efforts. Chief among these obstacles is a lack of funding for repatriation mandates, which is an issue for museums which are typically struggling to raise money for a host of other issues.¹²² Other problems plaguing repatriation efforts are the great distances between museums and native cultures, which can lead to issues with communication and transportation,¹²³ museums not cataloging their collections and sharing that information with native groups, which

¹¹⁹ Espenlaub, Stacey. “Interview with Stacey Espenlaub.” Interview by Seth Berkowitz. May 5, 2020.

¹²⁰ Thompson, Ian. “Interview with Ian Thompson.” Interview by Seth Berkowitz. April 30, 2020.

¹²¹ Jorgenson, Daryl. “Interview with Daryl Jorgenson.” Interview by Seth Berkowitz. September 24, 2020.

¹²² Espenlaub, Stacey. “Interview with Stacey Espenlaub.” Interview by Seth Berkowitz. May 5, 2020.

¹²³ Ibid.

makes it impossible to return artifacts to their respective cultures,¹²⁴ and stipulations related to gifts and endowments, which can prolong repatriation efforts in legal battles.¹²⁵ Despite these obstacles, there have been many positive changes in the museum field in recent years, which have resulted in museums making more of an effort to support repatriation.¹²⁶ In addition to establishing positions and setting aside funding focused on repatriation,¹²⁷ institutions are also working with other cultures to help decolonize museum narratives, and are listening to what those groups want from museums.¹²⁸ Plus, a new generation of young museum professionals, who are supportive of repatriation, are beginning to influence the attitudes and beliefs of museums.¹²⁹

Now that I have learned what museums have done in the past and present in regards to repatriation, here are some best practices that I think museums should pursue in the future. For starters, museums and governments need to increase funding for repatriation efforts. This is the biggest hurdle that needs to be overcome in order to make repatriation less challenging, so it is imperative that any funds that can be utilized to address this issue are set aside. In addition, museums should collaborate with other cultures when attempting to tell their stories. The best way for museums to educate people about particular groups of people is not by displaying objects that were taken without permission, but by working with cultures to present the stories that they want to tell, using the objects that they feel comfortable letting museums use. Museums also need to thoroughly catalogue their collections and determine which objects were acquired

¹²⁴ Thompson, Ian. "Interview with Ian Thompson." Interview by Seth Berkowitz. April 30, 2020.

¹²⁵ Cohen, Patricia. 2013. "Museums Grapple with the Strings Attached to Gifts." *The New York Times*. sec. Arts. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/05/arts/design/museums-grapple-with-onerous-restrictions-on-donations.html>.

¹²⁶ Espenlaub, Stacey. "Interview with Stacey Espenlaub." Interview by Seth Berkowitz. May 5, 2020.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Jorgenson, Daryl. "Interview with Daryl Jorgenson." Interview by Seth Berkowitz. September 24, 2020.

¹²⁹ Thompson, Ian. "Interview with Ian Thompson." Interview by Seth Berkowitz. April 30, 2020.

unethically and should be repatriated. They should then share that information with indigenous communities so that they can collaborate with them and determine the best course of action.

Until all museums have completed this process, the repatriation debate will never end.

Another best practice for museums is to establish training programs for museum workers to learn about the repatriation process and how to best pursue it. Once museums have cataloged their collections and determined which artifacts were acquired unethically, museum professionals will need to understand what to do next, and training would teach them what to do. For instance, museum workers should be educated on all of the various laws related to repatriation, as well as the proper procedure for returning specific types of objects to certain cultures. Do museum professionals all understand the difference between repatriating objects to a nation's government versus a tribal or indigenous group? These entities are rarely one and the same, and different laws apply to each, so it is imperative for individuals at museums to comprehend these differences in order to decide which groups a specific object should be returned to, and what the museum then needs to do in order to facilitate that repatriation. This training program could potentially involve bringing in experts on repatriation, ideally from indigenous groups, who could then explain the need for repatriation, how museums can best go about supporting repatriation efforts, the relevant laws related to repatriation, and the importance of collaborating with native groups in the repatriation process.

