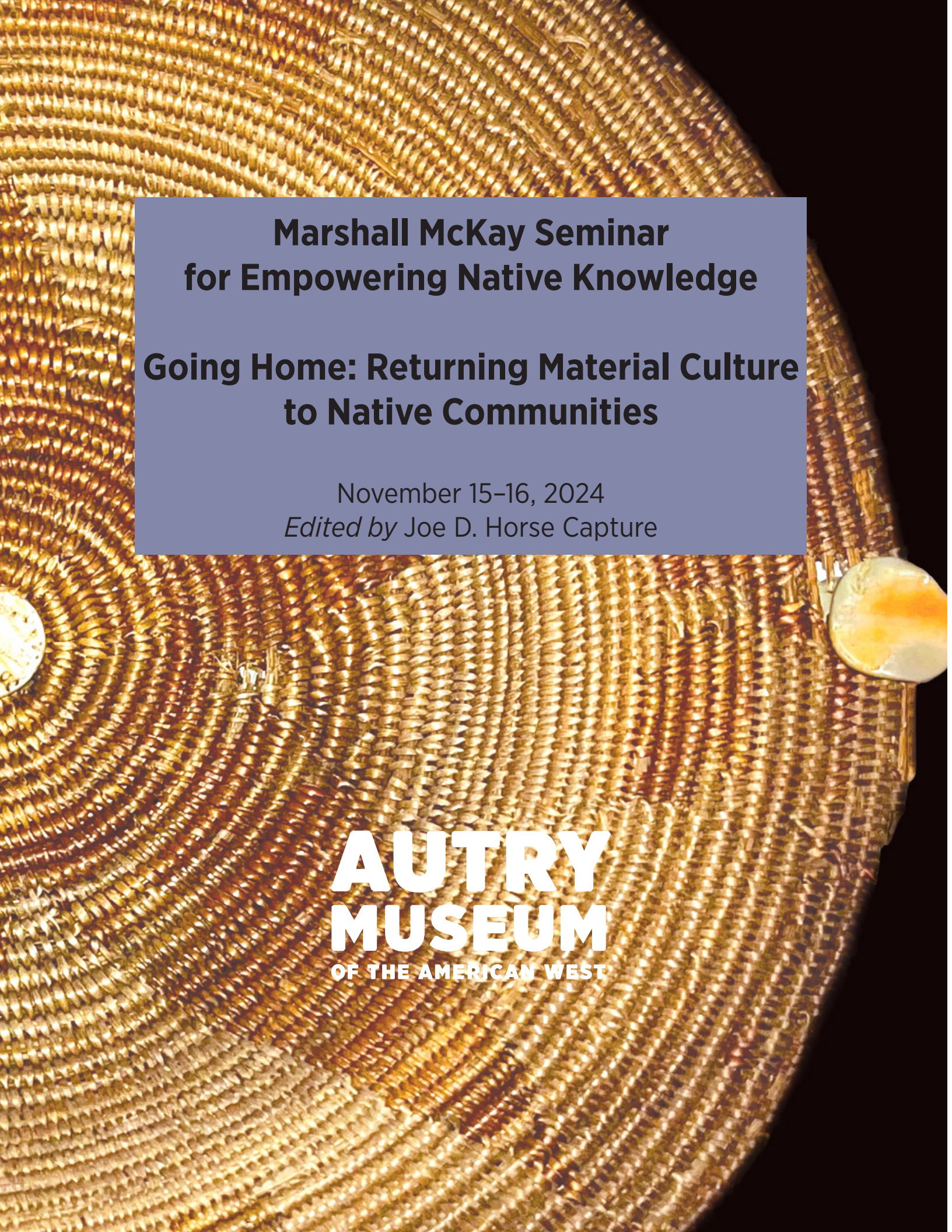

Marshall McKay Seminar for Empowering Native Knowledge

Going Home: Returning Material Culture to Native Communities

November 15–16, 2024

Edited by Joe D. Horse Capture

AUTRY MUSEUM
OF THE AMERICAN WEST

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Autry Museum of the American West
4700 Western Heritage Way
Los Angeles, CA 90027-1462
323.667.2000
TheAutry.org

Copyeditor: Jennifer A. Doyle
Proofreader: Marlene Head
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Introduction

Joe Horse Capture

Through the generous support of the Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation, the Autry Museum of the American West held the third annual Marshall McKay Seminar for Empowering Native Knowledge on November 15–16, 2024. Named in honor of Marshall McKay, former chairman of the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation Tribal Council and the first Native American to serve as chair of the Autry's board, the Marshall McKay Seminar for Empowering Native Knowledge seeks to empower Native knowledge by exploring topics that impact Native communities and beyond. Developed in partnership with the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums (ATALM), the 2024 seminar theme was "Going Home: Returning Material Culture to Native Communities."

The topic for the seminar was conceived a year earlier. With the revisions to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in January 2024, the opportunity to explore this topic further was timely. NAGPRA addresses institutions and organizations that receive federal funds; however, there is no established repatriation mechanism for private collections that may hold Native materials they want to return. The Going Home Fund, managed by ATALM, is a portal that facilitates the voluntary return of Native cultural materials to their communities of origin. The Fund serves as a conduit, providing financial support, increasing public awareness, and enhancing the efficacy of tribal museums.

The first day of the seminar laid the groundwork for the second day, which addressed the ATALM Going Home Fund. Participants included tribal historic preservation officers, museum directors, artists, and curators. Following is the seminar schedule and list of presenters:

Friday, November 15, 2024

Director's Welcome

- Stephen Aron, Calvin and Marilyn Gross Director and President and CEO, Autry Museum of the American West

What Is Cultural Patrimony?

- Aaron Brien (Crow), Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, Crow Tribe
- James Pepper Henry (Kaw Nation), Consultant and former Director of the First Americans Museum
- Panel Discussion

Voices From the Community: Recipients of Repatriated Items
- Jordan Dresser (Northern Arapaho), Collections Engagement Manager, Fort Collins Museum of Discovery
- Weshoyot Alvitre (Tongva), Artist
- Gerald Clarke (Cahuilla), Artist
- Panel Discussion

Understanding the Challenges of Returning Cultural Heritage Items
- James Bier (Chumash), Director, Santa Ynez Chumash Museum and Cultural Center
- Michael Black Wolf (Aaniiihnen), Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, Fort Belknap Indian Community
- Sven Haakanson Jr. (Sugpiaq), Professor and Curator, University of Washington
- Panel Discussion

Saturday, November 16, 2024

Welcome and Introduction
- Joe Horse Capture (A'aniiih), Vice President of Native Collections, Chief Curator, and Ahmanson Curator of History and Culture, Autry Museum of the American West

International Repatriation Efforts
- Nancy E. Weiss, Senior Fellow, American University College of Law
- Lyssa C. Stapleton, Director, The Waystation Initiative, Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, University of California–Los Angeles
- Henrietta Lidchi, Director, Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian
- Panel Discussion

Repatriation and Introduction of ATALM's Going Home Fund
- W. Richard West Jr. (Cheyenne/Arapaho), President and CEO Emeritus, Autry Museum of the American West, and Founding Director and Director Emeritus, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution
- Shana Bushyhead Condill (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians), Executive Director, Museum of the Cherokee People
- Evan Mathis, Director of Collections and Exhibitions, Museum of the Cherokee People
- Jordan Poorman Cocker (Kiowa), Curator of Indigenous Art, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art
- Panel Discussion

In this publication, you will find essays and edited transcripts of all the presentations, including the panel discussions, which were moderated by Amanda K. Wixon (Chickasaw), Autry Museum Associate Curator of Native History and Culture, and me. It is our hope that the knowledge transmitted in the seminar will impact more people than those who attended in person. Both days of the gathering were live streamed on the internet, and this publication will be distributed to tribal college libraries and Native community centers across the country. Many incredible people were willing to share their knowledge and time with us, and it is our responsibility to share what they have given. To view the videos of the seminar, please scan the QR code at the end of this introduction.

An event like the Marshall McKay Seminar for Empowering Native Knowledge takes a group effort at many levels. I would first like to thank our good friends at Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation, who have supported all the McKay Seminars over the past three years. I am equally thankful to the presenters, who generously shared their knowledge and perspectives. A big thank-you to Susan Feller, President/CEO of the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums, for the collaborative effort on this critical topic. W. Richard West Jr., former Director of the Autry, has played an important role in what we do. I appreciate his wisdom and direction as we move forward. I am eternally grateful for the efforts of the following Autry staff members: Amanda K. Wixon, Associate Curator of Native History and Culture; Karimah Richardson, Associate Curator of Anthropology and Repatriation Supervisor; Ben Fitzsimmons, Associate Director of Programs and Research; Laura Florio, Senior Director of Advancement, Foundation and Government Giving; LaLeña Lewark, Vice President of Exhibitions, Collections, and Conservation; and Quyen Tran, Audiovisual Specialist. I would also like to thank Taylor Felt, Associate Design Director, who created the catalog's visual identity, and Jennifer A. Doyle, Communications and Publications Associate, for the organization and editing of this publication.

In 2021, the first year of Stephen Aron's tenure as the Autry's Director, I proposed an idea to create an annual seminar that would delve into significant topics on Native culture. We would not only live stream the proceedings but also create a publication that would be distributed to tribal college libraries and community centers free of charge. To my surprise, he agreed. Thank you, Steve, for your continued support.

TheAutry.org/Marshall-Mckay-Seminar

Director's Welcome

Stephen Aron

I'm Stephen Aron, and as the Calvin and Marilyn Gross Director of the Autry Museum of the American West, I have the honor and privilege of welcoming everyone to the third annual Marshall McKay Seminar for Empowering Native Knowledge. I also have the honor and privilege of acknowledging the Gabrielino/Tongva people as the traditional land caretakers of the place where we come together today to pay our respects to their ancestors, elders, and relations. Words of acknowledgment and respect, I always emphasize, matter; what matters more are programs such as this one that put words into action—in this case, for the empowerment of Native knowledge.

It is fitting that a seminar established to provide a forum for empowering Native knowledge is named in honor of Marshall McKay, who played such a key role in service of that goal and in the revitalization of California Indian peoples and cultures. Marshall also played a vital role in the evolution of the Autry Museum. Here, where he chaired the board of trustees and where he, working with our board, our staff, and under the directorship of W. Richard West Jr., reconfigured the relationship between this museum and Native communities—in California and beyond.

In pursuit of that goal and in meeting other challenges, Marshall McKay was a firm believer in having these important discussions for the benefit of Native people and the public. For the McKay Seminar, we sent nearly one hundred invitations to Native community centers and tribal colleges to join us online for a live stream. The proceedings of this seminar will be published and distributed free of charge to this same group. In this seminar and throughout the Autry, we are committed to being a place where challenging discussions may be addressed in a respectful manner that serves all of us.

I want to thank Joe Horse Capture for his herculean efforts in assembling this program. I would also like to acknowledge our guests who traveled long distances to be with us to share their knowledge. We are delighted, too, to partner with the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums to present this seminar, and host a special panel kicked off by Rick West, who will speak about the ATALM Going Home Fund. We extend our thanks to Rick for rearranging his schedule to be here. Last, but certainly not least, this seminar—as well as many of the Native engagement and empowerment projects undertaken by the Autry—would not be possible without the generous support of the Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation. Thank you, thank you, thank you, Tribal Chair and Autry Board Member Lynn Valbuena.

Today and tomorrow, we take up the topic of "returns"—that is, from museums back to Indigenous communities of origin, both here and internationally. In

another setting, where the emphasis isn't on empowering Native knowledge, the focus could be on the legal mandate of the 1990 NAGPRA, CalNAGPRA, or now the 2024 NAGPRA. That is not, however, the purpose of this seminar. Instead, we hope that by inviting a distinguished and knowledgeable group of presenters, we will learn more about the "life cycle" of returning cultural items to their home communities. From exploring understandings of cultural patrimony to the ATALM Going Home Fund, we aim for a forum that will provide valuable insights for museum professionals, tribal historic preservation officers, collectors, scholars, students, and the public. I know I am particularly eager to learn more, not about the law but about our ethical responsibilities to the descendants of these works.

Indeed, those ethical responsibilities weigh particularly heavily on me—because I am the director of a museum with collections subject to return and because I am a historian. As a historian, I approach repatriation matters by looking backward. That includes examining the history of this museum and its Native collections, dating back to the ways in which these collections were handled before federal regulations and before there was much thought given to bringing Native people into the conversation about how their creations should be collected, conserved, interpreted, and exhibited. Probably because I'm a historian and *not* a lawyer, I'm more concerned with setting things right historically than with fulfilling rightful legal obligations. I believe the Autry took a big step in the direction of setting things right historically with the adoption in 2022 of a new Management of Native Collections Policy that mandates consultation, collaboration, and consent from Native communities (and their designated officers) in how we collect, conserve, interpret, exhibit, loan, and provide access to the Native heritage we steward. I believe that the Native Collections Policy provides a blueprint for how this museum should approach returns. I look to these proceedings to help me and us learn how we should take the next steps and move forward in carrying out our obligations to set things right historically, to return not what we must but what we should, and, more important, to reach an even better understanding about how we should safeguard what we hold.

What Is Cultural Patrimony?

Aaron Brien
James Pepper Henry

Apsaalooktatchia Ishbinnaache Iiwaaatchiluuk Crow Shields: A Case Study of Patrimony

Aaron Brien

As a tribal historic preservation officer, I admittedly paused to reconsider what cultural patrimony means when I was asked to present at this seminar. Today, I will demonstrate my view of cultural patrimony using Crow shields currently housed at the Field Museum of Natural History. Anthropologist S. C. Simms collected forty-four shields from the Crow Reservation in the summers of 1902 and 1903, purchasing them for only $591. He identified thirty of them; fourteen are unidentified, meaning they don't have ownership names or an indication of who they belong to. In the latter cases, the shields were typically bought from the families or descendants of the original owner, and there is some question as to how Simms acquired them. Sometimes, they were obtained under suspicious circumstances. We know this because Simms kept decent notes and actually told on himself in certain instances. To provide a sense of Simms's impact, Robert Lowie, a renowned anthropologist and ethnographer, visited the Crow Reservation in the early 1910s and 1920s to locate some shields but could only find fewer than a dozen. Lowie commented that Simms wiped out the Crow Reservation's supply of shields.

Shields are made from a single piece of rawhide and heated as they dry. During the drying process, the rawhide shrinks and becomes thicker. The thickest shield I have seen was about three-quarters of an inch thick, and the thinnest was about a quarter of an inch thick. A shield's thickness depends on the time the maker puts into it. Shields are typically passed down from father to son, or in some cases, to the wife or widow.

When I viewed shields at the Field Museum, I saw documents stating that they did not qualify as tribal objects of patrimony because they were not considered sacred. That's far from the truth. One of the things I wanted to do when I started examining these shields was gather as much data about them as possible; however, I found that there was no specific information. When I asked Crow elders about the shields, they did not seem to know much. They said things such as, "Well, I heard somebody had a shield at one time," since the person had [passed away in] 1902. The latest account, from the 1930s, involved a man named William Wildschut, who had purchased two or three shields.

I found that people actually knew about shields, but their knowledge was fractionated. That is, it was placed throughout other narratives. As I visited with people, I had to learn how to reframe my questions. You can't walk up to someone and say, "Tell me about shields because I don't know anything about them." So you reframe your query differently to extract information and figure out how the response fits the narrative.

Fig. 1. A shield belonging to Charges Strong (Aalaahuuwaatchaachish in Crow language), the author's great-great-grandfather. Charges Strong was a member of the Apsáalooke (Crow) warrior society known as the Lumpwood Society and was called Iitche a Kulat, which translates as "carries a pipe." This honorific likely referred to the pipe of a war leader, similar to a general. Charges Strong was known for his role in the Battle of the Rosebud, which occurred a few days before the Battle of Little Bighorn. Courtesy of the Field Museum © The Field Museum, Image No. A115383d_001, Cat. No. 71753.1. Photography by John Weinstein

This shield belongs to Charges Strong (fig. 1). I'm his descendant; he's my grandmother's grandfather—my great-great-grandfather—and he died in the early 1920s when he was in his early eighties. The shield features squiggly green lines that represent what they call a *dakshak*, which means "war honor." According to Crow belief, when a warrior returns to the camp after battle, he'll signal to the camp that he was successful by riding in a zigzag fashion and they're to prepare for the warrior's homecoming. Therefore, these squiggly lines indicate that the warrior was victorious in battle, each line representing a success. The green dots on either side represent the weasel. Crows believe animals that can live in two worlds have power—the weasel can live both underground and on the ground's surface. In contrast, humans are obliged to live in only one place on top of the earth. Our first name as Crow people is, Awáakiiwilaxpaake, "People on Top of the Earth." We find value in amphibious creatures that can live in the water and on land, in the sky and on land, or are nocturnal yet also active during the day. As a result, a weasel motif often appears on Crow shields; green holes or circles represent weasel holes. The pendant attached to the shield belongs to the Lumpwood Society. Charges Strong's shield tells a story about him, revealing his victorious battle deeds and his affiliation with a war society. These motifs and objects provide a sense of what a shield can reveal about an individual.

Although I don't know the origin of the name, Wúakbaalaaxish literally means "Crazy Sister-In-Law." He is my grandmother's great-grandfather and the father of the famous Pretty Shield. [Author and ethnographer Frank Bird Linderman wrote a popular 1932 biography of Pretty Shield's life titled *Pretty-shield: Medicine Woman of the Crows.*] Pretty Shield is my grandmother's grandmother. Crazy Sister-In-Law had spiritual power, which they call Qabalia. He says it was given to him directly by Qabalia, "God the First Worker." In Crow belief, we don't signify God as male or female, just Akbaatatdia. It's not often that someone receives something directly from the Creator. We believe in a form of animism in the way anthropology uses the term "animism," but it's not quite the same.

Crazy Sister-In-Law (see fig. 2) was a well-known warrior and very successful in battle. An honor song composed for him reflects his deeds. Some of the words of that song are, "That Crazy Sister-In-Law. You came close to them, you were wounded . . ." The song repeats that lyric, which means he was wounded many times. There are also red markings on the green and black areas, which represent rifles; each marking symbolizes a time he stole an enemy's weapon. Taking an enemy's weapon without harming them is one of the highest honors in Crow belief. Within this system, one can imagine what warfare looked like back in the day.

In the center of Crazy Sister-In-Law's shield is a horseshoe, which represents the time he captured a picketed horse, meaning it was tied to a lodge. This was not a horse that was kept with the herd; it was a prized horse. Pretty Shield said her dad painted his face and body yellow in a zigzag pattern, representing heat waves on the ground. His medicine was the burrowing owl, the long-legged owl that lives with the prairie dogs. The owl feathers are painted yellow.

I had never seen the shield in person, so the experience was powerful because I already knew the stories connected with it. This is the actual shield that Pretty Shield is named after. That shield had initially belonged to Crazy Sister-In-Law's father, Little Boy Strikes of the Lance, who passed it down to his son. Pretty Shield was then named by her grandfather after that shield, which features very bright, vibrant colors.

Fig. 2. A shield belonging to Crazy Sister-In-Law (Wúakbaalaaxish in Crow language), the great-grandfather of the author's grandmother. Crazy Sister-In-Law was one of the most respected leaders of his time, achieving the Apsáalooke military rank of Iipche Akeé (pipe owner) or Iipche Akkulee (pipe carrier). Courtesy of the Field Museum © The Field Museum, Image No. A115364d_002, Cat. No. 71741.1. Photography by John Weinstein

Shields are sacred objects. Can we all agree on that? One of the misconceptions I want to correct is the belief that women have no say or role in ceremonies and rites, but the opposite is true in Crow belief. We cannot conduct any ceremony or ritual without a woman's presence. Some of our most revered beliefs center women. What we believe in as Crow people is the concept of a ceremonial pair. If you don't have a husband, wife, or partner, you have no arm—you're regarded as a person with one arm. To be successful, you must have that partnership. To own sacred objects, you must be part of a pair. If you're single, things are not often transferred or given to you, even rights. You're skipped over because you lack an arm. Both men and women must have a partner.

I want to ensure people understand that despite the belief that women can't touch shields, that is not the case for Crow people. There is freedom within ceremonial customs for women to hold these objects. When we visited the Field Museum and began handling the shields, I wanted my sister, who was with me, to hold the shield of her ancestors. She panicked because everyone was like, "Oh, she can't do it." And I'm like, "That's not true."

In Pretty Shield's biography, she said she was named on the fourth day of her life. Pretty Shield translates to Ishbinnaachitchish in Crow language, which means on the fourth day of her life, her grandfather gave her a name. We receive good fortune from the names we are given.

This naming process is important because it reenacts a story about the Seven Buffalo Bulls, which is also known as the Big Dipper. In that story, the first bull bore a child, threw him in the air, and the child experienced this four times. On the fourth time, the head bull, Bisheeshikaakish, said, "I'm going to name this child Buffalo Boy." And they said, "Why did you do that? Why did you name him that? He's a human. Why did you name him?" And he said, "Dalaak Alachishish," which means "because we love our children." So that's the Crow belief.

When you name a kid today, you pick the kid up four times, and the last time you pick them up you will name the child. I mention this because in 1885 when the Crow census was tallied, there were people with the name "Shielded," meaning they were named after a sacred object, someone's personal shield. Someone decided to name those individuals after this holy object so they would receive good fortune. By 1900, those names dwindled substantially. By 1930, there were four shields left, and the individuals who had names that included shields were all gone. This is important because the practice of that holy object was left to the Crow people. That also meant that all the information about the shields, including the practice of naming people after a shield, was lost. The simple fact that that object left meant those things went with it. That I was able to see those objects again meant somebody started talking about shields again, and other people were able to see them. The reintroduction of those shields brought back a lot of that information.