Finally, museums should listen to young museum professionals and what they have learned about repatriation from their educations, as well as listen to members of native cultures and what they want museums to do. Emerging professionals and native representatives will have the challenging task of persuading museum leadership to listen to them, and hear their thoughts about repatriation. That will be easier said than done, since it will be difficult to convince

museum leadership that their institutions need to change their practices. Uncomfortable conversations will need to take place, which will discuss how museums cannot serve as stewards of the past while simultaneously refusing to acknowledge the consequences of imperialism and the role that Western museums played in that chapter of history. All voices need to be heard on this subject, especially those voices coming from the cultures who were devastated by the past actions of imperialist powers. Museums cannot remain relevant if they ignore these voices, and they may find themselves permanently closing their doors if they refuse to change. If museum leaders want their institutions to be able to adapt going forward, they need to listen to native voices and young museum professionals, and make repatriation a priority.

Future research into repatriation should attempt to reach out to more sources from the tribes and nations that are directly affected by this issue. Although I was lucky enough to find a few sources like this, these were the exception, as the vast majority of information on this subject is written by museum professionals. Examining this subject from a native perspective would likely reveal new viewpoints and information that would boost the arguments in favor of repatriation. More research of native authors would also allow for the exploration of concepts and ideas that are beyond the scope of this paper, such as the suggestion that land be repatriated to native groups and that structures built by colonizers be destroyed.¹³⁰

Furthermore, this topic would benefit from exploring how new technology can improve the repatriation process. I would be interested in learning more about how technology like video conferencing can help museums and tribes work together, or how 3D printers could enable museums to replace repatriated artifacts with realistic looking replicas. In addition to replacing

¹³⁰ Waziyatawin, Ph.D. 2008. *What Does Justice Look Like? The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland*. Living Justice Press.

returned artifacts, this technology could also potentially enhance the museum experience by revealing new information about objects. Digital recreations could possibly display objects in ways which would have damaged the real artifact, like showing the inside of a mummy or the different layers of paint on a piece of pottery. Research into new technologies could provide museums with far more options for how to educate visitors than if they simply displayed an artifact.

Additional research should also look into how exactly museums can raise the additional funds necessary in order to support future repatriation efforts. Funding for museums is a challenge even without taking repatriation into account, but I imagine there are ways to ensure that funding is set aside for this issue. Perhaps museums could establish relationships with donors who are passionate about repatriation, or hold fundraising events with the specific goal of raising money for repatriation efforts.

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VIII. Appendices

Interview with Stacey Espenlaub, NAGPRA Coordinator at the University of Pennsylvania: May 5, 2020

Seth: How has the NAGPRA coordinator position changed in the time that you've been working at Penn?

Stacey: Initially, the position was multiple part time people. It had coalesced into a full-time position that was on a three-year renewable position through the university. They also kept on two part time assistants, and we also have a work study student. A previous volunteer who used to work with us when he passed in 2011/2012 left money for the position to be fully endowed, which is great because that means you don't have to worry about what's considered soft money and it continues on. This endowment ensures that someone is always working on NAGPRA at the university, which doesn't happen everywhere.

Seth: Is there more support behind NAGPRA than when you first got started?

Stacey: In my experience over the past almost 20 years now, the University has been supportive, they've worked with us to work through different claims and repatriation efforts, supporting us to travel out to communities, as well as supporting communities in terms of providing lunch during consultation visits. So, I think that that support sort of keeps moving forward in a way. I would never say that the university was never supportive of NAGPRA, because they've always been supportive and still continue to understand its importance.

Seth: What obstacles are you facing when it comes to repatriation; either from within the institution or outside of it?

Stacey: Funding is certainly a big obstacle to carrying out the NAGPRA process. The University supports us by having a fulltime position, but NAGPRA is a severely underfunded mandate by the government. So, when we do host repatriations or we want to travel, or tribes would like to travel to us, it makes it very difficult, especially for us here on the East Coast, because there aren't many tribes on the East Coast. As a result, many tribes need to travel a long way with multiple people. This can be very expensive. I participated in a consultation in Oklahoma hosted by three Lenape/Delaware communities. In this instance they received a NAGPRA grant to support travel expenses for participants. And our university can help us in that way, but many tribes, museums, and small historical societies do not have that ability. There are grants that you can apply to for repatriation and consultation, but it's not a lot of money.

Stacey: I think another obstacle would be that it's often difficult with people changing positions, both on the museum and the tribes, to keep momentum going sometimes, or potentially not getting responses. This works both ways, but definitely that's an issue as well.