The current definition of cultural patrimony does not fully encompass the beliefs of Native people. With this presentation, I hope you understand that although these Crow shields do not fit the current definition, the removal of these items has had a profound impact on the people and communities in which they originated. Please consider this when working with tribal people.

Iⁿ’zhúje’waxóbe: Return of the Sacred Red Rock

James Pepper Henry

I’m going to tell you a little story about a rock. And it’s not just any rock. Cultural patrimony is a fancy way of saying that an item is communally owned and cannot be owned or sold by an individual to someone else. That is a colonial way of thinking. I’m going to address something that *we* belong to. This item does not belong to my people—my people belong to this item. And it is something that cannot be separated from us.

This is the story of Iⁿ’zhúje’waxóbe. In my language—the Kaw language—Iⁿ’zhúje’waxóbe means the “Rock that is connected to the Creator” or “Sacred Red Rock.” This rock has been important to the Kaw people for many centuries. It used to lie at the confluence of the Kansas River and Shunganunga Creek in Kansas, and a glacier most likely carried it there from what is now Minnesota tens of thousands of years ago. The rock is very unusual because it is composed of red quartzite. That red color would have stood out on the green of the prairie in central Kansas, and people would have been attracted to the rock because of its size and color. There is a photo of the stone in Robinson Park next to city hall in Lawrence, Kansas. And I’ll tell you how the stone got there.

In the early 1990s when I was a young man, my great-uncle, Luther Pepper, was vice chairman of the Kaw Nation, and I was a tribal historic preservation officer (THPO). During a visit to Kansas, he said, “Jim, have you heard about the sacred red rock?” I said, “I don’t know much about it.” He replied, “Well, I’m going to take you to visit Iⁿ’zhúje’waxóbe.” And he did. We visited a park in Lawrence, Kansas, next to city hall (fig. 1). I didn’t know what to expect when he said “sacred red rock.” I thought it was a little stone. When I saw it, it was very imposing, and I knew right away why our people had an affinity for it. It embodied the qualities of the Creator: it was strong, resilient, and had persevered over time.

The stone is fifteen feet tall and weighs about twenty-eight tons; it’s not small. My great-uncle told me the story about the stone. It used to lie near our traditional villages, on the Kansas River, and we would gather at the stone. We did not pray to or worship it; it was like a church or an altar, and we had many songs that we would sing at the stone in honor of *Wakanda*, or the Creator. The early settlers who came to that area were aware of the stone, and they knew of its importance. In fact, they called it Kaw Prayer Rock. In the 1840s, the Kaw people were removed from that area in Kansas to another reservation in the state and eventually to Oklahoma in 1873. The City of Lawrence was founded, not uncoincidentally, after we were removed from the area. The locals knew about the stone. So they erased us. They removed us from the land, and they

made a concerted effort to eradicate anything associated with us, including the memory of us. This stone was one of the important items associated with the Kaw people.

Topeka and Lawrence had a little competition about who would take the stone for their city park. Lawrence got there first, and the story goes that they brought a mule train down to the river, loaded the stone onto a cart, transported it to a rail car on a nearby train, and then moved it to Lawrence. They placed a giant bronze plaque on the stone, dedicating it to the hardships

Fig. 1. The Kaw sacred red rock, Iⁿ'zhúje'waxóbe, in Lawrence City Park before its relocation to tribal homelands. Courtesy of James Pepper Henry

of the abolitionists who came to Kansas seeking freedom and prosperity. These abolitionists from New England migrated to Kansas for their freedom. Then they took our freedom away from us, moved us into Indian territory, and took one of the most important items of cultural patrimony from our community.

Interestingly, a local reporter recorded our visit to the stone almost thirty years ago. There is a picture of me with it, taken when I saw the rock for the first time. Our visit to the stone left an impression on me, and I told my great-uncle, "Someday that stone will come back to us, or we will come back to it, and we will be its rightful stewards again."

Some folks who managed the Kansas River took tribal members on a river trip to where the stone originated before it was relocated to Lawrence. In my tribe, when you remove something from the land, you leave a void and must replace it with something else. The descendants of these settlers took the stone from its original location, leaving a void. We held a small ceremony there to fill the void left by the stone when it was taken nearly one hundred years

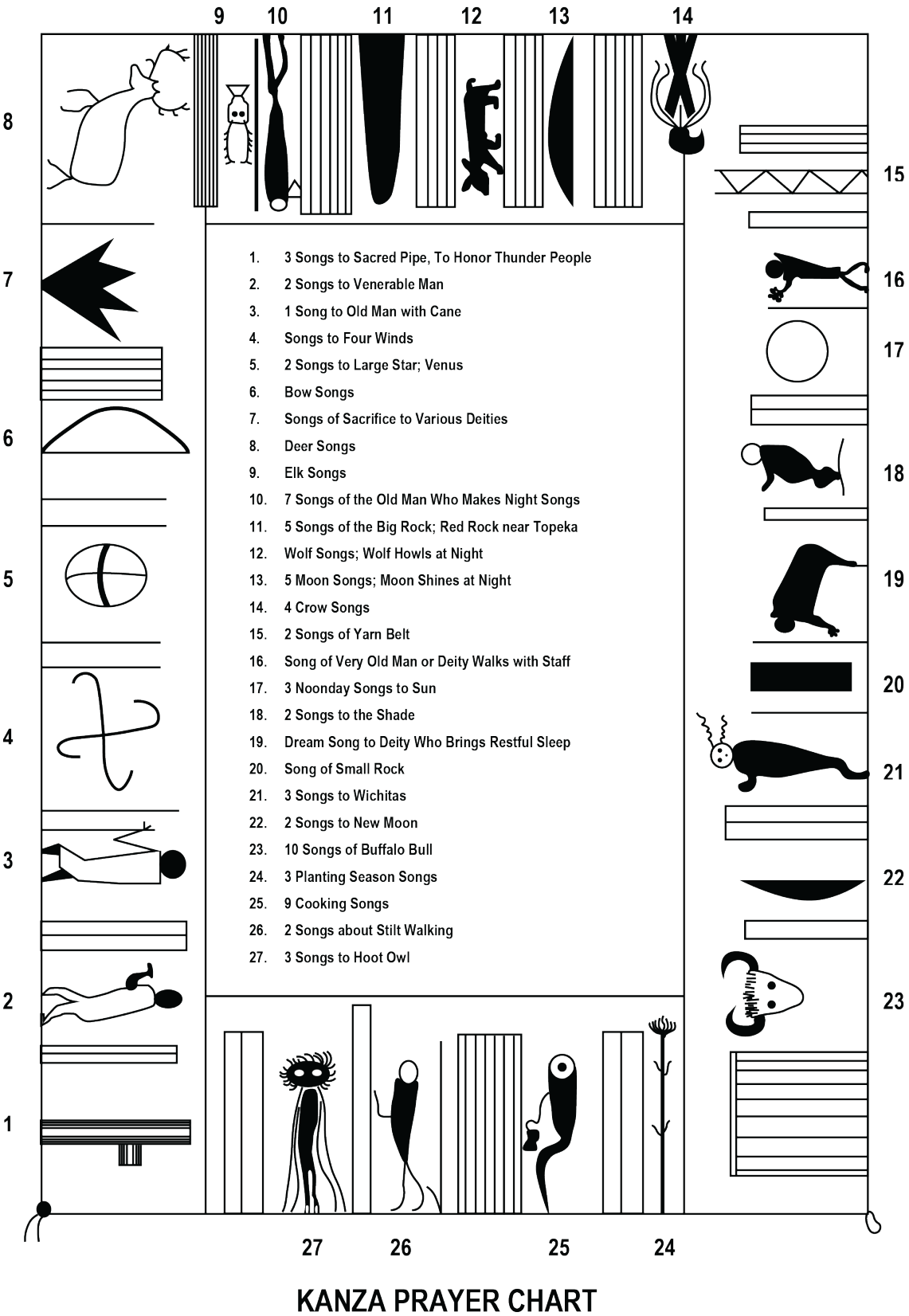

Fig. 2. Diagram of a Kanza prayer chart from a medicine pouch collected in the 1820s. The iconography represents songs, or prayers, that are sung in a specific order. The dark columnar object at the top of the chart (under the numeral “11”) is the sacred stone, which has been documented over a long period. Courtesy of James Pepper Henry

ago. My great-uncle told me that there are spirit villages along the riverbank where our people go when they join the Spirit World, and that stone was a way to notify the other tribes that our spirit villages were there and to respect that area (fig. 2).

In 1929, the settler descendants removed the stone from that spot and set it in Robinson Park. They placed a giant bronze plaque on the stone, which reads, “To the pioneers of Kansas, who, in devotion to human freedom, came into a wilderness, suffered hardships and faced dangers and death to found this state in righteousness.”

Before Lewis and Clark came through, and before these settlers arrived, my tribe’s population was about 20,000, according to Spanish expedition reports. The influx of European settlers eradicated the bison that sustained us and brought diseases such as smallpox, typhoid, cholera, and diphtheria, from which our people had no natural immunity. Over 95 percent of the tribe died from disease and starvation during this short period of time. By 1920, the number of our tribal members had decreased to 194; the rest had either been wiped out by pioneers with their diseases or murdered by settlers to take our land. I am a descendant of those last 194 people. So it’s just a slap in the face to take something so sacred and important to our tribe, put a bronze plaque on it, and dedicate it to the people who eliminated us from the land. Ironically, just a few years after they placed that plaque on the stone, three African Americans were lynched in the same park.

I was determined to get the stone back and began the process thirty years ago. For many decades, the city of Lawrence ignored our requests to return the stone. But something interesting happened. I ran for vice chairman, and one of the platforms of my campaign was to propose to the tribal council that we reclaim our stone. Around the same time, George Floyd was murdered, and the removal of Confederate monuments began around the country. The city council became a lot more receptive to listening to us and considering the stone’s importance to the Kaw Nation. They realized they were wrong.

That caught the attention of the Mellon Foundation, which became aware of the Kaw Nation’s efforts to return the rock through community advocates in Lawrence and the University of Kansas, who brought our endeavor to the foundation’s attention. The Mellon Foundation reserved approximately $250 million in grants to award communities for the reconciliation of Confederate monuments. Mellon is one of those foundations that you don’t approach. Instead, they come to you and request that you apply for a grant. They asked us, “If the city were to return the stone, how much would it cost to [physically] return it to the Kaw Nation?” We wanted to move it out of the park, obviously, so I said, “Two hundred fifty thousand dollars would probably do it. We have some tribal land in Kansas where we’re going to move the stone.” The Mellon Foundation gave us $5 million.

In early 2022, the Lawrence City Council announced its agreement to return the stone. They even issued an apology for taking the stone in the first place. The first thing we did was remove the plaque from the stone. We held a public ceremony to formally acknowledge ownership in the Western colonial way. It was great. Some community members helped us. We thought, *How is this thing on here? Is it bolted on? How did they adhere it?* When we began removing the plaque, it literally fell off the stone. The stone was ready for the plaque to be removed.

But the descendants of the settlers still had a connection with the plaque. Several tribal members wanted to either drag it down the middle of the street or melt it down. We decided that the plaque is the cultural patrimony of the descendants of the original pioneers of that community. So we loaned the plaque to a local museum indefinitely, allowing people to have a monument to their settler ancestors still while we have our stone back. We held a ceremony in Lawrence to honor the stone's relocation to the Kaw Nation, and I delivered a speech. We then held a community friendship dance to foster good relations. For the most part, the community supported us.

Fig. 3. Iⁿ'zhúje'waxóbe back in its Kaw Nation homelands. Courtesy of James Pepper Henry

We had to make an important decision: Do we bring the stone to Oklahoma for our people there? We thought, *Well, we didn't want to be in Oklahoma, so why should we bring the stone to Oklahoma?* It needs to stay in Kansas, and since we have some tribal land that we purchased years ago, we brought the stone there. With the Mellon funds, we upgraded our tribal park, Allegawaho Memorial Heritage Park, to highlight and interpret Kaw items of cultural patrimony. The stone was taken there (fig. 3), where it joins other monuments on our tribal lands, including a Kaw warrior's tomb that the locals built after we were removed from Kansas. They discovered a grave near a creek that had eroded the land and found the remains of what they believed was a chief. In 1925, they erected a thirty-foot stone monument to this warrior. We had some historic stone houses there, the remnants of an old interpreter's house, and a

dance arbor that was built through a grant from the State of Kansas. We go back a few times a year to visit and dance. I hope we can return permanently to our ancestral homelands in the future.

I view the return of Iⁿ'zhúje'waxóbe as an act of tribal sovereignty. The Kaw Nation is asserting its authority and "ownership" over places and items considered sacred to our people or that hold cultural and historical significance. It is the responsibility of the Kaw Nation and its tribal citizens to protect and preserve places and items of cultural patrimony—the tangible and intangible things that we belong to. If we don't protect our language, cultural lifeways, and historic places and items, we are in danger of losing them forever, and we cease to exist as Kaw people.

What Is Cultural Patrimony?

Panel Discussion

Joe Horse Capture:
Thank you for your presentations. They were interesting, and the way they sort of fit together was perfect because they're kind of interesting ends of a spectrum. Aaron, the shields were part of the community and then taken, only to be viewed privately in a museum and in collections, not necessarily by tribal members. Whereas opposed to the stone, which was taken from where it lived and then put on public view for non-Native consumption in a way. I find it interesting how both of those [experiences] sort of contrast with one another.

So the challenge is, what is cultural patrimony? The definition that I read talks about items that are for the common good of the tribe, or for use, or important to the tribe as a whole. Certainly, the rock fits that [definition], whereas the shields by that definition do not. However, Aaron, the story you told is how the individual, I'm assuming, gets a shield through a visionary experience and then it becomes part of the family, the family [lineage ends], and [the shield] becomes part of the community. And as you mentioned particularly with the census, how [its importance] grows larger and larger and larger. How does our audience understand what cultural patrimony is? Even if we can define it, how do we wrap our heads around it?

James Pepper Henry:
The stone is not something made by humans; we look at it as made by the Creator. Whereas shields are made by humans, but they're imbued with a living spirit, with a life-force power. At the First Americans Museum, we have an entire exhibit called *WINIKO: Life of an Object*, which literally means the living spirit in everything. When these things [were] made either for ceremonial purposes or for loved ones, they weren't made for trade or sale, or [to be] put in a museum. We try to respect that when we're stewards of collections. And museums try to understand that these [objects] weren't made to be in this facility. When there's an opportunity for them to come home and be cared for in the proper way, we try to facilitate that opportunity. But we also have to understand a lot of these things that are made by people are not meant to be sustained in perpetuity.

They have a life cycle; they have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Sometimes we preserve things beyond their life cycle. We've artificially sustained these things. I think of another example of cultural patrimony. Have you heard of Zuni war gods? Those were meant—even totem poles in the Pacific Northwest—they were made to go back into the elements so they may have a life cycle. So we have to consider that, too. Regarding repatriation, I remember working in the old Museum of the American Indian, and George Heye—one man—collected all these objects. He passed away in the 1950s, but his essence is still there. I remember somebody, a tribal elder from Arizona, came by and said something about museum people in general. He said that what you try to possess will possess you eventually, because we think of owning these things and keeping them forever. And you have to realize that these things weren't meant for that purpose.

Aaron Brien:
The way I was thinking about it, it's hard to sum up for anyone to believe. In the terms that anthropology and museum studies use, there's a lot more complexity than that. Whether a shield or a big rock, they are both made up of the same organism. The way Crows believe is that our society is like an organism; it's a living organism, and it's always 100 percent full. It's always 100 percent in function. It's whether those [functions] are negative or positive. If you remove an object from that organism, or a narrative, or a system, society will fill itself with something else.

To me, patrimony is anything that makes up that organism that's originally from us. Unfortunately, we have negatives on the reservation now, substance abuse and things like that. Those forces aren't extras to a society; they are just replacements for things that were there to begin with. So that organism is still functioning, but it's functioning within that, whatever that is. So, you remove a shield, and that organism is going to replace it with something, and it's not always positive.

Horse Capture:
That goes back to what each of you said. Now that the rock is back, there's a greater responsibility. And Aaron, I think you mentioned that your exposure to the shields, including an exhibition of some of the shields, illustrates that there is a greater responsibility to care for them. You mentioned that the image of the shield, sort of like a family crest, kind of empowers this responsibility as well. We know the story of the rock that came back to the community. What's the future of the shields?

Brien:
We want them back. Because now that we know the responsibility of them, the way they return has to be [properly] cleared; we can't just return them. There are descendants of those people, the shields. We should go to them first and see if there are people, families that want [them], because I don't want to bring holy objects back to the Crow Reservation just to be stored again. The idea is to perpetuate something, and if they can be used as objects, then that's what I would want. And I'm in favor of the tribe as a whole [being] second, if the families can't take them. So it's a long process.

That is ideally the plan, because we now know what comes with it. I became a preservation officer when the Crow exhibition [*Apsáalooke Women and Warriors*, 2020] was going to the Carnegie Museum of Art. Because I had interacted with the shields so much and with the people who held the knowledge that was left, I was no longer in favor of the exhibit because I now understood it.

Pepper Henry:
I wanted to add one thing. We were talking about cultural patrimony, about physical objects, but cultural patrimony can also be intellectual. I think of our Kaw language as cultural patrimony. It belongs to us. It's intangible, but it's our language. We see others trying to appropriate our language. I feel very strongly that we belong to our language but in the Western way, that language belongs to us. I think of that as cultural patrimony, too.

Horse Capture:
All right, so let's just sort of flip this around a little bit, and I don't know if I can answer this question. What is *not* cultural patrimony?

Pepper Henry:
The way that it's written in the NAGPRA regulations, if an item is owned by an individual and it was individual property, it's not community property. Technically, that wouldn't be an item of cultural patrimony, but if it's so significant to the community [that] it shouldn't be conveyed to a collector or anybody else, you could fit that into the definition of cultural patrimony. If I have a pair of beaded moccasins, that's my personal property. I could sell those beaded moccasins if I wanted to. I don't have to have permission from the entire community to sell the beaded moccasins. So that's kind of the quick definition of cultural patrimony: things that are not owned by individuals. But we know that there are things that were owned by individuals that are so important to the tribe now that [the items have] become cultural patrimony.

Brien:
I would say, yeah, things that are owned by individuals, but that's not how we function.

Horse Capture:
What I'm thinking about is much like what Jim said. When these items are taken from the community and put into a museum, essentially they're in a time capsule. We have conservators and curators like myself, who sort of watch over them, but they are [in a] little time capsule. The tribe outside of this time capsule continues to move on and move forward and builds on these traditions. And as they change and respond and think about what items they no longer have in their possession, these items which were individually owned, in a way, take [on] a life of their own; they become community owned. So cultural patrimony, as I see it, is different from when it is collected compared to how tribes respond to it now, which often reflects the importance of cultural knowledge embedded in these works.

Pepper Henry:
Well, I think time does have an impact on the definition of cultural patrimony because we've lost so much. A lot of our tribes have lost so much that those individual items have now become national treasures of our community. So, I think it does change. Just like you're an employee of the Autry Museum, but you can't go and sell that podium there because it belongs to the institution. So that would be cultural patrimony. But if you brought your own laptop to work or something like that, that's your individual [item]. But I think over time that has changed because we've lost so much that things that did belong to an individual or a small group of people have now become so important to that community.

Brien:
Unfortunately, there are a lot of items that belong to Crow people in museums all over the world. Every tribe has to prioritize what they can do and be realistic about how fast things can happen. The shields are on the list [of items to be repatriated], and we're talking with people and communities about getting them back. That's why I've put a lot on the individual families in their efforts to do things. And we would act as support because the list is so long because of how much collectors took; they came and just wiped us out. That is why we are better off [repatriating] certain things like [objects from] the Crow Tobacco Society. We're focusing on

items like that because we have a place for them. Right now, we don't have a place for the shields. The reason is that we don't want to necessarily bring items back just to put them in a Crow Museum so that Crow people can have them closer in proximity.

Because of our beliefs today, we're so influenced by the church that there are a lot of Crows who are afraid of these items in museums. Among the cultural people, there is a debate about the handling of sacred objects and their role in the community now because we're afraid of ourselves. That's not a problem that's unique to the Crows. It's everywhere. We are not even willing to reintroduce ourselves to these things in some cases. We need to get past that perspective before we can have anything come home, getting people to believe in themselves again. This is the issue today.

Voices From the Community: Recipients of Repatriated Items

Jordan Dresser
Weshoyot Alvitre
Gerald Clarke

Feather by Feather:
The Power of Repatriations on the Wind River Reservation

Jordan Dresser

I am a filmmaker, but my background is in journalism. My career began with print journalism many years ago and evolved into storytelling. That is how I look at museum work. Everything else is just storytelling in different forms. My work with repatriation began by accident. I am an enrolled member of the Northern Arapaho, but I am also part of the Shoshone Tribe through my mother's lineage. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in journalism, I returned home to the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming, where I began working at the Wind River Hotel Casino. The Northern Arapaho Tribe made history as one of the first tribes without a state compact, or agreement. We went to federal court and won the right to operate our casino without the state's input. Over time, the casino grew, and we planned to build a hotel. The tribal CEO at the time was eager to establish a cultural room, and he tasked me with implementing it. That process started these conversations because, honestly, none of us knew what we were doing. We slowly started amassing different objects.