Seth: Have you ever had an issue where you have this object in the collection where you're not entirely sure who it would be repatriated to, and you just have to deal with the complicated process of reaching out to different groups?

Stacey: I can imagine your research is probably turned up the sort of the steps for which we have to move forward under NAGPRA. Sending out letters to tribes, letting them know about our collections, which include human remains and cultural items, and working with them to identify who may or may not be culturally affiliated with those items. It can be incredibly difficult, given that tribes were moving around or forcibly moved to reservations over the past two hundred, three hundred, four hundred years. So sometimes you could be working with two tribes, sometimes you could be working with 30 tribes. So, it can make it a complex process, but I think

you sort of have to keep working at it and being as transparent and open as possible or communicative. Communication is probably one of the most important things under NAGPRA or in dealing with NAGPRA. Consultation is an extremely important aspect of NAGPRA.

Seth: I imagine opening up these communications with Native American tribes is probably a big advantage for the museum in general.

Stacey: Yes, it is. I mean, if you haven't been there lately, we have our Native American Voices exhibit, our exhibition that's been up for the past several years, a lot of that would not have been possible without some of the relationships that we've created through NAGPRA. So that exhibit included our museum curator, but there were also three native curators who worked on that, and then there were probably about 40 other native artists, students, anthropologists, lawyers, educators, poets and writers, and healthcare professionals who participated in some way in creating that exhibition. People are at the forefront of the exhibit. Focusing on people was really important to our curators and our staff and not necessarily the artifacts, but use the artifacts as a backdrop to issues that are important to different communities within the United States.

Seth: The museum probably makes an effort to keep a good relationship with the tribes that they work with. Do you build a lot of trust with them?

Stacey: Communication is key under NAGPRA. Sometimes, opportunities arise to continue working together beyond our NAGPRA compliance. We've worked very closely, and for many decades, with the Tlingit tribes in Southeast Alaska, in part because we have such an important Tlingit collection in the museum. In addition to our work under NAGPRA, we've worked with them on several other projects. We have an agreement with one group in Southeast Alaska to work on tribal projects where our expertise can be useful or helpful to them.

Seth: Have you ever come across a professional who seemed very resistant to your work?

Stacey: Yes, there are some people out there who don't necessarily support NAGPRA wholeheartedly, I wouldn't say that that's happening at Penn in particular. In the beginning, I think people expected that, you know, we would be backing up to the museum in trucks and, basically saying, let's haul everything out and it goes into the truck and off it goes. But that's not what has happened. Not every object meets the definitions of the law and tribes are very careful about the objects that they're asking or requesting for repatriation. The process is not always simple or easy, but after 30 years people are seeing what the benefits of it can be and how museums are changing in such a way that potentially make them more relevant than they've ever been. You're always going to have someone who's not going to support that, but I wouldn't say that that's the overwhelming majority of people. You know, most of our professors, most of our curators are all of that age where they've known nothing but NAGPRA in their professional and academic careers. It's 30 years now. Some of them weren't even born when NAGPRA was being passed.

Seth: If you met someone who didn't know much about repatriation and you had to explain why you supported it, what would you tell them?

Stacey: As a museum professional, I would explain what it is and how it affects museum and what the issues are. I think you would definitely have to speak about why this is important to native communities here in the United States especially. I'm only going by my experience with NAGPRA, and you could probably ask this question to many people across the world and they might say something slightly different. You would have to definitely explain the historic relationship between native people and the United States and how NAGPRA is not only cultural heritage law but also human rights law. Museums are changing as a result of NAGPRA. Exhibitions, like Native American Voices, are becoming more common by including and

amplifying the voices of indigenous people. And it's important to bring those multiple voices forward.

**Interview with Ian Thompson, Preservation Officer of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma:
April 30, 2020**

Seth: What are some of the obstacles and issues you've had with some of these situations where you're trying to get objects repatriated to the Choctaw Nation?

Ian: One of the obstacles that we face is, of course, a lot of institutions, even 30 years after NAGPRA, haven't completed their inventories. If they haven't completed the inventories, that means there's no possibility of us doing a repatriation. So that's pretty frustrating. Thirty years after the law was passed, there's still a huge number of collections that are noncompliant. In addition to that, the law is written such that we can repatriate human remains considered culturally unaffiliated if they come from our treaty lands or Aboriginal land or something like that. However, the institution is not required to repatriate associated objects that go with those. So that means, you know, a lot of institutions like to hang onto their funerary objects because it brings notoriety and income from using things like that. A lot of institutions like to take a narrow definition of what cultural association is and drawing upon more than a hundred years of anthropological literature. They're quite often able to say if human remains come from the period before European contact, and they're just universally unaffiliated, which to us is quite annoying because it means that you are here to write down our ancestors didn't exist, basically. So that's part of the reason that we put together our own criteria. It's, you know, bringing together a robust swamp of information that relies on oral history, language, class themes, you know, everything, not just the anthropological literature. A lot of institutions are also reluctant to repatriate associated funerary objects. A lot of them come into the discussion with an extremely narrow view of how far tribal history goes back, even though there's all kinds of evidence that it goes back further. They begin with that view that it does not.

Seth: What has been your best experiences with working with museums, in terms of getting objects repatriated?

Ian: A relationship that we have had with a museum in particular was with the Smithsonian when we repatriated the remains of a woman. We don't know her name. We know that she was the daughter of chief, a former Choctaw by Mobil. Her remains were taken from the Earth, bound by the anthropologist that was about as rationalistic as you can possibly get. I mean, he wrote to the top foundation, 'We see the Choctaw Nation every day in the streets of mobile, scarcely advanced a degree beyond beasts of the field.' That was the viewpoint of the man who desecrating the grave. So, one hundred and fifty years later, we worked with the Smithsonian through the process to repatriate the remains. And we did. And one of the people who works in the repatriation office is one of our tribe members, although she didn't grow up in Oklahoma. So, through this, we were not only able to repatriate this deceased woman's remains, but we were able to build a stronger connection with our own person who was there in that office during their repatriation burial.

Seth: When you encounter, museum professionals who seem very reluctant or opposed to working to return these artifacts like that, how do you counter that argument?

Ian: Now we work with all different groups. And I'd like to reiterate some are fantastic when working with us and we have a great relationship. So far, our conversation has focused on negative ones. When that happens, when we have someone that doesn't want to work with us,

you have to remember that, there in some other part of the country, they may be an anthropologist or a museum professional. They have their own area of knowledge, but nobody has better knowledge of cultural association than the tribes. Nobody has better knowledge of art, history, culture, language, all of them. So, when we get into a disagreement, we always have the better information because it's where we come from. We won't make a claim unless we can answer substantive information that it is related to us.

Seth: How would you like either NAGPRA or just the procedures in general to improve? Can you imagine how you'd want that improved in the future?

Ian: It would be useful to have associated scenery objects as being required to be reburied with what's so called culturally unaffiliated human remains. But in addition to that, it would be extremely helpful if, perhaps in the law or at these federal agencies there was a motivation to provide areas for doing reburials. So, when you repatriate remains, you know, it's coming from a federal collection, and then they are reburied. But if you to bury them on land that is not tribal trust land or not federal land, then they're in great danger of being dug back up. We've had people trying to do that before, like they're at the reburial, hiding just outside so they can come try to dig the remains up again because they think they're buried with treasure. If they do that on federal land and tribal trust it is protected by the Archeological Resources Protection Act and by the tribe itself. So, if they try to dig those up, it's basically a felony, not federally under non trust land. Those laws don't apply. So, we face situations where people dig up those remains and face relatively little penalty. If the law or by some other means more federal agencies were willing to make land available, federally owned land, for reburials, then we would have or take places to rebury. If we repatriate an ancestor from some remote area where the tribe doesn't have a footprint today, that can be a significant challenge, getting them reburied.

Seth: From the research that I've done, there's there seems to be like a bit of a split among a lot of people in terms of when it comes to repatriation, like there are people who are very much in favor of it or very much opposed to it. And I can imagine that can be frustrating to read about when it's your heritage that's being affected by this. So, what are your feelings and I guess what are the feelings of your people from the Choctaw Nation when it comes to this debate in the museum world?