I heard about a collection that belonged to the local Episcopal church. During the Early Reservation era, a deacon collected several objects from Northern Arapaho tribal members, and the objects were displayed in a small museum at the church in Ethete, located at the heart of the reservation. The museum eventually collapsed, and all the items were returned to the church's physical headquarters in Casper, Wyoming. I kept hearing about this, and so we inquired with the church about returning some items to our community. None of us knew how the repatriation process worked. The church told us no. We inquired about a loan, and they agreed to lend twenty items. It is funny looking back now, as I was in my twenties when we started this journey, and I just recently turned forty. We laugh about it because the Episcopal church asked us, "Do you have a collections policy?" We would lie, "Yeah, we do." Then we would turn to our co-workers and say, "Google 'collections policy.'"

This experience was the basis for the Wind River Virtual Museum, a project that incorporated Northern Arapaho objects from the Field Museum in Chicago. Wyoming PBS approached me about creating a virtual museum. I said, "You know, that kind of works. It is perfect timing because we are building our cultural room at the casino." They replied, "All right, let's do it together." So, we did. In 2012, we visited the Field Museum in Chicago for a consultation. During this visit, we captured 360-degree images of some Northern Arapaho items, which were uploaded to a kiosk at Central Wyoming College in Riverton, Wyoming. Importantly, the objects were interpreted in the Arapaho and Shoshone languages, as well as in English. The kiosk relayed the meaning behind the items, which resonated with a younger generation, a connection that was essential. I was very fortunate to go on this trip and to witness these

different things. But most importantly, the Field Museum visit raised the question of who owns the material and nonmaterial culture. Does it belong to the tribes?

During this time, we asked the Field Museum whether we could potentially bring the items back to our tribe. They said, “Well, let’s talk about those down the road,” which to me meant no. This experience served as the basis for the film *What Was Ours.* The film premiered in 2016 on the PBS documentary program *Independent Lens*, chronicling the tribe’s journey not only to the Chicago Field Museum but also to the Episcopal church. I was very fortunate to be a part of it.

I joined our tribe’s THPO [Tribal Historic Preservation Office] family in 2018 as a collections manager, overseeing cataloging. Most importantly, I began actively participating in the repatriation board. In 2020, I became chairman of the Northern Arapaho Tribe. During my tenure, I really pushed the tribe to engage in repatriation efforts and museum planning. Wyoming had a bishop at the time who called and asked me to come to Casper. I met with him, and he was vague about what he wanted. He said, “I watched the film. We would love to potentially renovate the circle there at the Episcopal church (the historical buildings of the original church site) and potentially do something with the museum.” I expressed my interest and explicitly said we would love to participate in conversations and consultations; however, it was never clear what would happen with the items.

Then, in 2024, a dream came true. We received a loan of the items we wanted, and in the end, the Episcopal church came back to us and said they were giving all the objects to us. People always ask whether this gift was a result of NAGPRA. From our understanding, when the deacon passed away, she left the objects to the Episcopal church in her will; however, upon further review, it was discovered that she had left the objects to the bishop at the time. Then that bishop passed. Do the objects then go to the next bishop? In the end, the church said, “We just don’t want that trouble.” We received all the items in September, marking a truly historic moment for us. People always ask where the items are going to go. When items return home, it is up to the tribe to decide where they want them and what to do with them. Hopefully, the objects will serve as the basis for the museum at the Episcopal church site, which will tell a story about what it means to be Arapaho.

We completed another repatriation in 2017. For years, Yufna Soldier Wolf, a Northern Arapaho tribal citizen and repatriation specialist, wanted to bring back the remains of children from the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. That was the dream of the Soldier Wolf family. Yufna approached the Army many years ago, and they said, “No. Are there any living descendants who could vouch for this?” She said, “Yes. Three boys died there. We are their living descendants.” My favorite story about that is she and two of the elders received word that the Army was holding a consultation in Spokane the next day. So they drove all night. When they arrived, the Army said, “Well, which tribes are ready? Which tribes did the work?” She said, “’Everything got quiet. And I just took off my backpack and went up there.’” She had three hundred signed affidavits. So Yufna and the elders were successful, and in 2017 we brought back two of the boys. However, there was a mix-up: one of the boys was not in one of the grave sites. We had to navigate that incident.

When I was chairman of the tribe, the Army reached out to me again and said there was a boy there. He was part of that original group because there were no living descendants. I said, “Well, what if I made the claim on behalf of the entire tribe because we are all related in

different ways?" The Army agreed. So last year, we brought back that last boy. All of them are now home.

It makes my heart feel good to see tribes repatriating their children buried at Carlisle every year now. Initially, the process of working with the Army was challenging because they wanted to restrain us. However, we documented the entire process and filmed a documentary titled *Home From School: The Children of Carlisle*, which was released in 2019. The Army was very restrictive about what we could document. But we persisted; "This film is for us."

Fig. 1. Northern Arapaho tribal members with donor Temple Smith in 2020 during the repatriation of a Northern Arapaho headdress. Smith's family inherited the headdress from a relative who served as a dentist on the Wind River Reservation in the late 1800s. Pictured from left (standing): Brian Soundingsides, Jordan Dresser, Devin Oldman, Jerel Kohler, and Crystal C'Bearing. Seated: Patrick Moss, Samuel Dresser, and Temple Smith. Courtesy of Jordan Dresser

Another significant aspect the documentary explores is the role of private collectors. How do we navigate that world? There are still good people out there. It is just a matter of making connections with them.

Right before the pandemic hit in 2020, I was the collections manager for the THPO. I received an email that said there is a guy with a headdress or something who is trying to get

in touch with someone. Then I got a phone call from one of the cooks at the Senior Center, and she said, “You need to call this number right now.” It was this collector in Marblehead, Massachusetts, who said, “I have a headdress that belongs to one of your chiefs. I am willing to give it to you, but you have to come get it now.” That was around Christmas. We made our plans, flew out there, picked up the headdress, and drove it home (fig. 1). The experience was powerful. We deliberately proceeded in that way because we felt doing so gave the headdress, first and foremost, respect, and second, acclimated him to the world. Because if you think about it, he had been in an attic for many years, and then here he was. I kept wondering, *What would he think of us? How is he going to react to us because we are so different?* We held an unveiling, and he is on display now.

Tribes are at a major crossroads, which is a good thing. They face issues such as, What do we do with these items? and How do we continue to tell stories in meaningful ways? I work at the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery, where I see every day the power of museums and how we can make them inclusive spaces. In the end, these repatriations brought life into our communities, which was much needed. I have immense respect for people who do this work, including all the THPOs and all the Natives who have been in the museum field for a long time, such as Joe Horse Capture.

I was told by someone that you give a little of yourself for these items to come back home. If I were to describe repatriation, it is like a ceremony. You must take care of yourself. I am unsure how much longer I can physically do this work, which is why it is crucial to train the tribe’s next generation in the repatriation process. I am very fortunate that our tribe is forward-thinking about repatriations; they see the value in it. But most of all, they say, “You young ones go out with our blessings.” That is important. It tells a story about our resilience.

I just discussed Carlisle, a museum, and a private collector. But in the end, I always think we are fragmented as Native people; there are pieces of us everywhere—culturally, physically, and mentally. It is our job to piece them together again. When we do, maybe we will not recognize what we see. But over time we will warm to it, and it will warm up to us as well. Hopefully, it will unlock things that we need to learn about ourselves and the future.

Home

Weshoyot Alvitre

On a daily basis, over 4,000 auction listings of “Indian baskets” are up for the highest bidder on eBay. As of 2024, Native nations within the United States have lost 99 percent of their traditional tribal lands. How much of their material culture remains intact after so much loss?

Not all the baskets sold on secondary markets are ours. Many are of East Asian or African manufacture or mass-market replicas. Some are made by non-Natives trying to dupe collectors. Others are Native-woven in nontraditional materials out of necessity. In the same way that most people living on tribal lands are not endemic to the places they reside, many baskets are copies or mislabeled and cash in on age-old curio markets, which sure love that “Mission basket” label.

Our realities as Native people mirror those issues of our baskets: displaced, misnamed, misidentified, lost, hidden, stolen, damaged, missing, and more. You know, the first time I held anything woven by our tribe was at the Autry Museum’s Parks Research Center just a few years ago. So what does “going home” mean when you have no real place to return to and are part of the diaspora of displacement as well as a culturally mixed mindset? Grasping at straws, so to speak. Or, in this case, grasping at *Juncus*.

The closest I could get to “**home**” was within the walls of a newly renovated archive deep in Los Angeles, Yaangna, an hour-and-a-half drive on a good day from my **home** on Chumash territory up north. This archive, with a long-standing history and ties to the Southwest Museum, was previously inaccessible to tribal communities or within the concept of “**home**.”

My relationship with fiber arts, weaving, and basketry has been on-again, off-again since I was young. In 2022, I shared a story during this seminar about Mabel McKay staying at our house when I was a kid to give a lecture on basketry under the corrugated metal rooftop of the converted horse-watering stable at Satwiwa, a land once shared by Chumash and Tongva/Gabrielino, a land once walked upon by Spanish soldiers on horses. The story of Mabel at my **home** was one I hadn’t even heard until the book *Mabel McKay: Weaving the Dream* came into my life in my thirties, and the story revealed itself after some questions about a star quilt in family photos led down the rabbit hole of my dad’s memories.

When I was growing up, my aunt visited often and always had a bag full of fibers and things to keep her hands busy. I never knew exactly what these

things were for, but I knew she attended and taught workshops and classes with her best friend, Sisquoc, and I always wished she lived closer because the classes sounded so wonderful, and I desperately wanted to learn.

Later, when I started reading books written by anthropologists about our tribe, I began learning about the materials we used and how none were easy to find today because most of the places they had grown had been decimated and destroyed. My dad's cynicisms kicked in. I was angry about having something taken away from me before I could even attempt to embrace it. I was angry about the desecration of our lands and all those things tied into it. I was distraught and conflicted over this underlying sadness I had regarding "**home**." Why did I feel a dull ache of loss when I had a **home**? What was I missing?

It's never fun to start from a place of pain when you're seeking a place and an object of beauty. This has been my relationship with basketry and with growing up as a Native person with no tribal lands. This has been my experience as an artist trying to communicate these things in my head under the world's laws regarding who can make art if they don't have all their pedigree tags for the dog show.

And so, I was always somehow missing a piece of "**home**." I never sought out *Juncus textilis* because I was told the only close patches were deep in thickets of poison oak, down in the canyons of a **home** we were forced to move out of and away from. I didn't know what deergrass was or how to differentiate it from the other grasses the deer ate where I grew up. This was another layer of trauma to add to my upbringing, which took me a very long time not to be both angry and sad about.

As I grew older and decided to take on the responsibility of creating culturally and tribally informed artwork, the world of basketry returned to me through a collaborator who I now call a friend, Chag Lowry. My first challenge was not to bring my negative view of "basketry revitalization being unattainable" to the table. My view, shaped by so many roadblocks passed down from my dad and family, which then tinted the lens of my glasses and worldview, was something I challenged myself to overcome in writing when Chag offered me this opportunity. I was in no way hopeful, but I do enjoy trying difficult things.

The project was a comic book co-writing project with Chag titled *My Sisters* (2020), written from the perspectives of baskets as ancestors and the dual narratives of an uplifting, healthy relationship to basketry from Chag's Northern California family and tribal viewpoint. This perception was countered by a difficult two pages of me attempting to write about the roadblocks my scattered Southern California tribal community has had accessing plants and revitalizing weaving. That hurdle opened so many doors, allowing me to see things in a new way. I will always reiterate how grateful I am to have had that challenge from Chag and the immense changes I have been able to see in real time in just a few years, both in my own perspective and in the blossoming of our community and its revitalization of basketry, collectively and individually.

Around the same time as *My Sisters*, I was approached by two Cahuilla elders, both basket weavers, to illustrate the creation story of how their people learned weaving from the Moon

Maiden, Elka Menyille. I worked alongside Lorene Sisquoc and Rose Ann Hamilton for several months to learn more about their community relationship as well as listen to their family stories about the baskets their ancestors wove. Some of their stories were beautiful and eye-opening, such as how much of their traditional stories and techniques are intact, unlike ours. And some of it was heartbreaking, especially to hear that many weavers do not have baskets left in the care and keeping of their families. Through conversations, I learned that the objects collectors assigned monetary value to were sold to help keep families from starvation, allowing them just the means to survive during the difficult times of Indian relocation and the Early Reservation era. This included many of the historic baskets that were tied in and loaned to this project.

Some of the stories I heard during our Zoom meetings overlapped with my readings on the work of George Wharton James, author and basket collector. The art collaboration with Cahuilla elders was for a larger exhibition, in which many Cahuilla baskets would be displayed, including one by Ramona Lubo (Lugos), her famous star basket. During that time, I reread *Ramona* (1884) by Helen Hunt Jackson and dove into the historical accounts of the curio basket trade in Southern California. I devoured source materials and downloaded JSTOR articles on borrowed college log-in time from a Zoom class I took from Palomar during the pandemic. I learned the story of Ramona Lubo's star basket and how everything she called **home** was taken from her in an instant, including the basket that represented this concept and her husband in the spirit world. That time of displacement in the late 1900s resonated with me on a very emotional level.

During this time, a basket attributed to Ramona popped up on eBay (fig.1). I had wrapped up the Elka Menyille project with Rose Ann and Lorene and had just received the final payment for completing the artwork. I was shocked that a basket with provenance such as this would be on a site like eBay, and of course, I was a bit skeptical as many baskets with star patterns have been attributed to Ramona over the years. I immediately tried to message the seller of the basket to find out more. In the back of my mind, I knew that time was against me, as someone could have used the "Buy It Now" feature and the basket could easily be scooped up and placed back into a private collection. I also found the timing of it all so strangely in sync.

The seller turned out to be a good friend of a well-known collector in basketry circles. He was kind to answer my numerous questions about the basket's history and the different owners whose hands it had passed through over the years. I also did some digging in Facebook basket groups I was part of and found previous postings sharing the basket from several years back, confirming the provenance of those collectors who had previously owned it. The two earliest owners of the basket had since passed away, so my search hit a dead end.

Ultimately, my thoughts were that this basket held such tremendous cultural value. And I was in a place where I knew it needed to return to the Cahuilla community in some way. Yet I was at a loss whether Ramona's descendants were still around and whether they had an interest in the family history of something like this. And what was the best way to go about this? What was the best way to return this basket **home**? The countdown clock on my end was ticking away with each eBay notification of a new auction watcher, the potential of someone buying it at any time rising with each alert.

Fig. 1. The Ramona basket. Courtesy of Gerald Clarke

I got very lucky. Or I was guided. Or both. Maybe I just hyperfixated and cared a little too much, a lot too much. I hit that “Buy It Now” button and spent a good portion of the check I received for the Elka Menyille project. Shoot first, figure it out later—vaquero instincts. I had never spent so much on anything except maybe my used car. I purchased the basket. It sat with me for several months, and then I reached out to Rose Ann again to see if she might have any knowledge about Ramona’s family connections. Her recommendation led me to Gerald Clarke, a Cahuilla artist. It turned out he was her family. Small world, huh? And the rest is

history, as they say. Or a very well-documented story that I felt a little shy about sharing in an article written by Gerald's daughter, Emily Clarke, in *News from Native California*. The basket returned **home**.

Many times, so many times, these baskets are gone in an instant. Many times, so many times, these items, which can be traced back to communities, are bought up in a flash, hidden away for decades on the shelves of collectors' **homes**. Many times, so many times, the families tied to pieces that actually still contain provenance are unaware of the existence of these items. Most of the time, those connected are never in a position where purchasing such an item is within their means.

Over the years, I have seen crowdfunding efforts to bring items **home**. I have seen families track down their heritage at pawn shops and online at LiveAuctioneers, people coming together and pitching in to bring a *single item* back from the chaos of the collectors' market and back into the **homes** where they are kept as deep, important memorials to ancestors—sometimes with names and sometimes not. But always with a story.

Unfortunately, I have seen a far greater number of mislabeled baskets slide through the cracks, and rare baskets reach insane final auction numbers. I know these items will continue to be absent from their communities, relegated instead as the next latest, greatest prize via FedEx-insured package for those who have loads of disposable income, a hobby in Indian baskets, and a big empty space in their **home** they are trying to fill. I have been in local warehouses and collections and had verbal disagreements with antique dealers who told me to my face that "Native people should be thankful collectors have kept their things safe for so long." And then, of course, there is the long-standing history of museums and archive donations and archival ownership. None of these compartments holding our items are **home**.

Travis Hudson wrote a book in the '80s that matter-of-factly stated which museums worldwide had what and what the best tribal affiliation for the objects might be. (You know, for future use.) Ethics in this strange world of museum culture, anthropology, and the deconstruction of the Indian in all ways, shapes, and forms are not something many possess or uphold. What he did during his time was pretty "punk" for someone in his shoes. He laid the groundwork for those of us looking, providing breadcrumbs thrown from outside the gates, which are normally locked to keep the Indians outside, so they won't try to free their family members who are in solitary confinement and get them back **home** for ceremony.

No matter which way you try to spin it—through the history of collections, to the history of commercialization of the basket as an object, to the history of the basket as an art form—the current state of the basket *is* our living history. The basket is the key to teaching nonlinear ways to our people, our kids, our communities, our lands, and those people who did not have these connections growing up. When we sat there, weaving anything together in strange ways and unsure why these things were calling, these objects became microcosms of what it means to be **home** and feel **at home**.

When I was around ten or eleven years old, we moved for the third time. My parents were friends with most of the neighbors on our street, and one couple moved and threw a going-away party. I didn't know them well. I remember the woman's strange yellow permed hair.

At the time, I would go to the beach park near our house with my mom, and I developed a fascination with the dune grass. Eventually I collected some and wove a small basket. I took it with me to the neighbor's party because I felt that if these neighbors were good friends of my parents, I should give them a gift of some sort. And because we often didn't have disposable income, I always made things instead of buying them.

I gave them that basket. I remember them thanking me. I was young enough to be embarrassed but not yet littered with all the insecurities of wealth comparison and self-consciousness that would come soon after. I remember the good feeling. I remember also sitting on the couch afterward and feeling sad about the loss of the basket.

I gave a white Midwestern couple a strange little woven basket I made out of dune grass because I felt it was the right gift to give to good people that day. I don't remember what it looked like. I am sure it was crude. But it reminded me of my **home**. The **home** we had made down near the beach for several years after leaving the **home** in the mountains and the **home** at Satwiwa. The basket made me connect to the beach and this new **home**. And I thought, in that little kid brain of mine, that perhaps it would remind the neighbors of their old **home** once they moved away.

We inherently desire that feeling of comfort and security. In today's world, when so much has been extracted and taken from our communities amid cycles of displacement and harm, sometimes we need to remember that a basket is more than an object—it's someone's time with their hands. It's their knowledge and heart being in a good place to create something beautiful. It's the seasons of gathering materials and the long hours of learning where to collect these items and how to process them. It's mistakes and fixes. It's a reflection of when the plants and people were healthier than they are now. It's a remembrance of the times when, despite all the odds, the creation of a basket could keep food on the table, provide milk for a babe who lost their mother from sickness, and help us to be here now, through the struggle of a thousand coils and the burden of bundle foundations and those stabs of hunger pains and bone awls.

A basket is our ancestors' gift to the world, enveloping everything they have experienced in their lifetime and condensing all the generational knowledge of those who came before, guiding *Juncus* through slivered doorways, bringing us into our present state. Despite collectors putting a price on that, they can never truly put a price on *that*. Baskets are objects of beauty, yes, but most importantly, they represent all things we know as **home**, and what we may strive to return to each year around the sun, each coil around to its herringbone finish until we are no more. They help us remember our ancestors. They allow us to hold our treasures. They keep and cook our food, and they send off the dead and beloved. Baskets are our family if we are ever lucky enough to have one come back to us. Remember that next time you see one on display, alone. Basketry is how we go **home**.

A Personal Repatriation

Gerald Clarke

I am glad that Weshoyot Alvitre presented first because she initiated the process of returning the Ramona basket to my family, and I really appreciate her words. We were friends on social media but had never met in person. Weshoyot, Lorene Sisquoc, Rose Ann Hamilton, and I attended a weaving circle held at the Benton Museum in Claremont, California. Weshoyot asked Rose Ann, a well-respected Cahuilla basket weaver, for assistance in connecting the Ramona basket she had purchased on eBay with its Cahuilla relatives. Rose Ann noted that I was a relative, and Weshoyot invited me to see the basket.

I drove to Ventura, where Weshoyot and I met at her house. We were both wearing masks because of COVID-19. The basket was in a box. I remember when she opened the lid, I was just shocked. I was surprised by how minute the coils were, how delicate the basket was, and how the patina revealed evidence of my ancestors. She then passed the basket to me (fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Gerald Clarke (left) and Weshoyot Alvitre (right) with the Ramona basket. Courtesy of Gerald Clarke

In addition to the basket, Weshoyot provided me with the documentation she had obtained and copies of the messages exchanged with the collector. There was a belief that the two pieces of shell on the basket were probably added later. I showed Rose Ann, and she reflected that one of the unique features of the basket is that its shape is not a typical kind of tray (fig. 2). It resembles the shape of a church collection plate, with a wide shoulder and a dip in the middle. Along with the basket, Weshoyot also gifted me with a rendering of Ramona. Both are in my living room. That is where they live. I placed the basket in a frame to protect it from dust, along with some tobacco leaves (*pivat* in the Cahuilla language).