Ian: I would like to reiterate that a lot of groups are tremendous at working with us, and we have built beautiful, longstanding relationships that go way beyond just repatriation branch and all kinds of other things. But in dealing with folks who feel that repatriation isn't important. To me, it's been humanizing ancestors, humanizing people literally from before our tribe's existence. So like family, by taking care of them you show them love. You show love to elders by trying to help their last years be comfortable. Just because someone dies, that doesn't mean that you don't continue to show love to them. So, for us, you still show love to these people by caring for their remains, you know, making sure that they're not bulldozed when they're dug out of the ground and treated as objects rather than as people. That's a violation of human rights from our perspective. That's a significant issue. It's not just that our community is damaged by it. There are instances where we believe damage happens to the people who do those things, not even realizing they're putting themselves in danger.

Seth: Have you noticed a big difference in the conversation around repatriation now than, say, 10 years ago or 20 years ago?

Ian: Twenty years ago, there was certainly a segment of the disciplines of federal collection managers who were willing to work with tribes. What I found is people who have come out of school in the last 15 years or so and moved into those positions also tend to be willing to work

with tribes. Some of the folks that were raised academically, went to grad school back before that time period, are less willing to work with tribes. And so, yes, it's intellectual equals. So overall, as you know, some of the older folks are great to work with. But overall is that cohort retires, I think it becomes easier and easier to establish positive relationships that are repatriation.

**Interview with Daryl Jorgenson, Museum Supervisor with Minnesota Historical Society:
September 24, 2020**

Seth: Can you tell me about your work with Fort Snelling and how they are working with Native American groups there?

Daryl: We have we have different departments that work on projects, and we actually have a Native American initiatives department where they oversee a lot of different subject matters. We have people with our institution who are from these communities who actually work on the project. And I think that's one of the most important things that that they're doing out there for sure, is they're trying their best to have as many voices present in the storytelling as possible. They don't want it to just be one group. They don't want it to be the Minnesota Historical Society having this one voice. They understand history to be a bit more nuanced than that. When they're telling these stories about native peoples, they want that voice in the room and one of the ways that they do that is through our Native American Initiatives Department to help them work on different projects.

Seth: Yeah, it's definitely important to have those voices there and giving their input.

Daryl: Yeah, absolutely. I know that we have we have a council as well. The Minnesota Historical Society does. Besides people who work for us who are from those communities, we also have people who aren't employed by the institution. They're from those communities, but they sit on what is essentially an advisory council. They're not part of the institution, but they influence what we do in a lot of cases. I would say those two groups are especially helpful when it comes to projects like Fort Snelling, where it's an interesting history. There's over ten thousand years of human history at that site. They've been good at telling the variety of stories that exist there, but I would say they've been better at it in recent years as they work towards decolonizing their story. There are people who years and years ago, if they recall their family trip to Fort Snelling, they would probably remember soldiers marching around and maybe they'd run into a fur trader or something there. But the story was much more focused on those people who came in the 1820s. And now I think there's definitely more of a focus on expanding that story and bringing in the voices of the people who were there for hundreds and thousands of years before the soldiers from the US military showed up.

Seth: When you when you tell visitors the whole story, they think you are making it up when really it was the people before who were kind of making it up, right?

Daryl: Well, you'd hope that every site or museum or institution for that sake can tell their own history, their own story of developing with honesty. And if they can tell it with honesty, then you will see change, hopefully. I think those are some of the big points of how it's worked at Fort Snelling. And you can see some of the direct outcomes in the stories that they tell and the other big direct outcome would be in the actual name of the place. In the process of telling all these stories and essentially becoming more self-aware, in some ways, the institution has seen that this spot hasn't always been Fort Snelling. There were people who called it something long before that. And in recent years, the name has actually been changed for us anyways. We've started calling it historic Fort Snelling at Bdote. And you might have seen some of the signage and stuff

in the article. And that's something that a number of institutions are doing, is they're looking at name changes. They're looking at ways to tell the broader story through simple things like that, name changes are something that that can really make a big difference, because when you do that, you are recognizing that there's a broader tale to be told. So Bdote is actually the name that the Dakota peoples who have been in this area in Minnesota for thousands of years, that's the name that they call the place where Fort Snelling was built. It's a confluence of two rivers, the Minnesota in the Mississippi River come together right outside of Fort Snelling. And that is Bdote. And it's a sacred space for the Dakota people. So, in changing the name, there's hopefully a little bit of recognition that this is an important place, not just of the soldiers, it's not just Fort Snelling, not just soldiers and other people who are there, but it's recognizing some of the nuance, some of the complication, some of the grander story that exists in that space.