Fig. 2. The Ramona basket. Courtesy of Gerald Clarke.

The Ramona basket is a little over a hundred years old, and it has a natural patina that is just amazing. When looking at the basket, you see a star-like design, often referred to as a star; however, I always disagree with that interpretation because, if you look closely, you can see that the lines, or rays, are not straight. The rays appear curved, like the petals of a flower. When we pray, we smoke pivat. Indigenous tobacco grows on our reservations, and I also cultivate it. The tobacco plant has a five-point flower that only opens at night, and the pattern on the Ramona basket resembles that shape. That also links it to the idea of an offering plate. I see this as very spiritual, and really special.

When we brought the basket home, the first thing we did was have a feed (a dinner) to honor the basket's return. It was something special. My extended family came to the reservation, and we all gathered in our community hall to eat together. We invited Rose Ann because she was a part of this process. My daughter, Emily, was completing a residency with *News from Native California*, a magazine that publishes articles about California's Indigenous people, and she wrote a story for the magazine about the basket's return home.

My aunts tell me stories about their youth. My grandmother was a basket maker, and many of the women in the tribe were also amazing basket makers. Often, you hear people say, "Well, if they sold it, then they really have no right to ask for it back." "Indian givers," right? My aunts recall that their parents and grandparents had a milk cow and made blocks of cheese to sell to the non-Natives off the reservation to earn a little money. After my grandfather butchered cattle, he would braid the rawhide into old-style lariats, and he would sell them. It was about survival. It is just like the Relocation Act and other things. They say, "Well, you had a choice." Did we really? *Did we really have a choice?* These things were sold for survival.

After we went through the process of getting the basket back to our family, I thought, *You know, we do not have any family heirlooms. Poor people do not have family heirlooms. That is a privilege, right?* Let's flip the coin on cultural patrimony. What does an affluent white American family consider their cultural patrimony? They have their great-grandmother's china and the rifle of great-great-grandpa, who was an Indian fighter. Native people did not have that privilege. What we inherited was our lives, and the miracle that we are still here. Many generations later, we are still here.

Weshoyot mentioned the 1884 novel *Ramona* by Helen Hunt Jackson. There is the novel, and then there is the *Ramona Pageant*, the longest outdoor play in California history, which takes place in Hemet, California, where I was born, not far from the reservation. The staging of the play started in 1923 and centers around the novel and the life of Ramona. I have never seen it. Because I know the real story. And the real story is quite different than the romanticized version. The novel kicked off a huge tourism boom in Southern California. People who read the novel then came here on the railroad to see something about Ramona. Many places claim to be Ramona's birthplace or the location where Ramona and Alejandro married. It is like assembling all the pieces of wood from the original cross that European cathedrals all claim to have to build a cathedral. The *Ramona Pageant* is an erasure of our culture.

But we have the Ramona basket. My family will always be indebted to Weshoyot for this.

One of my elders told me that when I get home, I should talk to the baskets in my living room because they are living things. I talk to them every day. I have two great daughters, and I know they are protective of our culture. I can count on them to ensure that the Ramona basket stays in the family.

Voices From the Community: Recipients of Repatriated Items

Panel Discussion

Joe Horse Capture:
I was thinking about what Aaron Brien said during the "What Is Cultural Patrimony?" session. And I can't remember the exact words that he used, but he said within the tribal community there's a wholeness that is always there. When items leave the community, sometimes those holes can be filled with negative energy. I was thinking about your presentation, Jordan, as well as Weshoyot and Gerald's, and we have several generations of Native folks in communities that are missing those tangible items. But now that some of the objects are returning to communities, how does [the community] become complete again? Maybe some of these communities have these negative effects because the items were gone. How does the reintroduction of those items back into the community help secure the future of our youth?

Jordan Dresser:
I think it shows the bravery of the people. I always think about how sometimes we hear those different things. And when I was a THPO [Tribal Historic Preservation Officer], a lot of us were younger, so when we [had] these conversations, people would be like, "Mmmn. Do you all know what you're doing?" And it was crazy, because I was like, "Okay, well, we all were taught these different ways." I was always taught not to be scared of things if you take care of yourself in a good way. Zona Moss was a Keeper at the time in our tribe, I remember. She once told me, "If there's something Arapaho, that's not going to hurt you." And I always thought that in my head. So I always went through these things thinking, *Okay. This is for everybody else because then, down the road, who's not going to [have to] do it?*

She's like, "We do this work." Especially too, when we brought back those children from Carlisle, that was hard. It [involved] literally digging up their bodies. I watched a kid's skull come up. Those things stick with you forever. But at the same time, she told me, "We're doing this so down the road these kids don't have to. And [so] that they can be whatever they want to be, doctors or whatever. So we get this out of the way so we can clear that trauma." I thought, *Man, you're right. This pain goes somewhere, and in the end it was worth it.*

Horse Capture:
Now that these items have returned, is there an educational process within the community so young people have exposure to the knowledge that's embedded within these items?

Dresser:
When we brought back the items from the Episcopal church, I loved it because [the tribe] had all the elementary school kids there, the high school kids there. And to me, that was just really powerful. It's not only showing the items but also what [the items] can do for them. And to me, that was just so cool. I was just like, "Yeah, this is what this is about." When we went to Carlisle, they made a conscious decision. They're like, "Well, we're going to take elders there, but we want youth to go with them as well, too." And they got to see these different things. And I just really love that connection, because it's like showing them how these items can be used and also what it means for them. So I love that we make it something for them.

Weshoyot Alvitre:
I feel like my position with our tribal community is a little bit different. We have a small area of tribal land that was given back very recently, which is wonderful, but we don't have a cultural center. We don't have tribal land to hold any of these ceremonies on. Everything that belonged to our people in the various villages in Los Angeles County is all what you see today. You're on our land. So I feel in many ways, me, my family, and our community are several steps back from seeing something like this where it's been done. Ancestors have been brought back to the community, and they're buried. And that has happened within our community, however, we have a lot of different roadblocks in the way because our tribe is not federally recognized.

I feel from a very personal level, I can respond to your question. My dad did this work up until he got physically hurt and couldn't do this work anymore. After we moved away, he was very much involved in Southern California Indian work. He was doing monitor work; he was helping with burials, and monitoring sites, and trying to do work, bringing our items home and protecting our items. When he got hurt and moved away, he really cut himself off [from] that because in many ways, he was not mentally and physically able to take those things on with his injury. And I always speak of him and say that without the work that he had done there, I wouldn't be doing the work that I'm doing now. The same thing with my aunt as well. She had put in so many hours in doing this type of work, but it's on such a micro level. We do it so our kids don't have to do it. My dad did it so we didn't [have to].

But I started carrying on some of the work that he couldn't finish because his health became his priority and also became something that didn't allow him to continue this work. I make [it] a fact to communicate this [to] my kids. With everything that I do, I show them. My daughter took the picture of Gerald, and I was explaining like, "Who's that guy? He explained to you who he is." After he left, I educated them, "Okay, this belonged to his great-great-great-grandmother, and was taken away from her, and we don't know why, but that's why he came to pick it up."

And I can only hope that my kids don't have to deal with this when they get older and that they're educated on these things. Also, that they [don't] see all this anger and sadness that I dealt with when I was a kid watching my dad struggle to deal with these things, but they see positivity. And she got to take that picture and see the smile on his face, and I didn't know what to think; that was just a lot of different emotions. But at the end of the day, that picture is there as a representation. My kids can see that and remember that memory, and not think about stuff that maybe was going through my head at the time.

Gerald Clarke:
So we have Cahuilla 101; I miss that class. Just growing up, you just look at your elders and just watch what they do. And it's terrifying being a parent, because you'll say something, and your kid will say two decades later, "Do you remember that time you said . . ." I have no clue. What did I say? So, you have that impact. When we welcomed this basket back, my daughter was there with her nieces. They were all there. And who knows what they thought. But I think it's in their [mental] library upstairs. But these days it happens. Before you know it, people start looking at you to know something as a parent or grandparent. But it doesn't mean it doesn't stick with the kids, because before you know it, you might start seeing basket designs

on skateboard decks, stickers on their lockers, and stuff. And so that's how you know it does have an effect. It's an empowering effect. It's traumatic. It's traumatic in a good way, but it's still trauma really.

I have a great deal of hope for the younger people that they see what people are doing. And I do think that they'll carry it on.

Understanding the Challenges of Returning Cultural Items

James Bier
Michael Black Wolf
Sven Haakanson Jr.

Two Steps Forward: The Challenges and Triumphs of Opening a Tribal Museum

James Bier

I would like to begin by sharing our mission: foster respect, share knowledge, and encourage dialogue about Chumash culture. The Santa Ynez Chumash Museum and Cultural Center connects past and present stories to shape a shared future (fig. 1). We do this by collecting, preserving, and presenting the rich heritage of the Chumash people. I joined the Santa Ynez Chumash Museum and Cultural Center two and a half years ago, initially as a consultant, to help the construction project regain momentum following a long pandemic-

Fig. 1. The Cultural Park of the Santa Ynez Chumash Museum and Cultural Center. Courtesy of the Santa Ynez Chumash Museum and Cultural Center. Photography by James Bier

related pause. At the time, my focus was on assessing the project's status, organizing collections, and initiating exhibition development. As the work progressed and needs grew, my role evolved into that of museum director, guiding a dedicated team toward opening day.

The museum officially opened to the tribal community on April 15, 2025—a day made even more meaningful as it coincided with Maria Solares's birthday [Solares was a revered elder who worked with anthropologists in the nineteenth century to document Chumash culture and language]—and to the public one month later, on May 15, 2025. These two events were the result of focused

Fig. 2. Santa Ynez Chumash Museum and Cultural Center Board of Directors outside of the main entrance of the museum. Courtesy of the Santa Ynez Chumash Museum and Cultural Center. Photography by Nik Blaskovich

collaboration, cultural stewardship, and strong community support. They marked not only a significant institutional milestone but also the beginning of an ongoing dialogue between past and present and between the community and visitors.

The opening has already had a meaningful impact, as the museum has quickly become a space for learning, reflection, and engagement. We have welcomed thousands of visitors, facilitated thoughtful conversations, and created a venue where Chumash stories are shared in respectful and accessible ways. The museum now serves as both a guardian of heritage and a catalyst for deeper understanding.

I currently work with a twelve-member museum board and lead a ten-person team (fig. 2). Together, we continue to shape operational systems, fine-tune policies, and welcome cultural items into the collection. Although staffing and resources are still developing, we have built a solid foundation and a team that rises to meet each day's priorities with purpose.

In the past year alone, we have processed more than 4,000 cultural items—a testament to years of relationship building and negotiation that came to fruition just before our opening. We have also implemented a collections management system, installed exhibition elements, and brought our 3D printing and scanning capabilities online. These tools, initially acquired to produce object mounts, will also play a key role in supporting NAGPRA- and THPO-related efforts.

While every project has its complexities, we focus on steady progress. Our approach has always been solution oriented—whether addressing storage constraints, refining workflows, or finding new ways to meet both institutional goals and community expectations. That flexibility and forward thinking have allowed us to move from vision to reality.

Looking ahead, the Santa Ynez Chumash Museum and Cultural Center is excited to expand its reach and deepen its community partnerships. Our long-term goals include continuing to grow the collection thoughtfully, supporting repatriation efforts, and offering programs that reflect and honor the depth and diversity of Chumash history. The museum is not just a place to visit—it is a resource that belongs to the community and exists to serve future generations.

Serving the People: A THPO's Perspective

Michael Black Wolf

I have been the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) for the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation, located in north-central Montana, since 2014. The region is about as isolated a place as you could get, with an extremely isolated reservation—no major cities or towns. I live on the southern end of the reservation, which is even more isolated than the northern part. So, I live in an extremely rural area, and I commute thirty-six miles one way to work and back home every day.

In January 2014, I was asked to come aboard as the THPO to help our tribes; Fort Belknap is home to the Aaniiihnen (Gros Ventre) and Assiniboine (Nakoda) tribes. There were some challenges with the THPO program at the time. I helped rectify a few situations and have been the THPO ever since. Needless to say, the role definitely required on-the-job training. Oftentimes, we are humbled, and I was asked to do this job because of my cultural upbringing. I was born into my culture, customs, traditions, and Cree language, but with a heavy dose of the Gros Ventre customs, beliefs, and traditions that I learned from my maternal grandfather.

I would not be the person I am today if it were not for both my grandfathers and my paternal grandmother; I always like to mention them whenever I deliver a talk. I did not have the opportunity to meet my maternal grandmother; she passed away before I was born. Numerous paternal aunts and uncles also helped make me who I am. Through this upbringing, I have been immersed in cultural knowledge.

It was humbling to learn about the job, NAGPRA, and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) section 106—all that fun stuff. It has been almost eleven years, and it is the dream job I never knew that I wanted. Before my appointment, I did not realize that for those of us who are THPOs or work with THPOs, there are not enough hours in the day to accomplish what we must do to fulfill our obligations to our People.

In addition to the regular THPO duties at Fort Belknap, one of the office's most difficult hurdles is repatriation and bringing items back home. Due to our infrastructure, or lack thereof, we do not have the financial resources for many things, including a new cultural repository or museum building. Another major hurdle for us, especially at our main tribal headquarters at Fort Belknap Agency, is that the community is tapped out when it comes to infrastructure services, including water, sewer, and other utilities. With those limitations—insufficient finances and a lack of infrastructure—we cannot build a museum, which is quite disheartening.

In January 2024, new NAGPRA regulations were released, making it much easier to repatriate cultural items. There has been recent interest in exploring various repatriation methods to reclaim those items. But it comes back to a lack of resources and infrastructure. Almost every tribe in Montana has gaming, but our gaming is not revenue generating in the traditional sense. Our tribal casino is small—one room—and we probably break even or make a modest profit each fiscal year. We are a grant-driven tribe, meaning we do not have unrestricted funds for projects; instead, most of our funding comes from federal grants, which carry many spending restrictions.

In addition to being the THPO, I am also the NAGPRA representative. As with many THPOs, when we receive funding from the National Park Service to open tribal historic preservation offices, most of us receive only enough funding to cover the THPO's salary and maybe travel expenses for consultations throughout the year. As a result, most of us have no support staff. Luckily, our current tribal council and previous councils have been very supportive over the past eleven years. As difficult as it is, our tribal government has really stepped up to provide additional funding from the tribe's general fund to hire an assistant THPO. We also recently hired an office manager for our program.

Unfortunately, we do not have the resources or time to have fully staffed Tribal Historic Preservation Offices on par with most State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs). When you look at the staff of any respective state, they have the SHPO, an assistant, an archaeologist, an archivist, a historian, and numerous other positions. We want to take advantage of the new NAGPRA regulations; however, we do not have the resources to do so due to a lack of funding and capacity.

We currently have an agreement with the University of Montana, which is located over three hundred miles away, to house some of our items should we want to repatriate. Our tribal college, Aaniiih Nakoda College, has a repository for collections. We have a few items there, but the facility is small.

When we receive inquiries about how to return items to the tribe, which we appreciate, it is often difficult to be unable to bring those items home. Of course, we would like our cultural heritage items returned, but where can we keep them? We will soon have a brainstorming session, to include tribal leaders, members of our tribal college, and other stakeholders, to think about how to move forward on this issue. It is crucial that we not only discuss the return of cultural objects but also establish a place where our People can gather. I hope we will someday have four main cultural centers: one at Fort Belknap Agency, the others at Dodson, which is off the reservation where a lot of our People live, Lodgepole, and Hays. We can hold ceremonies, singing, hand games, and cultural or noncultural activities in these spaces that will help revitalize and keep the two respective cultures going.

Although it can sometimes be discouraging, I will never give up on these ideas because they are too important. I hope we can get something going and bring some of our items back. I recently visited a museum in Montana that had an entire drawer of eagle bone whistles, which are very sacred objects among Plains tribes. These sacred items need to be used or "put away," which would be determined by the tribes. Either way, the objects should not be in museum collections. Spiritual power is still with these items. When a group of THPOs and I visited a collection, a drawer with Society rattles and pipes came out and threw itself on the

floor. You can imagine our surprise, especially considering how sturdy those drawers are. None of us was near them. Those items were telling us they did not want to be there; they wanted to go home.

My story is not unique. Many THPO offices across Indian Country are underfunded and understaffed. Of course, the irony is that these objects were collected [by] and found their way into museums. But these same museums are unwilling to financially assist us in rebuilding what we lost when our ancestors' work left our communities.

Reflections on History, Knowledge, and Cultural Heritage

Sven Haakanson Jr.

Introduction

I invite you to reflect on the relationship between local and global perspectives in how we perceive and understand our histories. What does this history mean to us—to you? For me, history is not just a record of the past; it is the past actively living within us, shaping our present and guiding our future. Every cultural object we care for—whether in libraries, archives, museums, or our homes—carries knowledge and history. This knowledge can help us restore what was taken from us and place our histories in a meaningful, living context that we can learn from, use, and celebrate within our cultures.

But we must ask: How do we use this history? Who decides what is remembered and how it is told? What happens when we confront the uncomfortable truths of the past—when we ask hard questions that challenge our assumptions, identities, and understanding of the world? These are difficult yet necessary questions to reflect on if we are to create meaningful and lasting change in our communities and lives.

How do we use knowledge to move forward? This is where knowledge becomes power. As scholars, you may not always recognize it, but you hold significant influence—the power to share knowledge, shape perspectives, and build a better future. I begin with *our* shared history—our past, our present, our responsibilities, and our future. And when I say "our," I mean all of us—Native and non-Native alike. Moving forward requires mutual effort. We must confront the past honestly, even when it is painful. That pain can be overwhelming; it consumed me during the first eight years of graduate school. It took time for me to understand how powerful and important it is to know one's history, and how to use it to change the present by learning from the past.

Knowledge as Power

I gained a deeper understanding of the power of cultural heritage while living and working with the Nenets reindeer herders of the Yamal Peninsula, Russia, during my doctoral research from 1994 to 1997. I witnessed a living culture in which traditional knowledge, language, beliefs, and ways of being are not just remembered but embodied in daily life (fig. 1). Immersed in the Nenets cultural environment, I experienced what a living culture truly looks like: language, beliefs, and heritage expressed, celebrated, and passed on within their cultural context. This experience opened my eyes to what we should—and could—have on Kodiak Island within my own tribe.

Fig. 1. Indigenous Nenets from Brigade 17. (Brigades are collective family or community groups.) The author worked with members of the Serotetta family in the Yamal Peninsula from 1996 to 1997. Courtesy of Sven Haakanson Jr.

The Nenets culture, as I came to know it, is not a relic of the past. It is a thriving, intergenerational way of life. In contrast, I grew up in a place where our language was forbidden, our cultural heritage stripped away, and our past dismissed as primitive and irrelevant. The Sugpiat of Kodiak, like the Unangan of the Aleutian Islands, have endured some of the most profound cultural disruptions in Alaska. Having survived two waves of colonial encounters, they were forced to set aside much of their cultural history, language, and beliefs to survive.

My journey began when I learned about the archaeology of Kodiak and what it revealed about our past. Sugpiaq history was not written—it was shared orally. But colonial practices suppressed this way of knowing. I wanted to understand and reclaim the history of my community. Through archaeology, I discovered my ancestors had lived on Kodiak for over 7,500 years. Yet we only began learning about this history in the mid-1980s, thanks to the work of Dr. Richard Knecht and the KANA Cultural Center, which later became the Alutiiq Museum.

The challenge now is to understand our history not just as a collection of facts but as something meaningful and alive for our community. This means confronting a colonial past that is often painful. Our ongoing task is to share, celebrate, support, and use this knowledge in ways that help our communities grow and heal.

Colonial History and Its Impact

Alaska experienced two waves of colonial suppression: first Russian, then American. As I studied archaeology, I began reading historical texts to understand how these forces shaped our communities. Some of the earliest English-language accounts, such as those from Captain Cook's 1778 voyage, offer disturbing insights—not necessarily from Cook himself, but from the journals of his officers. One officer in particular, David Samwell, described what they saw and did during their encounter with Native people. His descriptions were dehumanizing and dismissive, as indicated in this passage Samwell wrote in 1778:

> Entering down a ladder made of thick wood with steps cut in it, into a dark and dirty cave seemingly underground, where our noses were instantly saluted with a potent stink of putrid fish which was scattered about the house. We were welcomed into these murky caves by the master of the house and his wife and other females sitting together in one part of the hut; being used to many strange scenes since we left England, we spent no time in staring about us with vacant astonishment but immediately made love to the handsomest woman in company, who to make us welcome refused us no favor she could grant though her husband or father stood by.[1]

When I read this, I was flooded with emotion—*wait, what did he write?* This narrative sounded disturbingly familiar. Just six years later, in 1784, the Russians, under the command of the sea merchant Grigory Shelikhov, would take over our region and claim Alaska for Russia.[2] This incident happened on Kodiak, near where I grew up in Old Harbor. As they crossed Siberia and entered Alaska, the Russians took control of Native communities by taking the leaders' families hostage, forcing others to work and pay tribute to the tsar.

When Shelikhov arrived in Kodiak in August 1784, he followed this same pattern: taking women and children hostage and forcing the men to hunt for food and sea otters. They confiscated weapons, clothing, and angyaat (large, open boats), leaving the people defenseless and unable to escape. Families were torn apart. From Samwell's description—"we spent no time in staring about us . . . but immediately made love to the handsomest woman in company"—we see that they acted without fear of consequence. These are not just stories. They are part of our lived history, and they have not been openly discussed.

Uncovering this history is painful. It brings sadness and anger, especially when you realize what is implied in these written texts. I was angry. But what do you do with that anger beyond acknowledging what our ancestors endured? I had to learn how to manage and refocus it so I wouldn't carry it with me. Sadly, we must go through this process—learning what happened and feeling the weight of it—to understand and, hopefully, change what we can now. That way, the next generation doesn't have to repeat this realization.

These accounts are evidence of what happened. They are part of the legacy we still live with. They force us to ask, Why do we do what we do today? And how can we begin to change it?

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1. J. C. Beaglehole, ed., *The Journals of Captain James Cook, Part II (Volume IV: The Voyage of the* Resolution *and* Discovery, *1776–1780)* (Cambridge University Press for the Hakluyt Society, 1967), 1123.

2. Lydia T. Black, *Russians in Alaska, 1732–1867* (University of Alaska Press, 2004), 104–116.

This kind of self-reflection is essential for our communities to understand our past and to shape a better future.

Rebuilding Knowledge

History is not just about the past. Our living histories shape our present, influence how we are seen and treated, and affect how we see ourselves today. To rebuild what was lost, we must piece together knowledge from scattered sources: historical accounts, archaeological sites, oral histories, and museum collections—many of which are still held outside our communities, even across the world.

After spending time in Siberia, I came to appreciate the practicality and meaning of traditional ways of life. For example, I saw how Indigenous clothing was better suited to the environment than European alternatives. Today, we live in a world where Native people run billion-dollar corporations, celebrate Christianity, and mark the Fourth of July. But these modern identities coexist with a deeper question: How do we reclaim the knowledge and ways of being that were taken from us? And how do we return them to a meaningful, lived context?

This question became central to my work when I joined the Alutiiq Museum in Kodiak, Alaska, in 2000. The first grant I worked on supported a program to bring museum collections to villages across Kodiak. The six communities on the island—Ouzinkie, Port Lions, Larsen Bay, Karluk, Akhiok, and Old Harbor—are accessible only by small planes or boats. For more than thirteen years, I collaborated with each community, bringing traveling exhibitions and projects to share with students and adults. These visits were timed to coincide with “culture weeks” in the schools.

I learned how to teach skin sewing, mask carving, bow making, kayak construction, and the crafting of tools, toys, bowls, and games. I learned from elders, artists, museum collections, and hands-on experimentation. We ensured each project could be completed within a week, allowing participants to see it through from start to finish. These culture weeks became a way to return traditional knowledge to our communities through direct, hands-on experience. I wasn’t just an observer—I was a participant. It’s critical to roll up your sleeves, teach, and learn alongside community members rather than just document the process.

In 1990, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was passed. This law required museums to return human remains, burial and sacred objects, and items of cultural patrimony to their respective communities of origin. It was a critical step in returning our ancestors to their homelands. But more than that, it created space for Native people to access and learn from collections that didn’t fall under the law. Many communities were unaware that these collections even existed.

This is where we must go further. We should collaborate with museums to go beyond legal requirements and build relationships that make collections accessible to our communities. This process takes work, and we cannot wait for museums to initiate it. We must find pathways to collaborate and help return the knowledge embodied in each cultural object. Our youth deserve to know who they are and where they come from. That sense of identity is powerful. Once they have it, no one can take it away from them.

The Angyaaq Project

Over the past two and a half decades, I have traveled the world researching museum collections, working to recover and return knowledge to our communities. One of the most meaningful efforts has been the revival of the angyaaq, a traditional open-sea boat that had been lost to living memory.

While visiting museums, I encountered fifteen model angyaat [the plural form of *angyaaq*], but I had yet to find a full-size one. In 2014, at the Akhiok Kids Camp at Cape Alitak, we began making model angyaat on Kodiak (fig. 2). We built thirteen models, and in doing so, we started to rediscover the engineering behind them. We learned that the angyaaq's bulbous bow design enhances speed and efficiency. Interestingly, modern ocean-going vessels often feature this same design. It is said that this innovation was inspired by Viking ramming ships and credited to David Taylor, who introduced it in the early 1900s for the USS *Delaware* during World War I. But our Sugpiat ancestors had already mastered this design centuries earlier.

After we completed the models, Speridon Sr. (Mitch), the camp leader, said, "Let's make a full-size one." I had no idea how to do it, but said, "Okay, let's figure this out." From fall 2014 to spring 2015, I gathered wood and partnered with communities in Seattle through the Burke

Fig. 2. Model angyaaq builders. In 2014, the author worked with Sugpiaq youth and adults at the Akhiok Kids Camp to construct thirteen model angyaat. These prototypes led to the creation of a full-size angyaaq at the camp in 2016. Courtesy of Sven Haakanson Jr.

Museum to help construct a frame. That summer, I returned to Akhiok, where we completed the angyaaq's frame. Three generations—grandfathers, fathers, and sons—worked side-by-side.

Between 2015 and 2016, we built and completed two full-size angyaat: one at the Burke Museum and the other at the Akhiok Kids Camp at Cape Alitak. The latter was the first full-size angyaaq constructed on Kodiak in more than 156 years (fig. 3).

It is important to recognize that museums do not own the knowledge embodied in these cultural objects—communities do. We have a responsibility to care for this knowledge and return it when communities are ready to engage with it. Museums are caretakers, not owners. The knowledge belongs to the people, and we must ensure it remains accessible to future generations.

Fig. 3. Angyaaq paddling. This angyaaq, paddled by members of the Simeonoff family, was made in 2016 at the Akhiok Kids Camp. It was the first full-size angyaaq made on Kodiak since the 1860s. Courtesy of Sven Haakanson Jr.

Empowering Communities

The Angyaaq Project was never just about building a boat. It was about restoring knowledge to the people it belongs to. We used museum collections not as static displays but as sources of living knowledge. We did not wait for perfect conditions or formal repatriation. We acted. We brought that knowledge back into our communities and made it real again.

What made this work meaningful was that the community owned the process. Not museums. Not me. The people who built the angyaaq—elders, parents, and children—reclaimed that knowledge through their own hands and stories.

This is what it takes: rolling up your sleeves and doing the work. So, I leave you with a challenge. As scholars, how are you using your privilege? How are you helping to create the changes we all know are necessary? The power to transform the future is in your hands.

Understanding the Challenges of Returning Cultural Heritage Items

Panel Discussion

Joe Horse Capture:
Thank you for the great sessions. In your opinions, what are a museum's responsibilities to Native communities outside of just returning objects? Sven addressed the question of access. Mike addressed resources and infrastructure. James, I believe your presentation addressed staffing and training. What should a museum's responsibilities be? Because museums, collectors, a hundred years ago, went and took these works by sometimes unethical means and then built an institution around them. Or sometimes, collectors, like the one Jordan mentioned, want to return the object. They say, "All right, well, we'll give it back." Is that the end of the museum's responsibility? What should their responsibilities be to communities?

James Bier:
My view is, it's a continuous evolution of the narrative of that particular tribe. What story they want to portray, what they want to communicate. I see myself as a facilitator of that, not the creator of the story, but I'm the problem solver. And I'm there to make it happen and to do it with the utmost respect and sensitivity. My formal training was in the fine art world, and in that contrast of where I am now, I would say that I have the wonderful opportunity to contribute my creative approach to solve the problems, [whether that] be coming up with storage solutions or a conservation approach. And the thing is that the term *best practices* for a cultural museum is not the same as best practices for a fine art museum. I think just identifying that difference and respecting it is the foundation of giving that heritage, the cultural heritage, its due respect.

Michael Black Wolf:
Yeah, it's a great question. From my perspective, a responsibility of the museum, ideally a tribal museum, is to have cultural items from their respective tribes and nations closer to home and more readily available for tribal members or family members to access. The reason I say that is that we also repatriated some of our children from Carlisle this past September. And while we were there, we had the opportunity to visit the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

That is where they have the largest collection of Gros Ventre items in the United States. And while we were there, I got to see and hold my great-great-grandfather Black Wolf's replica shield. And Aaron [Brien] is right, the shields were made of one solid piece of rawhide. But among our people, we had replica shields. These were the small shields that Aaron was talking about that do have a wooden hoop. They were made of a thin piece of rawhide, and we would use these to re-enact our war deeds. I got to hold my great-great-grandfather's dance shield and a replica of his lance. It was awesome to be able to hold my great-great-grandfather's items that he created with his own hands.

But I have to go to New York City for that. If we had our own tribal museum, our own tribal archives, available for my children, grandchildren, brothers, sisters, all my relatives, all the descendants of Black Wolf and all the other cultural items that belong to both the Nakoda

and the Aaniiihnen right there at home [that would be ideal]. I think it would be an amazing opportunity, but not only that, a responsibility if we do have tribal museums to have easier access for our tribal members to be able to come and see [their cultural objects], to hold them, to view them, to get ideas on how to make our constructions themselves.

Horse Capture:
Sven, before you answer, I want to reword the question based on James and Michael's responses. So, large museums that hold items from your cultural collections—for example, the Autry, right? We have 237,000 Native American objects in this building. So, museums like the Autry, the American Museum of Natural History, and the Field Museum—the big institutions—what should their responsibilities to communities be?

That's what I initially meant by the question, not tribal museums. So should [mainstream institutions] train folks to work at tribal museums? Should they provide some type of financial support to communities that maybe aren't necessarily positioned now for infrastructure to build a museum? Should they make sure that collections are always accessible, Sven, as you talked about?

Sven Haakanson Jr.:
First, it should be that they provide full access to the community members; that should be just blanket [policy] for every institution. The second is, the financial stuff is always going to be a challenge. I had a museum for thirteen years, and I spent over half the time trying to raise funds to keep the institution open. That's a huge burden on our community to have a museum, a state-of-the-art museum. I spent so much time just trying to make sure that we keep the doors open. We should be spending that time and money on the health of our community first. Yes, I understand the importance of the culture and that knowledge, because it does help create healthier humans. But after working at a state institution, I think about it from a very different perspective now: Why are we putting the burden on the tribal museums to care for these things in perpetuity when these museums, the state-run museums, are funded by tax dollars?

How can we work with the tribal museums so that, yes, we have the collections and museums, but the tribes own it? And how do we care for it? Developing long-term loans or exchanges and then also providing opportunities for community members to come in to learn from the collections, to either re-create or do what they need to do to learn from that and bring it back home, while also not putting that financial burden on the communities. This is something that I've been thinking about [during] the last five years because why are we putting this burden on these communities in perpetuity? It's expensive. We can't afford it. I worry about tribal museums running for so long for a while and then all of a sudden they don't have the money. What happens? And these state museums, [they're] state funded. It's tax dollars. How can we tap into and work with that? That's something I've been thinking about.

Horse Capture:
Now that I've rephrased the question, Mr. Bier, would you like to [respond]?

Bier:
The responsibility would be to fill the void [by recognizing] that each community is unique and working with tribes on a case-by-case basis. It would be ideal if these other museums could assist in housing the works if the tribal museum does not have the room and facilitate training and conservation work so we can care for these items properly. But again, it is [on] a case-by-case basis, and each tribe would need some type of support depending on their unique needs. I think that would be, in my view, not dictating how that should be done, but being there to support whatever they need.

Black Wolfe:
Yeah, so I think an idea would be, obviously, the cost to bring tribal members to museums for training and hands-on work, there's that difficulty, because most of us live great distances away from where our items are housed. So an idea, maybe, for those of us who are fortunate enough to have tribal colleges is to have staff members come to our own lands and provide training for those people who are either in that line of work or interested in that line of work.

Haakanson:
Can I answer? I want to quote Jim [Pepper Henry] really quick: What you try to possess will possess you. That's something to think about. How do we make sure that our tribes and our communities aren't being possessed by museums and that financial burden? How [do] we do this in a way that makes sure we get that knowledge back, but we're not given that burden? Because it's huge. It's not cheap. How do we work with the larger institutions so that we can make sure to provide full access to the communities?

Horse Capture:
All right, thank you.

International Repatriation Efforts

Nancy E. Weiss
Lyssa C. Stapleton
Henrietta Lidchi

Reuniting Native American Communities With Ancestral Heritage by Forging Cross-Border Pathways and Partnerships Among Tribes and International Museums[1]

Nancy E. Weiss

> Today, we welcome home beloved Living Beings
> We, their many relatives, have known them all our lives
> We, their many relatives, have missed them all our lives
>
> —Suzan Shown Harjo,
> "Welcoming Home Living Beings"[2]

Introduction

At the 2024 International Conference of Indigenous Archives, Libraries, and Museums, Suzan Shown Harjo shared a simple yet powerful truth: If you want to get something done, you start by talking about it. When opening the Marshall McKay Seminar for Empowering Native Knowledge, Autry Museum President and CEO Stephen Aron counseled that meaningful change requires the transformation of words into action. Dr. Sven Haakanson Jr., curator of Native American anthropology at the Burke Museum of Natural History, subsequently observed that there is no better time to act than the present. Together, these voices call on us to not only envision a future in which tribal communities are reunited with their ancestral heritage but also take purposeful steps toward realizing that future today.

To manifest change, you thus need to seek out the "doers"—the individuals and groups who will transform ideas into action. I have been fortunate to work with many doers during my government tenure. In this essay, I will introduce two federal interagency teams and then share the story of an international exchange program that I helped launch while at the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), in partnership with the U.S. Departments of State, Interior, and Justice. The program was developed through tribal consultation and collaboration as well as with the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI).

U.S. Interagency Teams

First, I will introduce the interagency teams. The International Repatriation Working Group brings together a dedicated group of people from the U.S. Departments of State, Interior, Homeland Security, and Justice, as well as from the Smithsonian Institution, IMLS, and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). The Working Group has met for several years to address the challenges Native American communities face when repatriating cultural items and ancestral remains from foreign institutions. Through our work together, we have learned that repatriation requires a whole-of-government approach involving extensive and ongoing relationship building. The White House Council on Native American Affairs, of which the

1. This essay is adapted from the author's presentation at the 2024 Marshall McKay Seminar for Empowering Native Knowledge. The views presented here are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. government.

2. Library of Congress, "Susan Shown Harjo Reads and Discusses 'Welcoming Home Living Beings,'" August 14, 2020, https://www.loc.gov/item/2020785244/.

Working Group is part, has supported this approach by facilitating collaborative interagency work and regular, meaningful tribal-federal engagement.[3]

The other interagency group I would like to highlight is the Cultural Heritage Coordinating Committee (CHCC) at the U.S. Department of State. This organization brings together federal agencies and entities across the government to coordinate diplomatic and law enforcement efforts in combating trafficking and protecting cultural property worldwide. The Department of State established the CHCC in 2016 pursuant to the Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act, Pub. L. 114-151, codified at 19 U.S.C. Section 2601 note,[4] with the department's Cultural Heritage Center as its secretariat.

Members of the Committee include the Departments of State, Interior, Defense, Homeland Security, Justice, and Treasury, as well as the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, IMLS, NEH, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Smithsonian Institution, the Library of Congress, and the National Archives and Records Administration. The CHCC has become an important space for discussions on international repatriation, given its expansive membership of federal agencies that focus on cultural engagement and preservation.

In addition to serving as secretariat to the CHCC, the Cultural Heritage Center at the U.S. Department of State plays a significant role in international repatriation and the return of Native American ancestral remains and cultural heritage. The Center serves as a conduit between tribes and foreign governments and institutions; it is the State Department's subject matter expert for embassies on international repatriation matters and develops programming to establish and strengthen relationships between tribes, Native Hawaiian organizations, and international institutions. The Center also coordinates with agencies and engages with external partners. The Center's Indigenous Affairs officer is a key contact for tribal nations.

These interagency teams have actively engaged with issues of international repatriation, including support of the U.S. Department of Interior's implementation of the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony Act of 2021, Pub. L. 117-258.[5] This act prohibits the exportation of illegally obtained Native American cultural items and archaeological resources; provides for the return of such items, including voluntary returns; and determines related criminal penalties. The legislation also strengthens communications among federal agencies, tribal nations, and Native Hawaiian organizations. Our work together has led to some important collaborations, including the program discussed below.

Native American International Museum Exchange and Bringing Ancestors Home From Abroad

Phase 1

In 2022, in response to nation-to-nation consultations and the needs of U.S. museums and international practitioners, the IMLS joined the Departments of State and Interior, along with

3. Exec. Order No. 13657, 78 FR 39539, July 1, 2013, https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2013/07/01/2013-15942/establishing-the-white-house-council-on-native-american-affairs.

4. Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act, https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ151/PLAW-114publ151.pdf.

5. Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony Act, https://www.congress.gov/117/plaws/publ258/PLAW-117publ258.pdf.

NMAI, to launch a pilot program, the International Repatriation Museum Exchange (now known as the Native American International Museum Exchange program or NAIME). The goal of the program was to empower museum champions for international repatriation. The agencies believed that enhancing positive relationships between museums abroad and tribes could help facilitate access to ancestral remains and cultural items, shared stewardship, and collections management while addressing the information gaps that can frustrate repatriation efforts.

The pilot was inspired by earlier experiences. For example, in 2018 the U.S. Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program brought European museum professionals to the United States to discuss best practices of collections management; enhance their understanding of tribal and Native Hawaiian perspectives on and treatment of ancestral remains and sacred or ceremonial items; and connect museum professionals managing Native American collections with Native American communities to promote future collaborations. One of the participants in this exchange was an influential curator who returned from the United States sympathetic to the effort to repatriate ancestors and their belongings that had been removed from what is now Mesa Verde National Park.[6] This awareness, in turn, led to a successful repatriation in 2020, which inspired yet another museum professional in Finland to pursue these efforts.[7]

To inform the pilot program, the partner agencies held two tribal listening sessions in 2022, building upon information and insights from prior tribal consultations. As explained in a "Dear Tribal Leader" letter dated April 19, 2022, during the earlier exchanges, "Tribes made it clear that there is a need for increased engagement with international institutions regarding the return of Native American cultural heritage items and human remains from abroad."[8] Our vision for the pilot program was a series of dialogues on international repatriation between museum leaders from Western Europe and Indian Country, which would serve as a starting point for future engagement. The sessions would bring together tribal leaders and representatives, tribal cultural heritage experts, representatives of tribal and foreign museums, and U.S. government museums and agencies to foster the types of relationships critical for the return of heritage items. The agencies sought input from tribes on international institutions with significant Native American collections or experience with repatriation to tribes. These recommendations could inform the content and goals of the sessions, potential geographic locations for international representatives to visit within the United States, and approaches for facilitating dialogue.

With guidance from the listening sessions, the federal partners launched the pilot program in October 2022 on the traditional lands of the Pechanga Band of Indians at the 15th Annual International Conference of Indigenous Archives, Libraries, and Museums in Temecula, California (fig. 1). This yearly convening brings together Indigenous leaders, students, and culture keepers working in or with libraries, archives, museums, schools, and tribal

6. See U.S. Embassy Finland, "Native American Ancestral Remains Repatriated from the National Museum of Finland to Mesa Verde," press release, September 17, 2020, https://fi.usembassy.gov/press-release-native-american-ancestral-remains-repatriated-from-the-national-museum-of-finland-to-mesa-verde/.

7. See "The Repatriation Act: How Finland Returned Ancient Native American Remains Taken by a Swedish Scientist Over a Century Later," *Helsinki Times*, December 5, 2020, https://www.helsinkitimes.fi/culture/18370-the-repatriation-act-how-finland-returned-ancient-native-american-remains-taken-by-a-swedish-scientist-over-a-century-later.html. The article describes a repatriation between the National Museum of Finland and a coalition of Pueblo Indians indigenous to the Mesa Verde area, represented by the Hopi, Acoma, Zia, and Zuni Tribes, including a meeting with U.S. President Trump at the White House.

8. Bryan Newland, U.S. Department of Interior Assistant Secretary–Indian Affairs to tribal leaders, April 19, 2022.

Fig. 1. International museum practitioners on a visit to the Pechanga Band of Indians Cultural Center and Repository. Phase 1 of the Native American International Museum Exchange was launched at the 2022 International Conference of Indigenous Archives, Libraries, and Museums, held in Temecula, California, on the traditional lands of the Pechanga Band of Indians. Courtesy of the U.S. Department of the Interior–International Technical Assistance Program

governments in addition to representatives from multiple federal agencies, private foundations, and educational institutions. In all, more than 1,300 people from forty-six states and eight countries attended in 2022.[9] The participants in the pilot program met at the outset of the conference, and later facilitated a standing-room-only discussion with conference attendees at a session titled “A New Pathway Forward: Building a Roadmap for International Repatriation.”

The initial group of international museum practitioners hailed from prominent museums in Germany, Finland, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand. The group included Tina Brüderlin, Head, Ethnological Museum of Berlin; Eero Ehanti, Keeper, Collections and Conservation Centre, National Museum of Finland; Laura Van Broekhoven, Director, and Marina de Alarcón, Curator and Head of Collections, the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford; and Te Herekiekie Herewini, Head of Repatriation, Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Programme, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

During their two-week stay in the United States, these practitioners met with elders, cultural professionals, and historic preservation officers from thirty-three tribes in California, Arizona, and Oklahoma. Site visits included trips to museums and cultural centers. With support from the IMLS, the Otoe-Missouria Tribe of Indians coordinated an in-person meeting of tribal

9. Sarah Glass (Wyandot Nation of Kansas) and Jen Himmelreich (Diné), “Building Cultural Connections and Community,” *Institute of Museum and Library Services* (blog), November 29, 2022, https://www.imls.gov/blog/2022/11/building-cultural-connections-and-community. Accessed November 30, 2024.

leaders and cultural representatives at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, located on the University of Oklahoma–Norman campus. In addition to the international museum practitioners and U.S. government representatives, members of twenty-nine tribes participated in the museum convening, including representatives from tribal leadership, tribal museums, Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, and Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) officers.