Seth: When institutions work with the cultures to learn more about the artifacts, I feel like that benefits everyone. Even just providing access to artifacts and resources can make a huge difference. Would you agree?

Daryl: Yes, quite often I'll get emails from people with our Native American Initiatives Group and they will be saying, hey, we're going to have some folks from whatever community in the building. They'll come into the history center and they will do smudging ceremonies and then they will go down to our archives, and they will view objects that that we have, that these communities. I can't say for sure whether or not they've asked for them back, I don't know. But they at least want to come and they want to see them. They're doing these ceremonies, they're recognizing them. I think in a lot of cases, they probably would like them back, but I don't know, because I'm not a part of those communications. But that's another part of it as well that you're absolutely right about. Providing access is key, and I know that we as an institution, we do try to do that because on a regular basis, I get those emails about smudging ceremonies and people coming into the building to view objects.

Seth: Do you have any personal stories of working with native groups?

Daryl: Yeah, yeah, absolutely, I mostly work in public facing projects. So, I think my examples come from programming and we have worked with our Native American initiatives group to develop our classroom lessons that we offer at the Minnesota History Center. We have one lesson in particular that comes to mind. It's called Dakota Children. And, you know, with the pandemic and everything that's going on, we're not offering lessons at the moment. There's nobody going on field trips right now. But before all of that, we had a lesson called Dakota Children. And we worked very specifically with our Native American Initiatives group. We tell the stories of two children who are growing up, a boy and a girl, and their personal stories. But we also include a lot of role playing and a lot of teaching moments where the kids who are in the class can participate and they can sort of reenact these stories from these children's lives. It's been a very positive experience, at least for me, working with these groups, because, maybe this is this is personal opinion, but this is not a story that I wouldn't even want to tell on my own to do the research and then write something. Sure, I could, but I don't think that's fair. And I don't think that I'm the right person for that job. I think that some people need to recognize that when they're doing their work, and that's part of decolonizing your thought process. No matter how qualified you are, you could have your PhD and you could absolutely know it all. You could tell that story yourself, but maybe you shouldn't. Yeah, so we worked with our internal groups and we also had some people from the Dakota and Ojibwe communities working with us on writing this. It's been a very positive experience. I would say one of the things that I'm trying to think of

a difficulty in the process, one of the things that was a bit difficult was just trying to coordinate all of this and bringing it together.

Daryl: You know, the other thing that comes to mind as I'm thinking about this is recently, we actually hired a Native American playwright to come up with some stories or short plays that we can perform in our museum. And again, this is part of that larger discussion of decolonization through inclusion and presenting these stories and presenting them in a way that they're actually prepared by the community. We've hired this guy to write these stories, and it's been great, it's a very positive experience. And again, it takes a lot of back and forth because we have to tell the writer or whoever you're working with from the community that this is what we're trying to do. This is our goal. This is the kind of program. And then you have to be ready to adapt because they're going to tell the story in the way that they think it should be told. So, I think it does have to be a situation where groups are flexible, they're working together. That stands in the example of our lesson as well. I'd say the lesson and the plays were two examples of where we working together and we had to revisit things, you know. Folks might say this is the way that the story needs to be told, and then we might say something like, well, we only have 40 minutes, 50 minutes, so we need to change it somehow. And it's just a matter of working together with these groups.

Daryl: A good exhibit that was just developed, is in our History Center Museum. It's called our home native Minnesota. And it is an example of our museum telling. We're not telling or presenting Ojibwe and Dakota stories, but we're doing it through their voice. We had people from the Dakota and the Ojibwe community write these stories. They helped us put together the exhibit. The exhibit itself is presented in three languages. It's Dakota, Ojibwe and English, which again, I think is another step towards decolonizing in providing access through way of presentation. I think that's a really, really cool example of how our institution as a whole has done this working together with those community groups. My experience comes on a much smaller scale, like, building a lesson that we're going to offer to second graders or working with a playwright and having to be flexible to tell the stories within the confines of our program. That's the kind of thing that I personally have done. But this exhibit is a much larger example of how our institution has done the same kind of thing.