The in-person meeting at the museum was carefully orchestrated to foster the exchange of ideas and encourage constructive dialogue while also cultivating relationships and deepening cross-cultural understanding. The agenda featured updates on the current state of domestic repatriation efforts as well as a discussion on the exchange of best practices in the lesser-known realm of international repatriation. As Project Director Sheila Bird recounted, “One of our tribal attendees brought a war shirt that had recently been repatriated from an international museum. The host museum ensured the shirt was displayed appropriately and securely throughout the presentation. There was no better way to emphasize the significance of this meeting than through the shared experience of one of the tribes.”

The participants deemed the meeting a success as it facilitated meaningful discussions regarding international repatriation—a process that tribes often struggle to prioritize due to logistical hurdles, complexity, and the extensive cultural heritage and historic preservation work they are already managing domestically. The event sparked new conversations about forging long-term partnerships built upon cultural sensitivity and mutual respect. The attendees’ engagement not only strengthened existing connections but also led to ongoing post-event collaboration. By signaling their openness to initiate conversations about repatriation, the international museum representatives created what was perceived as an “open door” for all parties to engage [with]. As a result of these strengthened relationships, one tribe successfully completed a repatriation from Finland while identifying markings of a sister tribe that then facilitated the repatriation of a different object. In addition, another tribe initiated active consultations with the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

Throughout their discussions, museum and tribal representatives identified key challenges facing future international repatriation efforts, including limited funding, time constraints, and the absence of standardized policies. As the participants observed, these issues contribute to uncertainty for tribes and museums alike. Participants also acknowledged the challenges of working nation-to-nation. During the repatriation process, foreign museums operating as part of a sovereign state work directly with U.S. tribes, which are themselves domestic sovereign entities. There are thus as many U.S. sovereigns as foreign sovereigns, each with a different approach to repatriation.

International travel is often necessary to properly assess cultural heritage, as relying on photographs to view human remains and sacred objects may result in insufficient information, and some tribes prohibit photography. The logistics of legally escorting human remains and cultural items across borders without causing further harm to ancestral remains or communities add another layer of complexity. Tribes underscored the critical importance of handling the return of ancestral remains with care and sensitivity, particularly by government border patrols and airport security personnel, to ensure that the repatriation process respects both cultural and legal requirements.

Participants also identified the lack of communication mechanisms among museum practitioners, NAGPRA officers, and Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs) as a significant challenge for both international and domestic returns. Project Director Bird suggests this communication gap might be bridged by organizing future training sessions that bring all three parties together.

After the meeting, representatives from the Canadian government reached out to Project Director Bird, inviting her to share her insights from the exchange as they develop an international repatriation policy aligned with the standards set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This work is ongoing, but as Bird observed, increased U.S.-Canadian collaboration could offer Indigenous communities on both sides of the border valuable hands-on repatriation experience without the significant costs associated with overseas travel. Bird has also participated in webinars hosted by the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, which has facilitated connections with other museums across the United Kingdom. These ongoing conversations hold the potential to broaden opportunities for collaborations between tribes and museums.

Phase 2

At the end of the pilot program, the museum practitioners and federal partners continued to meet virtually on a monthly basis during the following year. Eero Ehanti described in public communications his experiences both during the visit to the United States and afterward.[10] During this period, he continued to communicate with tribal leaders he met, including the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria and Acoma Pueblo.[11]

The success of the pilot, now referred to as “Phase 1,” led to a second phase of NAIME. Funded and led by the U.S. Department of State, Phase 2, carried out in coordination with the U.S. Department of Interior’s International Technical Assistance Program (ITAP), was designed to provide tribal representatives with an opportunity to access and gain direct knowledge of museum collections outside the United States. For this second phase, the federal partners sought to engage with tribes and international museums that had preexisting relationships to explore whether these relationships could be deepened to update collections information, foster shared stewardship opportunities, and advance the potential repatriation of ancestral remains and cultural items.

Following a selection process, representatives from five Native American tribes visited ten institutions in six countries in 2024. The Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe, whose tribal lands are located in South Dakota, visited museums in Germany (fig. 2). These included the Grassi Museum of Ethnography in Leipzig and Dresden, as well as the Ethnological Museum in Berlin. The Blackfeet Nation, whose tribal lands are located in Montana, traveled to Scotland to engage with museum professionals at Leith Hall in Kennethmont, Aberdeenshire (fig. 3); the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh; the University of Aberdeen in Aberdeen; and the Nairn Museum in Nairn. The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, whose

10. Eero Ehanti, “This Is Where They Belonged,” *SAM Magazine*, June 2, 2023, https://www.sammagazine.fi/ihmiset-ja-kulttuuri/juuri-tanne-he-kuuluivat-6.111.34448.6f8dcf901f.

11. See relatedly, Laura Van Broekhoven, *Hope in Solidarity: Building Trust Towards Cultural Care and Repair*, AAM Center for the Future of Museums (2024), https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/HorizonPapers-Broekhoven.pdf.

Fig. 2. Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe representative from South Dakota on a visit to the Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Germany. The Tribal Council and Tribal Historic Preservation Office representatives viewed cultural items often broadly attributed as Prairie or Sioux, including multigenerational outfits with beadwork, ceremonial musical instruments, and equestrian accessories. As a first step toward continued collaboration, the representatives met with the museum's curators and conservators, advising on culturally sensitive preservation methods and exploring the possibility of returning these items. They emphasized the importance of engaging other tribes, applying scientific methods, and educating younger generations. Courtesy of the U.S. Department of the Interior–International Technical Assistance Program

tribal lands are in Oregon, traveled to New Zealand to enhance connections with the Auckland War Memorial Museum (fig. 4). The Pawnee Nation, whose tribal lands are in Oklahoma, traveled to the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg, Sweden. Finally, the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation, whose tribal lands are in North Dakota, traveled to Germany to visit the University of Leipzig Institute of Anatomy and Switzerland's Nordamerika Native American Museum (NONAM) in Zurich.

Each visit took place after months of planning and discussions between tribal and museum representatives. During virtual meetings, tribal leaders, historic preservation officers, and elders discussed cultural items, some of which had clear provenance and others that lacked such documentation. Museum personnel at the Grassi and State Museum in Germany explained that many items brought to Europe by collectors in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were labeled as "Sioux" or "Prairie," with little indication otherwise of their origin. Program participants observed that while this ambiguity could have led to thorny questions of ownership and how to return ancestral heritage to the rightful owners, the labeling presented an opportunity for in-depth discussions on how to handle situations of vague or multifaceted provenance, a critical issue for tribes for potential repatriations both abroad and within the United States.

When representatives of the Blackfeet Nation began planning their travel to Scotland, the tribe opted to include representatives of the Blackfoot Confederacy, including the Siksika, Kainai, and Piikani tribes, in their delegation. While members of the Blackfeet Nation reside within the United States and members of the Blackfoot Confederacy in Canada, the four tribes share the same culture and history. Similarly, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon included members from the neighboring Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the Confederated Tribes of the Yakama Nation during their international visits. The three tribes are located near each other in the Columbia River Basin.

In-person visits to foreign museums focused on reuniting tribes with their ancestors and cultural items, in-depth discussions of repatriation, opportunities for shared stewardship, and innovative loan agreements. The visits also provided an opportunity to convey proper handling practices, as well as correct and enhance catalogue information. Museums hosted hybrid Zoom sessions with the tribal visitors, enabling relatives, elders, and neighboring tribes—who could offer additional expertise and cultural heritage knowledge—to participate from afar. The participants were particularly enthusiastic when they encountered items of which they were previously unaware. During these virtual sessions, tribal representatives educated museum staff about what they were seeing; in turn, museum staff shared their knowledge of the history, provenance, and treatment of items with the tribes. The lively and engaging conversations extended well beyond the collections themselves, exploring topics such as history, cultural traditions, and cosmovision.

While abroad, program participants also met with ambassadors and cultural counselors, gaining additional insight into each nation's repatriation processes while sharing each other's cultural heritage and history. The visits included ceremonies, cultural activities, and planning sessions for continued collaboration.

Fig. 3. Members of the Blackfeet Nation and Blackfoot Confederacy during a visit to Leith Hall, Edinburgh, Scotland, U.K. Courtesy of the U.S. Department of the Interior–International Technical Assistance Program

Fig. 4. Representatives of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, the U.S. Consul General and Public Diplomacy Officer, and museum staff during a solemn moment in New Zealand. Courtesy of the U.S. Department of the Interior–International Technical Assistance Program

Although the primary goal of the exchange was relationship building and paving the way to repatriation, several repatriations took place during Phase 2, including the successful return of two ancestors to the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon and an innovative indefinite loan of an ancestral leader's regalia for reburial by the Pawnee Nation. The ancestors had been away from home for almost 146 years, and the regalia for nearly 150 years.

What's Next?

The exchanges described above provided meaningful opportunities to inform the development of best practices for international repatriation. Tribal representatives provided the federal agencies with the following recommendations:

- Increase the transparency of government repatriation processes, making contact information for government officials easily accessible
- Develop and publish standard processes to follow when engaging with the U.S. government on international returns
- Enhance coordination among agencies to increase the security and protection of ancestral remains and other repatriated items entering the United States
- Engage in ongoing communication with tribes and international organizations about Native American collections
- Enhance outreach with U.S. embassies to emphasize the importance of international repatriation and promote coordination
- Expand the availability of information on Native American collections located in museums abroad
- Designate travel-related funding for tribal representatives to connect with international collections and bring ancestral remains and cultural heritage back to the United States
- Encourage international museums and private collectors to work directly with tribes on repatriation

Our focus now is on following up on these recommendations and working together to compile and share tools and best practices for achieving the desired results. In addition to establishing and deepening relationships among representatives of international museums and tribes, our pilot program has strengthened communication among federal agencies, helping us to better understand and carry out our interconnected roles.

In her poem quoted at the beginning of this article, Suzan Shown Harjo offers a vision of hope for the future—a tomorrow with "our beloved Living Beings." I am grateful to the Autry Museum of the American West and those participating in the 2024 Marshall McKay Seminar for the opportunity to combine our experiences and support one another as we strive to reunite Native American communities with their cultural and ancestral heritage. Let us work together to manifest our shared vision. Now!

Beyond Repatriation: The Waystation Initiative's Commitment to Education, Stewardship, and Global Collaboration

Lyssa C. Stapleton

In November 2024, the Autry Museum of the American West presented its annual Marshall McKay Seminar for Empowering Native Knowledge. The seminar followed the annual two-day conference of the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums (ATALM), which took place in Palm Springs, California, and adopted ATALM's conference title, "Going Home, Returning Material Culture to Native Communities," as its theme. This essay summarizes a talk about UCLA's Waystation Initiative that I presented for the McKay Seminar. The Waystation Initiative at the University of California–Los Angeles and ATALM's Going Home program have a dynamic, collaborative partnership. The Going Home Fund focuses on extra-NAGPRA returns to Native American groups, advocates for policies that make these returns possible, and looks beyond repatriation to restoration of not only tangible objects but also culture. The Waystation Initiative has parallel goals; it seeks to facilitate voluntary returns of international cultural objects to nations and communities of origin and develop forward-thinking solutions for the stewardship and care of cultural heritage. Via the Waystation, UCLA is the first university in the United States to offer an academic program that trains students to manage the restitution of cultural heritage. Through the partnership between the two organizations, the Waystation can request assistance with returns to Native American tribes and ATALM can receive help with international returns.

During the four days of the ATALM conference and the McKay Seminar, we heard profoundly personal and emotional experiences about the ongoing legacy of loss created by colonialism, particularly the removal of cultural heritage from its rightful home to non-Native institutions. I am incredibly grateful to all the participants who shared their powerful stories.

My talk for the McKay Seminar did not have the poignant and personal nature of many presentations. Nonetheless, the Waystation at UCLA is an important part of a collective effort. The Waystation Initiative advocates for meaningful change and fosters new efforts at decolonization. These shifts can occur through the voluntary return of cultural objects and by creating space for deeper, more nuanced conversations that challenge and address the systemic economic, educational, and social trauma caused by colonialism, including the removal or destruction of cultural heritage.

The Waystation is here to listen, learn, and collaborate. It is a relatively new program that responds to the growing need for knowledge and training related to the international restitution of cultural objects.

The Waystation Initiative was launched in early 2023 with support from two National Endowment for the Humanities grants and funding from the Cyrus Tang Foundation, the Kress Foundation, and a UCLA Chancellor's Arts Initiative Grant. The Waystation is a response to changes over the past three or more decades as the discourse surrounding the ownership and curation of ethnographic and archaeological materials shifted dramatically. Institutions and individuals alike are increasingly recognizing the complex legacies of looting, war, and

colonialism that accompany many collections. Every year, UCLA faculty and staff, as well as the staff of other universities and museums, receive inquiries from the public seeking assistance in returning cultural objects in their possession. The Waystation is now providing some of that assistance.

Although the Waystation's approach and programming are unique, we endeavor to use the same terminology in practice for other cultural heritage projects. In some cases, we may use words in slightly different ways. The following definitions will clarify:

Voluntary return: This phrase defines the Waystation's proactive effort to reunite cultural objects with nations and communities of origin. Returns coordinated by the Waystation are neither a response to a demand or request for return, nor a response to international legislation or legal claims. We will return objects that were brought into the U.S. legally and that do not violate any international agreements, because in many cases, cultural objects were removed from their place of origin unethically, during periods of colonialism, or due to the long-term socioeconomic effects of colonization. We may also call this act of voluntarily returning objects *restitution*, a word that carries other meanings, including "restoration" and "reparation."

Stakeholder: This term broadly refers to anyone associated with a cultural object or its related issues. These relevant parties will engage in any decision-making or conflict-resolution processes relating to returning the objects.

Shared stewardship: This is a process in which the ownership of an object is held by its nation or community of origin, usually after that ownership has been transferred back to them by an institution or individual. Under a stewardship agreement, an institution in the U.S. is entrusted with the care of the object, either for the long or short term, based on the preferences of the nation or community to which it belongs. We also use the term *collaborative custodianship* to highlight the supervisory role that nations and communities have in the interpretation, handling, preservation, and care of their cultural heritage under stewardship agreements.

Cultural objects: This is the term we have chosen to describe the material we are working with. The word *orphaned* is often used to describe items that cannot be donated to museums, particularly antiquities, but this word has been used to describe other types of objects and misused to justify the trade in looted cultural material. We might occasionally use it to describe objects that cannot be donated.

Provenanced/unprovenanced: Provenance is the transactional history of an object. In the case of something illicitly removed from an archaeological site, it is the object's history after it left its find-spot. For heritage belonging to Indigenous groups, provenance begins once an object is taken from its place of original use. *Unprovenanced* isn't a meaningful term because what we mean by it is "a lack of acceptable provenance," not that an object has no transactional history. The Waystation still occasionally uses this word, as do many other provenance researchers, because we have not yet found an alternate term that is well understood by all users.

Decolonization: Often called the "decolonization of museum (or curatorial) practice," this term includes efforts to openly acknowledge the colonial histories of collecting; reevaluate the legacies of founders or major donors whose wealth and collections were obtained through colonialism; diversify museum professions; restitute illegally and unethically obtained cultural material; include and incorporate Indigenous voices into interpretations and exhibitions; engage with diaspora communities; and ensure that objects—especially sacred objects—are cared for in a culturally informed way.

Facilitating voluntary returns to nations and communities of origin is only one of the Waystation's goals. We are primarily an educational initiative, offering a certificate in Cultural Heritage Research, Stewardship, and Restitution to UCLA graduate students. Our dynamic workshop series (Waystation Workshops) is presented two to three times annually. We have developed a network of international stakeholders that, to date, includes more than 250 individuals in 60 countries. Soon, the Waystation will be developing best practices for voluntary returns and shared stewardship agreements that can be shared with other institutions (museums and universities) and community members. We intend to produce a set of practices that reflect the forward-thinking heritage justice goals of the Waystation and advance ethical approaches to the return, care, interpretation, and stewardship of cultural objects.

Through the research the Waystation performs on objects being returned, we construct long-term collaborative relationships with nations and communities of origin and develop consensus-building skills that we can share with other stakeholders (fig. 1). With the permission of the nation and community, students in the UCLA Waystation Certificate Program work directly with the objects we are returning and interact with stakeholders engaged in the return. Our goal with all the objects in the program is to return them or help nations and communities regain ownership and decide where and how the objects are stewarded in the future.

The Waystation differs somewhat from other repatriation and provenance research efforts because we engage with nearly all international tangible cultural heritage, whether archaeological or more recent (we do not take on Nazi-era research or returns). To address looted or unprovenanced antiquities, we work with law enforcement (Homeland Security Investigations and the FBI), the U.S. State Department, and ministries of culture in nations of origin.

Our main objectives are to:

- Assist individuals and institutions
- Offer unique skills and training to UCLA students
- Act as a hub of information for international stakeholders
- Provide expert assistance to law enforcement
- Establish new and innovative solutions for the protection and stewardship of movable cultural heritage
- Advocate and provide support for communities seeking recognition from their own government and decision-making roles in the future of their cultural heritage
- Develop best practices that can be shared

Fig. 1. Aspects of the Waystation Initiative. Courtesy of Lyssa C. Stapleton

In the Waystation Certificate Program, our students focus on learning specific details about the objects they are assigned (fig. 2). However, since many of the objects we are returning were taken through looting or as a result of colonization, some information can never be fully recovered. For example, the exact location where an item was found within an archaeological site cannot be reconstructed. We also cannot know what other items were associated with an object before it was illicitly removed from its context. In many cases, these cultural materials may have come from graves or ritual settings, but this knowledge is lost. For many objects, we will never know who created them, their intended purpose, or how they were originally used or valued.

The certificate program begins with a course in cultural heritage law, ethics, provenance research, and community engagement. During this first course, students are assigned a group of three to four objects that they will work with throughout their time in the program, and they begin to both conduct their provenance research and work with the Waystation's database. In the second quarter of the program, students take a materials analysis course with Dr. Vanessa

Fig. 2. Waystation Certificate Program students Mary Anastasi and Maryan Rahgeb discuss a ceramic tripod pitcher (gui) from China. Courtesy of Lyssa C. Stapleton

Muros, director of the Experimental and Archaeological Sciences Lab at UCLA. The purpose of this class is not to train the students to become conservators but to make them conversant with the types of technical analyses that can help determine the age, authenticity, and origin of the objects they are working with.

During the program, students take a single class in another UCLA department related to their research for the certificate. This might be a cultural heritage law course in the law school, a regional course that will help them understand the culture their objects came from, or a course that focuses on colonial history or community engagement. They will also take an active part in at least one Waystation Workshop or conference (fig. 3). Finally, they complete a capstone project that guides them in finalizing the investigation and analysis they have already begun

Fig. 3. UCLA and Stanford students discuss sampling methods for ancient ceramic vessels. Courtesy of Lyssa C. Stapleton

and ensures that all their research is well recorded so that it can be transferred when the objects are returned. Students often continue to work on research projects even after they have completed the certificate program. We ask students and UCLA scholars to partner with scholars from the nation or community of origin if they pursue a research publication.

Some information can be regained through research. For example:

- It is possible to find the source of some types of stone (particularly obsidian), but that will not necessarily tell us where or by whom an object was made because raw materials were often traded across thousands of miles before a final tool or ornament was created.
- Some metal alloys, like bronze, follow “recipes” that might pinpoint where or in what period an object was made or help determine whether an object is authentic or fake.
- In some cases, evidence of food or drink can be detected on the inside of vessels.
- We may be able to determine when the object was looted by learning when it appeared on the art market and, therefore, associate it with sites illegally excavated around that time. In addition, similar objects that became available on the market at the same time may have come from the same site. Art market data can help reconstruct an object’s original context.

- We may be able to reconstruct the provenance of an object to the extent that we know how it was stored or "conserved," where it might have been stored or displayed, and how it might relate to similar objects from the same region and period. This information will help us to determine the following:

    - Whether the object was stored somewhere or with something that will contaminate surfaces and distort materials testing.
    - If an object has been or is being inappropriately stored or handled from the point of view of the culture that made the object.
    - Whether objects were treated with toxic substances, which were often applied for pest control. These objects should undergo decontamination whenever possible. In some cases, handling may need to be restricted, entirely prohibited, or protocols for safe handling established.
    - How a looted object fits into or expands knowledge about a specific class of objects from the same region, era, or site. This may include new information about early or late types, diversions from typical shapes and designs, or individual artistic styles.

China

Our most well-established partnership is with China. In 2023, we formalized a Letter of Intent with China's National Cultural Heritage Administration. The document outlines the Waystation's intent to return objects to China and establishes our goal to conduct collaborative research on the objects prior to their return. We subsequently put in place a collaborative agreement with Shandong University's Qingdao campus. This agreement establishes specific research goals, including an exchange of students, scholars, and faculty, that create opportunities for knowledge sharing and encourage international cooperation around the protection and restitution of cultural heritage. I'm happy to say that this cooperative work has been very successful. It is via this agreement and our grant from the Cyrus Tang Foundation that we have two graduate student researchers from China this year, Furen Peng from Shandong University and Lei Huang from Sichuan University. Both are working with Chinese materials we are returning and aiding UCLA certificate program students as they research their assigned Chinese objects (fig. 4). The visiting students were assigned to research objects that will be returned to countries other than China. This will broaden their experience and knowledge of how returns are actioned outside their home country.

The materials we are working to return to China all originate from a single private collection based in Los Angeles from the late Lloyd Cotsen. This collection was examined by Chinese scholars on multiple occasions prior to Cotsen's death, making the process of accepting the collection for return straightforward. Within it, there are both known fakes and authentic, high-quality examples. The collection was donated to the Waystation, rather than a museum, primarily because most of the objects were acquired after 1970—the year the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property was enacted. Many museums use 1970 as a benchmark to assess whether they can acquire cultural objects, typically refusing donations of items that entered the U.S. after 1970 and lack documentation proving they were legally exported from their country of origin.

Fig. 4. Maryan Rahgeb, a doctoral candidate in archaeology and a Waystation Certificate Program student, discusses her research on objects from China. Courtesy of Lyssa C. Stapleton

Mexico

The Waystation is currently establishing formal collaborative agreements with Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Antropologiá e Historia (INAH) and the Mexican Consulate in Los Angeles. Through our partnership with ATALM's Going Home program, the Waystation is assisting the Museum of the Cherokee People in North Carolina to return objects to several nations. The largest group of items being returned from the museum is from Mexico. We prioritized this effort because we have also committed to helping three private individuals in the Los Angeles area return cultural materials to Mexico.

When we first examined the objects in the Museum of the Cherokee People's collection, we found that some are certainly from Mexico, while others could originate from Costa Rica, Guatemala, or other neighboring countries. To better understand the makeup of the collection, we formed an expert panel that included faculty members from universities in both Mexico and the U.S., as well as museum professionals. All are specialists in Mexican archaeology, Indigenous communities, and provenance research relating to the trade in Mexican cultural heritage. The panel met for our March 2024 Waystation Workshop, "Strategizing Returns of Cultural Heritage to Mexico."

Peru

Our third active repatriation effort involves Peru, with whom we are negotiating a collaborative agreement. We hope to establish partnerships with both the Ministry of Culture and at least one university. The Peruvian authorities have reviewed a list of items that we are planning to return and have approved a research request for one specific object. We hope this will lead to collaborative research opportunities with Peruvian colleagues and students in the near future.

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In summary, the Waystation fosters long-term collaborative partnerships that promote positive relations among nations and communities. It offers valuable educational opportunities for students both at UCLA and internationally while establishing new benchmarks for social justice through a thoughtful and ethical recognition of the significance of cultural heritage. We are honored by the generosity of the national representatives and academic colleagues we have worked with. While our relationship with China is a model, no two returns or collaborations are alike. Nonetheless, there is a pattern as well as a set of goals and approaches that we action in most cases:

- Sources of the cultural objects in the Waystation:
    - Estates of private collectors or their heirs
    - Individuals seeking assistance with objects they collected or were given
    - Museums needing assistance or guidance

- Early relationship-building (Letters of Intent and collaborative agreements with governmental agencies [e.g., ministries of culture]):
    - May allow the Waystation to have temporary stewardship (based on an acceptable standard of care, and/or culturally sensitive curation) of objects so students can conduct research
    - May grant the Waystation permission to research or publish objects in collaboration with co-authors from the nations or communities of origin
    - May grant permission for Waystation students to research or publish objects
    - Establishes the goal of returning all objects stewarded by the Waystation to the nation or community of origin
    - Establishes the willingness of the Waystation to return any subsequent cultural objects that may enter the program in the future
    - Establishes strong, long-term relationships with nations and communities of origin that could support shared stewardship agreements

- Collaborative agreements with universities:
    - Establish student exchange via visiting graduate research positions at UCLA
    - Promote student exchange via special course offerings (such as summer schools) for UCLA students at universities abroad
    - Facilitate faculty, staff, and scholar exchange for purposes of research, collaboration, teaching special courses, or giving lectures
    - Develop collaborative research among students, faculty, and scholars at multiple universities

- Expert panels:
    - Constituted when an object's cultural and geographic origin is not immediately identifiable
    - Consolidates opinions offered from multiple experts
    - Examines possible relationships to descendant communities
    - Results in a list submitted to ministries of culture in likely origin nations
    - May result in efforts to engage descendant communities in the return process

- Object inventories:
    - All objects stewarded and/or returned by the Waystation are cataloged in a database.
    - The database records metrics, condition, research data, bibliographies, provenance, expert knowledge, and materials analyses.
    - Inventories of cataloged objects (in list format) can be sent to nations and communities of origin (the Waystation database does not currently allow for outside access).

Despite the efforts of many communities, nations, museums, and universities, some individuals still regularly argue against repatriation and voluntary returns. Common objections and rationales include the following:

- Current national boundaries do not always align with historical ones, and modern populations may be unrelated to historical or ancient populations.
- The nation or community of origin does not want objects to be returned.
- The nation or community of origin does not have the resources to care for returned objects.
- How can we be sure these items won't be destroyed, lost, damaged, or resold on the art market after being returned?
- If we repatriate everything, museums will be empty.
- There is no legal reason to return it, so why should it be returned?

My response to nearly all these arguments is: How can one group *own* another's cultural heritage? Over the past two decades, international agreements between U.S. museums, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the J. Paul Getty Museum, and source countries have demonstrated the transformative potential of repatriation. By building relationships rooted in trust, these agreements create extraordinary opportunities to foster knowledge sharing, support collaborative research, and ensure that cultural heritage is returned to its rightful owners. At the same time, they allow global audiences to continue engaging with and learning from these treasures. Moving forward, the most effective approach is to reconceptualize cultural material through the lens of ownership, recognizing that the originating culture holds the rightful claim. This shift in perspective offers the best path for fostering mutual respect and long-term cultural stewardship. The Waystation Initiative promotes heritage justice through community engagement, offering opportunities to students from diverse backgrounds and fostering open dialogue among global stakeholders. It is designed to inspire mutual respect, encourage meaningful partnerships, and work toward a future where nations and peoples can engage with each other in ways that are both just and restorative.

How European Museums Are Addressing the Question of the Return of Cultural Heritage

Henrietta Lidchi

> [L]aw is one thing, morality quite another. And just because an action may not have been forbidden under international law at the time did not make it morally faultless. It is a misunderstanding of 19th-century sensibilities to assume that all Europeans at the time lacked contrition after learning the full details of the acts their soldiers had committed in their name.[1]

The late 2010s was a time when the question of colonial collections (objects amassed for institutional collections in colonial territories, under colonial rule, and through colonial networks) came under renewed scrutiny in European museums. Those countries that addressed the question of colonial collections at an institutional and governmental level during this period were principally Western European—the Netherlands, Germany, France, Belgium, and Austria—and, to some extent, the United Kingdom.[2] Many of these nations had been direct colonial powers or benefited from forms of colonial appropriation through trade or military service. All had museum representation at the national level in the collaborative consortium known as the Benin Dialogue Group.[3] This group brought together European and Nigerian parties to discuss ways of moving forward on the question of the restitution of the Benin court artworks from the Republic of Nigeria. In 1897, British colonial naval forces attacked Benin City in the Kingdom of Edo, looting thousands of artworks. It is a documented fact that this act of aggression, although at the time justified by the British government as a retaliation, guaranteed the presence and prominence of Benin artworks in museums globally while depriving African institutions of similar collections.[4]

The subject of the Benin court artworks had been in the public domain for most of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; however, the issue was galvanized in the 2000s by a major traveling exhibition in 2007–08 that celebrated the Royal Arts of Benin. The exhibition benefited from loans from European and American collections and was shown in Vienna, Berlin, Paris, and Chicago, but never toured Nigeria. By the late 2010s, the case of the Benin court artworks had become a touchstone for the debate about the appropriation by former colonial powers of collections taken through force and now situated away from their communities of source. In the European context, the case of the Benin court artworks starkly illuminated the difference between the legality of possession and the legitimacy of retention.

This controversy illustrates a couple of points. First, the debate surrounding repatriation, restitution, and return has been significantly influenced in Europe by discussions about access to collections from African nations and the African diaspora, due to the manner in which many European nations negotiated and settled claims to African territories following

1. Alexander Herman, *Restitution: The Return of Cultural Artefacts* (London: Lund Humphries, 2021), 49.

2. Since January 2020, the United Kingdom is no longer a part of the political union of Europe but certainly is part of the continent.

3. Benin Dialogue Group, "Statement from the Benin Dialogue Group, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, The Netherlands, 19 October 2018," https://docs.dpaq.de/14096-statement_from_the_benin_dialogue_19_october_2018_16.33.pdf. Accessed January 30, 2025.

4. Jos van Beurden, *Treasures in Trusted Hands: Negotiating the Future of Colonial Cultural Objects* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 74. See also Jos van Beurden, *Inconvenient Heritage: Colonial Collections and Restitution in the Netherlands and Belgium* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022).

the Berlin Conference of 1884–85. Second, while European museums have often been perceived as resistant to discussions of repatriation and return, it is the case that questions of repatriating collections and belongings have been part of postcolonial discussions between former European colonial powers and their former colonized territories. Indeed, in much of the twentieth century, newly independent African and Asian countries requested cultural heritage objects and belongings, especially when and if these independent nations aspired to establish national museum systems. There are known instances of selective returns for strategic political reasons during much of the twentieth century, mostly according to a state-to-state principle, with returns also known to have occurred with royal houses.[5]

Changing Attitudes Toward Return in Europe From the 2010s

In the 2010s, the resurgence of a European public debate regarding restitution, repatriation, and return can be attributed to several factors, of which the most politically visible was the November 2017 speech by President of the French Republic Emmanuel Macron in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.[6] In an unprecedented move, President Macron announced that it was no longer acceptable that African cultural heritage had a larger presence in museums in Paris (France) than in Dakar (Senegal), Lagos (Nigeria), and Cotonou (Republic of Bénin). He suggested that the French Republic, which for a long time was considered one of the most intransigent of European countries when challenged on legal and moral grounds regarding its ownership of contested cultural heritage, should reassess its retention of culturally significant objects held in national collections. To that end and following his speech, President Macron commissioned two noted scholars, Senegalese academic and writer Felwine Sarr and French historian Bénédicte Savoy, to draft a government report. They engaged in a high-profile, yearlong international research and consultation process to address this issue, with the specific purpose of developing recommendations that would largely apply to public collections from sub-Saharan African countries held by French national museums. Their report, published in November 2018 in French and English, is titled *Restituer Le Patrimoine Africain*.[7]

5. For examples, see Jos van Beurden, "Returns by the Netherlands to Indonesia in the 2010s and the 1970s," in *Returning Southeast Asia's Past: Objects, Museums, and Restitution*, eds. Louise Tythacott and Panggah L. Ardiyansyah (Singapore: NUS Press, 2021), 187–209; Caroline Drieënhuizen, "Repatriation as Means of Repair and Redress? Dutch-Indonesian Repatriation Debates, 1949–Present," in T*he Future of the Dutch Colonial Past: Curating Heritage, Art and Activism*, eds. Emma van Bijnen, Pepijn Brandon, Karwan Fatah-Black, Imara Limon, Wayne Modest, and Margriet Schavemaker (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2024), 250–55; Mario Laarmann, Clément Ndé Fongang, Carla Seemann, and Laura Vordermayer, eds., *Reparation, Restitution, and the Politics of Memory/Réparation,Restitution et les Politiques de la Mémoire. Beyond Universalism/Partager L'Universel* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023); Lars Müller, *Returns of Cultural Artefacts and Human Remains in a (Post)colonial Context: Mapping Claims between the Mid-19th Century and the 1970s* (Berlin: Deutsches Zentrum Kulturgutverluste, 2021); Margareta von Oswald, *Working Through Colonial Collections: An Ethnography of the Ethnological Museum in Berlin* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2022); Wieske Sapardan, "The Return of Cultural Property and National Identity in Postcolonial Indonesia," in *Returning Southeast Asia's Past: Objects, Museums, and Restitution*, eds. Louise Tythacott and Panggah L. Ardiyansyah (Singapore: NUS Press, 2021), 213–34; Alicia F. Schrikker and Doreen van den Boogaart, eds., *Weapons of Persuasion: The Global Wanderings of Six Kandyan Objects* (Colombo: Tambapanni Academic Publishers, 2023); Klaas Stutje, *The History of the Indonesian Dutch Restitution Debate: Working Paper* (Amsterdam: NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, 2022); Sarah Van Beurden, *Authentically African: Arts and the Transnational Politics of Congolese Culture* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2015); Sarah Van Beurden, Didier Gondola, and Agnès Lacaille, eds., *(Re)Making Collections: Origins, Trajectories, & Reconnections/La Fabrique des Collections: Origines, Trajectoires & Reconnexions* (Tervuren: Africa Museum, 2023).

6. La Maison Élysée, "Submission of the Savoy/Saar report on the restitution of African Cultural Heritage," November 23, 2018, https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2018/11/23/submission-of-the-savoy-sarr-report-on-the-restitution-of-african-heritage. Accessed January 30, 2025.

7. Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, "The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics," République Française Ministère de la Culture, November 2018," https://www.unimuseum.uni-tuebingen.de/fileadmin/content/05_Forschung_Lehre/Provenienz/sarr_savoy_en.pdf. Accessed January 30, 2025.

This presidential initiative did not happen in a vacuum.[8] Between 2016 and 2020, numerous publications and policy recommendations written by journalists, academics, professional bodies, and museums were published in French, English, German, and Dutch to address questions of restitution, repatriation, and return. These writings placed questions of colonial spoils and their fates at the forefront of public discourse across Europe, with several policy documents emerging in France,[9] Germany,[10] the Netherlands,[11] Belgium, and the United Kingdom.[12] All of these have long-term implications for the processes of claiming cultural heritage globally but pertain especially to these European states' former colonial territories. The ground being progressively conceded at this time was that while museums might indeed have legal title to their collections, in certain instances, the cultural and moral title was open to challenge, as acquiring cultural heritage in politically heightened or unequal circumstances begs questions about duress, consent, and adequate recompense. Consequently, national policy and legal changes were developed in the Netherlands (from 2020), Belgium (from 2022), France (to a limited extent from 2021), Germany (from 2019), and proposed in Austria (2023).[13]

Plurality of Arrangements Around Culture Within Europe

In thinking about this shift, it is important to recognize that Europe is a complex geographical and political space. European nations have essential differences regarding the regulation of culture, suggesting a plurality of ways in which existing cultural policy may be modified or overturned. Moreover, while many Western European countries were active colonial powers, they do not have existing European Indigenous populations; Northern European countries—Finland, Norway, Denmark, and Sweden—do. Accordingly, the debate about return in Northern European countries has been viewed through this priority and lens. Between 2019 and 2021, the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History and the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo, Norway, undertook a process of collections review to share collections with six consolidated Sámi museums, involving the transfer of title to certain ceremonial items. The creation of conditions to promote the Sámi language, culture, and way of life is part of the provisions of

8. For example, see van Beurden, *Treasures in Trusted Hands;* van Beurden, "Returns by the Netherlands to Indonesia," 187–209; van Beurden, *Inconvenient Heritage*; Henrietta Lidchi, "Material Reckonings with Military History," in *Dividing the Spoils: Perspectives on Military Collections and the British Empire*, Henrietta Lidchi and Stuart Allan, eds. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 269–83; Henrietta Lidchi and Stuart Allan, eds., *Dividing the Spoils: Perspectives on Military Collections and the British Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020); and Louise Tythacott, ed., *Collecting and Displaying China's "Summer Palace" in the West* (Oxford: Routledge, 2018).

9. Sarr and Savoy, "The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage."

10. Deutscher Museums Bund/German Museums Association, *Guidelines on Dealing with Collections from Colonial Contexts*, German Museums Association, July 2018, https://www.museumsbund.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/dmb-guidelines-colonial-context.pdf; Deutscher Museums Bund/German Museums Association, *Guidelines for German Museums: Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts,* German Museums Association, February 2021, https://www.museumsbund.de/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/mb-leitfaden-en-web.pdf. Accessed January 30, 2025.

11. Raad voor Cultuur/Council for Culture, *Colonial Collections and a Recognition of Injustice*, January 2021, https://www.raadvoorcultuur.nl › 2021/01/22.

12. Arts Council England, "Restitution and Repatriation: A Practical Guide for Museums in England," September 2023, https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/supporting-arts-museums-and-libraries/supporting-collections-and-cultural-property/restitution-and-repatriation-practical-guide-museums-england. Accessed January 30, 2025.

13. In June 2023, *Recommendations of the Advisory Committee for Guidelines for Collections in Austrian Federal Museums from Colonial Contexts* was delivered to the Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, the Civil Service and Sport, Republic of Austria, with recommendations regarding public collections. The report has not yet been translated into national policy. For a complete report, see Republic of Austria Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport, *Recommendations of the Advisory Committee for Guidelines for Collections in Austrian Federal Museums from Colonial Contexts*, June 20, 2023, https://www.bmwkms.gv.at › dam ›.

Norway's constitution,[14] which changed in 2023 to recognize the Sámi as Norway's Indigenous people. Denmark has also engaged in a multiyear discussion and negotiation with Greenland following the self-government agreements of the late 1970s. The National Museum of Denmark returned 35,000 objects to Greenland in a process that lasted from 1982 to 2001 called *Utimut* (Greenlandic for "return").[15] In 2022, the Swedish parliament directed the Swedish government to start discussions with Sámi communities regarding cultural heritage items.[16] These initiatives with Indigenous-led museums are distinctive to Northern European states as part of recognizing the principles of sovereignty, the political changes consequent upon self-rule, and the implications of the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Another significant factor is the governance arrangements of European museums. National cultural institutions play myriad roles within national life, and the nature of funding regimes for large national museums varies across Europe. All these factors influence the management and ownership arrangements of national collections. In France, for example, the national collections nationalized after the French Revolution are indivisible and inseparable from the nation. Once objects are officially entered into the national collections, the only way items can be deaccessioned (legally transferred out of the collections) is by creating new national legislation that references the individual artworks in question. This has happened once in recent history. As a result of the Sarr and Savoy report, the French government created specific legislation in 2020 to allow for the return of twenty-six looted items from the national collection of the Musée du Quai Branly–Jacques Chirac to the Republic of Bénin (former French colony Dahomey).[17] The objects were returned in 2021. The symbolic weight of this gesture cannot be underestimated (even if, for some, too few were returned), given the significance of these iconic works and their prominent display in the most recognized national museum of non-European culture in France. The process of return has recently been documented in the film *Dahomey* (2024) by French Senegalese filmmaker Mati Diop, which depicts the political impact and debate that ensued in the Republic of Bénin when cultural heritage was returned.[18]

In the United Kingdom, in contrast, each museum has its own Act of Parliament (primary legislation). Many of these acts include a provision against deaccessioning, meaning the collection items may not be removed from the collection once they are legally registered into it (accessioned). Thus, national museums are governed by national legislation created for one or more institutions. The British Museum is governed by the British Museum Act 1963, and the Victoria and Albert Museum (along with three other institutions, including the Royal Botanic

14. Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, "The Sámi Act," https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/the-sami-act-/id449701/#:~:text=The%20purpose%20of%20the%20Act,%2C%20culture%2C%20and%20social%20life. Accessed January 30, 2025.

15. Kate Fitz Gibbon, "Successful Repatriation: The Utimut Process in Denmark & Greenland," *Cultural Property News*, November 28, 2019, https://culturalpropertynews.org/successful-repatriation-the-utimut-process-in-denmark-greenland/.

16. Elin Hofverberg, "Sweden: Parliament Directs Government to Investigate Return of Sámi Cultural Objects," 2022. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2022-06-12/sweden-parliament-directs-government-to-investigate-return-of-sami-cultural-heritage-objects/. Accessed January 30, 2025.

17. Musée du Quai Branly–Jacques Chirac, "Restitution de 26 Oeuvres á la République du Benin," https://www.quaibranly.fr/fr/collections/vie-des-collections/actualites/restitution-de-26-oeuvres-a-la-republique-du-benin. Accessed January 30, 2025. It is important to note that Benin City in the Kingdom of Edo (which was looted in 1897) is in present-day Nigeria, a former British colony. The Republic of Bénin (Dahomey) is a former French colony.

18. *The Economist* staff, "Plundered Artefacts Return to West Africa in 'Dahomey,'" *The Economist*, February 26, 2024, https://www.economist.com/culture/2024/02/26/plundered-artefacts-return-to-west-africa-in-dahomey. Accessed January 30, 2025.

Gardens, Kew) is governed by the National Heritage Act 1983. The result of these differences is that while the obstacle to any claim may feel the same to the claimant, namely that national legislation prevents discussion of a claim of a European national collection item, the reason for the obstacle may be entirely different. French law nationalizes the collection. British law specifies that the national museums' board of trustees (who severally hold the national collection in trust for the nation) cannot act against their founding legislation.

Such stringent legal conditions may not be present for other European national collections that national foundations may hold. For example, the Netherlands has no national legal provision against deaccession. The government holds national collections, with national museums as their custodians, and if the proper process is followed, objects may be removed from these collections. In Sweden, national museums can freely transfer collections from their custodianship to other state-run institutions, although they cannot do so internationally.[19] For international returns, applications must be submitted through the Swedish government. Such differences across European nations may be confusing and are further amplified by the mosaic of institutions that compose national cultural sectors. All European museum sectors include national, local, regional, university, and private institutions that may be able to make their own policy recommendations and may not be compelled to obey policy recommendations applicable to national collections.

Another decisive factor in Europe is the experience of any given nation during and after the Second World War. World War II is the clearest historical moment in Europe when artworks owned either by nations or individuals were expropriated in conditions of conflict, taken either by the occupying Nazi forces or by liberating forces, which included the former Soviet Union. World War II provides a European experience of dispossession or contested possession with the dispersal of state and private property in ways that European nations have had to reckon with over the subsequent decades. This experience is ultimately what prompted the 1954 Hague Convention (the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict) followed by the 1970 UNESCO Convention (the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property) and the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention (the Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects), conventions and declarations that recognize the need to protect cultural heritage in situations of conflict.[20]

A key moment in the reckoning with World War II was the 1998 conference held at the National Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. (known as "The Washington Conference"), whose focus was devising principles by which families could claim artworks held by national museums across Europe. Five countries (Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom) subsequently established restitution panels to review and address claims for items in national collections,[21] some of which have operated on an open process, and publish their findings (the UK and the Netherlands primarily). The Washington Principles are not legally binding, but they call on signatory countries to comply with eleven guidelines, which ultimately

19. National Museums of World Culture Sweden, "National Museums of World Culture Sweden. Policy for Return of Objects, 2021," https://www.varldskulturmuseerna.se/siteassets/pdf/aterlamnande/final-policy-for-return-of-objects_eng.pdf. Accessed January 30, 2025.

20. Many European countries have become signatories to these international conventions and declarations, however, not all of these agreements are retroactive.

21. Herman, *Restitution*, 61.

call for fair and just solutions regarding contested property. The principles thus critically engage with ideas of legal title and ownership since the laws applicable during World War II in occupied Europe were those imposed and prosecuted by a National Socialist (Nazi) regime. As lawyer Alexander Herman has argued, the legal discussion has created an "indelible mark in the area of restitution"[22] since it critically engages with the nature of forced sale and meaningful consent: these items found their way into national collections only after Jewish owners and others were forced to abandon or sell their possessions under Nazi law. Namely, the laws everyone now perceives as unjust were the legal basis on which many European museums rested their claims of rightful ownership and legal title to artworks acquired before or during World War II.[23]

World War II and the successful co-option of culture for political purposes by the Nazi regime is a powerful reason why culture is not centralized or nationalized in the Federal Republic of Germany today. State collections across Germany are substantial, and the national structure for culture is extensive. In 2018, the German Museums Association launched a report on German collections and colonialism. *Guidelines on Dealing with Collections from Colonial Contexts* was funded by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media and publicly endorsed by the German Federal Minister of Culture.[24] This is a professional guide for all those working in the museum sector with colonial collections and defines colonialism as a relationship based on domination where the colonized lose self-determination. The publication of this report was shortly followed by a press release in 2019 in which all German federal and state ministers of culture and media expressed unison on the need to return colonial collections that were taken in ways that might now be seen as legally and morally indefensible. They noted in their agreement the need to return ancestral human remains.[25] Partaking in the conversation about complicity with colonialism was conceived around the 2020s by German museums and politicians as having an important role in the "common social culture of remembrance" that was described at the time as the basis on which contemporary German civil society could grow and be maintained.[26]

Two National Systems: The United Kingdom and the Netherlands

This broad overview provides some insights into the developments that took place in the 2010s and 2020s across Europe, within political conditions where center-leaning political parties prevailed in European states and the European Parliament. This political landscape has since shifted with the rise of the right-wing conservative and far-right successes in the 2024 European Parliamentary elections. I will now focus on two countries where current policy or legal frameworks may be of interest to Indigenous communities seeking to claim: the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

22. Herman, *Restitution*, 64.

23. The Nazi era in Europe is widely defined as the period between 1933 and 1945.

24. Deutscher Museums Bund/German Museums Association, *Guidelines on Dealing with Collections from Colonial Contexts*; Deutscher Museums Bund/German Museums Association, *Guidelines for German Museums: Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts.*

25. Christopher F. Schuetze, "Germany Sets Guidelines for Repatriating Colonial-Era Artifacts," *New York Times*, March 15, 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/03/15/arts/design/germany-museums-restitution.html.

26. Culture Ministers Conference Germany, "Erste Eckpunkte zum Umgang mit Sammlungsgut aus kolonialen Kontexten der Staatsministerin des Bundes für Kultur und Medien, der Staatsministerin im Auswärtigen Amt für internationale Kulturpolitik, der Kulturministerinnen und Kulturminister der Länder und der kommunalen Spitzenverbände," March 13, 2019, www.kmk.org/fileadmin/pdf/PresseUndAktuelles/2019/2019-03-25_Erste-Eckpunkte-Sammlungsgut-koloniale-Kontexte_final.pdf.

For many looking at museums in the United Kingdom, the possibilities and developments remain obscure. This ambiguity is partly due to its national museums' status as non-departmental public bodies (NDPB) and the political fact of devolution. In the United Kingdom, the status of an NDPB means that national museums are governed by boards of trustees (appointed by the government for the nation) and run on the "arms-length principle." This means that while the national government may create a policy context, boards of trustees are ultimately independent. Devolution in the United Kingdom is the statutory granting of greater self-governing powers to the regions of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. This federalism impacts culture, as culture in the United Kingdom is a devolved matter, meaning that the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government, and the Northern Ireland Executive have responsibility for culture across their nations. Consequently, the National Museums Scotland (the umbrella organization for several national museums largely located in and around Edinburgh) has a different legal basis in Scottish law and is governed by the National Heritage (Scotland) Act 1985. This act has a presumption against deaccession but allows for the transfer of objects from the collection to other national museums. Until recently, return was interpreted as permissible only within the United Kingdom; however, in 2022, the Nisga'a Lisims Government of Canada and National Museums Scotland announced that the House of Ni'isjoohl memorial pole held by the National Museums Scotland since 1929 would return home to the Nass Valley. The return was legally possible under the provision of transfer, which may create a future precedent.

Across the United Kingdom, most decisions regarding claims are made on a case-by-case basis. Each claim is evaluated on its merits and decided by the governing board of trustees after application to the individual museum. This process frequently occurs in discussion with the United Kingdom government as, according to the devolution arrangements, foreign affairs are not a devolved matter but are ultimately controlled by London. This illustrates the fact that questions of repatriation in the United Kingdom and other European countries frequently involve ministries of foreign affairs and are viewed within a broader context of state policy and cultural diplomacy. In 2023, the Arts Council England, a national umbrella body in England that supports arts and culture, produced a set of policy recommendations for museums.[27] Comparatively, Scotland has a steadier history of return among the varied museums that compose its museum sector, including National Museums Scotland. In addition, the umbrella body for museums in Scotland (Museums Galleries Scotland) provides a list on its website of repatriations from Scottish museums, including ancestral remains and cultural heritage items.[28]

Today, perhaps the most important piece of national legislation in the United Kingdom pertains to collections of ancestral or human remains. In 2004, the United Kingdom passed a medical law with provisions that specifically addressed the question of human (ancestral) remains in museum collections, provisions that since 2004 have allowed for their return. The Human Tissue Act 2004 applies to England, Wales, and Northern Ireland and was drafted in the aftermath of a medical scandal that affected many families across the United Kingdom. Because of discussions with the Australian Government, when the act was drafted it also included powers to deaccession and return human remains from museum collections (Section

27. Arts Council England, *Restitution and Repatriation*.

28. Museums Galleries Scotland, "List of Repatriations from Scottish Museums," https://www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/advice-article/list-of-repatriations-from-scottish-museums/. Accessed January 30, 2025.

47 of the Act).[29] In the parliamentary legal system, only a piece of primary legislation can overturn another piece of primary legislation. The Human Tissue Act 2004 was explicitly drafted to overturn the provisions against deaccession in some of the national museums' primary legislation, restricting this process *solely* to human remains.[30] Accordingly, the Human Tissue Act 2004 permits museums to respond positively to claims for the return of ancestors and human remains and has resulted in returns by institutions such as the British Museum, the Natural History Museum, and others. The law was extended to Scotland in 2006. The Human Tissue (Scotland) Act 2006 allows for national museums in Scotland to do the same, and this enabled the return of Beothuk ancestral remains from the collections of National Museums Scotland in 2020 in response to a request made through the Canadian Museum of History and the Assembly of the Chiefs of First Nations. The enactment of these laws across the United Kingdom has influenced all types of museums (local, regional, national, and university) to return ancestral remains. Claims made to any institution in the United Kingdom are submitted directly to each museum, often with the support of a national institution, national government, or nationally representative body. National Museums Scotland has published its policy online,[31] as has the British Museum.[32] It is worth noting that many museums in the United Kingdom that receive government or public funding publish their policies, and many also publish the results of claims, so websites tend to be informative. In addition, all Acts of Parliament may be found online, accompanied by explanatory notes on the principles of open government, namely, transparency, accountability, and public participation.

Within the debate of restitution, repatriation, and return in Europe and beyond, the Netherlands has been especially influential, investing since 2017 in a range of policy initiatives and fostering the development of provenance research through academic research projects and government-supported institutional research. Between 2017 and 2019, two major museums undertook important initiatives that addressed colonial collections. The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam conducted significant provenance research on ten iconic and contested objects. In March 2019, the Wereldmuseum (in Leiden, Amsterdam, and Rotterdam)[33] published a policy

29. The National Archives, Government of the United Kingdom, "The Human Tissue Act 2024", https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/30/contents. Accessed January 30, 2025. The "Human Tissue Act 2004 Explanatory Notes" outline the following provisions for human remains in museums:
Section 47: Power to deaccession human remains
62.This section confers a power upon the bodies listed in subsection (1) ('listed institutions') to deaccession human remains.
63.Subsection (2) enables listed institutions to transfer human remains from their collections if it appears to them appropriate to do so for any reason whether or not it relates to their other functions. The power only applies to human remains which are reasonably believed to be of a person who died less than 1,000 years before this section comes into force.
64.Subsection (3) provides that if it appears to a listed institution that human remains are mixed or bound up with non-human material and it is undesirable or impracticable to separate them, the power to de-accession the human remains extends also to the associated non-human material. This has the effect of enabling artefacts such as mummies (where non-human material is integral to the human remains) to be de-accessioned intact. The provision does not extend to grave chattels that are buried with but are separate from human remains found in a grave.
65.Subsection (4) provides that the power contained in subsection (2) does not affect any trust or condition subject to which a listed institution may hold human remains.

30. The National Archives, Government of the United Kingdom, "Human Tissue Act, Explanatory Notes, Section 47," https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/30/notes/division/5/3/2/2. Accessed January 30, 2025.

31. The National Archives, Government of the United Kingdom, "Human Tissue Act, Explanatory Notes."

32. The British Museum, "Human Remains in the Collection," https://www.britishmuseum.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/Human_Remains_policy_061218.pdf. Accessed January 30, 2025.

33. The Worldmuseum/Wereldmuseum was known until 2022 as the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen/National Museum of World Cultures. It holds the national collection of non-European art and material culture in the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

document titled “Return of Cultural Objects: Principles and Process.”[34] Devised internally in consultation with a prominent human rights lawyer, the document opted for the term *return* (rather than *repatriation* or *restitution*, to allow for both individual and community property ownership and transfer to another place) and identified three criteria on which basis cultural heritage could be claimed. It also conceived a process by which claims could be made and received.

The Wereldmuseum explicitly devised the criteria by drawing on the “soft” international laws to which the Kingdom of the Netherlands had consented (UNESCO 1954/1970 and UNIDROIT 1995) and its “hard” national heritage law (Erfgoedwet) of 2016.[35] The museum sought to acknowledge the nature of asymmetrical relationships during colonial periods while considering the current legal frameworks in which the movement of cultural property is regulated during periods of armed conflict, applying these as retroactive moral principles. These criteria were cognizant of the legal, ethical, and moral considerations applicable to any claim and were simplified into three overarching categories (see Wereldmuseum website for further details):

1. Legality: It can be shown that the cultural object was collected or acquired in contravention of the standards of legality at the time.

2. Involuntary Separation: It can be shown that the claimants were involuntarily separated from the cultural object.

3. Cultural Heritage Value: The cultural object(s) is of such value (cultural, heritage, or religious) to nations or communities of origin that continued retention should be reevaluated.

The criteria aimed to take account of some of the following historical possibilities:

- A museum may have acquired the cultural heritage object knowing, for example, that it was available for sale in contraventions of legality or had been obtained under morally questionable circumstances in the twentieth century.

- A cultural heritage item offered for sale might not be the type of cultural heritage that could be individually owned, meaning that from a community perspective, no individual could transfer its title with meaningful consent.

- A cultural heritage item might have such importance for a cultural community that its location in the Netherlands inevitably raised moral questions.

For this last possibility, the Dutch heritage law provided a sound basis for comparison, as items in Dutch national possession are deemed inappropriate to be out of national hands.

34. Nationaal Museum van Wereldmuseum, “Return of Cultural Objects: Principles and Process,” March 7, 2019, https://leiden.wereldmuseum.nl/sites/default/files/2019-05/Claims%20for%20Return%20of%20Cultural%20Objects%20NMVW%20Principles%20and%20Process.pdf. Accessed January 30, 2025.

35. The Cultural Heritage Act can be found online. See “Heritage Act,” Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom, the Netherlands, accessed April 14, 2025, https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0037521/2016-07-01.

"Return of Cultural Objects: Principles and Process" was published as a pilot policy document in March 2019, with relevance only to the collections of the Wereldmuseum, which set up an active provenance unit and an open-access journal, *Provenance*, to publish ongoing research. The policy document was, however, immediately influential in prompting the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science to set up a National Advice Committee for a national conversation and international research in September 2019, to report in 2020. In addition, the ministry supported a national research project into provenance, "Pilot Provenance Project on Objects of the Colonial Era," which brought together three noteworthy national cultural institutions: the Rijksmuseum, the Wereldmuseum, and the Netherlands Institute for War, Holocaust, and Genocide Studies (or NIOD, which published the findings).[36] In October 2020, the National Advice Committee published their report, *Colonial Collections and a Recognition of Injustice*, in both Dutch and English,[37] which offered a series of recommendations that were adopted as Dutch national policy in 2021.

The report and recommendations were significant in several respects, not least because they were widely read and commented on across Europe. The Dutch chose to create a national policy to ensure a consistency of impact (thus reducing the discretion of a case-by-case system) and a transparency of decision making. The report had argued that "shared policy on dealing with colonial cultural heritage objects can lead to satisfactory outcomes for all parties."[38] A bold and unique decision was that of allowing for the *unconditional return* of cultural heritage from those former Dutch colonial territories (in particular, the Republic of Indonesia) where it could be demonstrated "with a reasonable degree of certainty" that the cultural heritage was lost involuntarily (without meaningful consent, often with violence) and through this means came to the Dutch state hands.[39] This decision acknowledged that when claimants were asked to make a case for the return or provide proof of ownership of important cultural heritage items, the process itself could constitute a further harm. If the historical circumstances under which the cultural heritage items were taken were generally acknowledged today to have been punitive or unjust, then asking claimants to make the case again, with the potential for failure or disappointment, raised the possibility not of repair but of further humiliation. To make the success of such a claim *conditional* on an argument allowed for the possibility of failure and shame in the face of failure and thus might act as a powerful deterrent to making a claim. The National Advice Committee argued that such a process would repeat rather than redress the injustice. The recommendations thus sought to address moral questions and the emotional labor of claimants, and to prevent further harm to claimants known to have been historically treated unjustly by the Dutch state. The National Advice Committee argued: "The readiness to return objects unconditionally means it is important that the redress of a historical injustice through a request for return is not weighed against other interests, however relevant these may be in themselves."[40]

36. Jona Mooren, Klaas Stutje, and Frank van Vree, "Pilotproject Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era" (Amsterdam: NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies; Stichting Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen; and Rijksmuseum, 2022), https://d3mb4k8bvt6xe4.cloudfront.net/2022-03/Sporen_Eindrapport_PPROCE.pdf.

37. Raad voor Cultuur/Council for Culture, *Colonial Collections*.

38. Raad voor Cultuur, 6.

39. Raad voor Cultuur, 6.

40. Raad voor Cultuur, 6.

Fig. 1. Gunay Uslu, State Secretary for Culture and Media of the Netherlands (center left), and Lilian Gonçalves-Ho Kang You, Chair of the Colonial Collections Committee (center right), with Indonesian representatives I Gusti Agung Wesaka Puja, Executive Director of the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (far left), and Hilmar Farid, Director General of Cultural Heritage, Ministry of Culture (far right), on July 10, 2023. This meeting marked the official handover of hundreds of works from the Wereldmuseum collection (taken during the colonial period by the Dutch) to the Republic of Indonesia. Courtesy of ANP

Although this unconditional return is *only* available to former Dutch colonial territories (namely, the Republic of Indonesia, Suriname, and parts of the Caribbean), the National Advice Committee argued that international returns should be determined on legal and moral grounds. There was a broadening of criteria for return which reflected the cultural heritage criteria of the Wereldmuseum policy: that if cultural heritage objects "are of particular *cultural*, *historical*, or *religious* importance for the source country" but had been acquired with consent, the items could nevertheless be requested and potentially returned (subject to research and the case being made) based on reasonableness and fairness.[41] This standard moved the discussion away from the need to demonstrate punitive circumstances, instead defining cultural loss and depletion as being significant and relevant considerations for former Dutch colonial territories and other countries.

41. Raad voor Cultuur, 7.

Fig. 2. Ysleta del Sur Pueblo tribal members with representatives from the Wereldmuseum and the Colonial Collections Committee on March 22, 2025, during the handover of culturally significant objects. Courtesy of Boudewijn Bollmann

After the report, the Dutch government established the Colonial Collections Committee,[42] which advises the Minister of Education, Culture and Science about cultural heritage claims, and the Colonial Collections Consortium, which brings together several institutions and provides a single point of contact and expert advice for institutions in the Netherlands and overseas to support Dutch national policy and promote provenance research.[43] The Colonial Collections Committee (fig. 1) is chaired by the Dutch Surinamese Human Rights lawyer Lilian Gonçalves-Ho Kang You (who also chaired the National Advice Committee) with a small membership that can elicit outside expertise. The Colonial Collections Committee website identifies its policy and processes. It also publishes advisory reports on claims and provenance research undertaken by museums whose collections are being claimed. To date, the Colonial Collections Committee has made four major recommendations for return. These include iconic collection items from Indonesia and Sri Lanka held by both the Rijksmuseum and the

42. Colonial Collections Committee, “About the Committee,” https://committee.kolonialecollecties.nl/about-the-committee. Accessed January 30, 2025.

43. Colonial Collections Committee, “Colonial Collections Consortium,” https://www.colonialcollections.nl/en/. Accessed January 30, 2025.

Fig. 3. Ysleta del Sur Pueblo tribal representatives with repatriated cultural objects, March 22, 2025. Courtesy of Boudewijn Bollmann

Wereldmuseum, as well as, most recently, Indigenous North American collections. The Dutch government works on a state-to-state principle and requires that all claims must be made with national or state support. For example, the latest claim to be heard and accepted, resulting in the successful return of cultural objects, was made by the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo for items in the Wereldmuseum collection (figs. 2 and 3). The claim was submitted in 2023 and explicitly supported in 2024 by the U.S. Department of the Interior, demonstrating support by the United States Government for the claim and allowing the return according to the state-to-state principle that governs the Dutch policy.[44]

44. Colonial Collections Consortium, "Objects from the Wereldmuseum Leiden Collection to be returned to Indigenous tribe in the US," January 17, 2025, https://www.colonialcollections.nl/en/2025/01/17/objects-from-the-wereldmuseum-leiden-collection-to-be-returned-to-indigenous-tribe-in-the-us/. Accessed April 1, 2025.

Conclusion

The picture across mainland Europe has changed substantially since the late 2010s. While it may remain confusing from the outside, given the number of languages and governance arrangements, the shift from a policy of legal possession to one in which museums and governments embrace more nuanced moral arguments is clear. Working through European processes takes time, as evident in the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo case or the House of Ni'isjoohl memorial pole; however, there is change. This shift is visible in the emphasis across Europe on provenance research. European museums are mobilizing both money and staffing to enable wider sharing and knowledge about the histories of their collections, and this research is potentially helpful for the work of claimants. It has shown the networks of trade between European museums, allowing the circulation of cultural heritage objects to be traced. Such research is beneficial for those cultural heritage objects exchanged with institutions such as the Smithsonian, since exchanges were further carried out among European museums.

These policy changes reflect a dynamic consensus. The obstacles that may have existed in the past—European understandings of their own legal possession, their sometimes opaque communication with claimants, their own sense of losing "treasures" from the national collection, and the considerations of who items are being returned to—have been to some extent addressed in the national policy documents adopted across Europe. The European context established over the last ten years is more receptive to claims, has more transparent processes in place, and potentially broader criteria on which claims can be made. These changes do not make the process simple—the issue of international political relations and internal national negotiations will remain. However, the precedents of recent years carry some weight. The dynamism is due to political changes in Europe. Many of these concessions were made in a political environment that was more clearly oriented toward the idea that civil society benefits from diverse national citizenship and a broad consensus of the need to critically reckon with the colonial past as a moment of injustice. This perception of the benefits of this reckoning to European civil society is certainly not guaranteed in an ever-evolving political landscape.

Amanda K. Wixon:
It's exciting to hear about all this work that's being done internationally. As a curator in a medium-size institution that is getting our repatriation program [started] with our new staff, these presentations are really motivating. We're still pretty far off from international work, but I'm glad to see how much work has been done.

So one of the questions I have is, how does a museum like ours, or other museums, support these kinds of activities? How can we help our community partners, stakeholders, and tribal people recover their cultural heritage objects?

Lyssa C. Stapleton:
Part of the impetus for setting up the Waystation Initiative was actually to help museums, so sort of the other way around, to respond to requests for assistance with international returns. Because we know that museums have their own collections to address. And so most institutions are not prepared to take on objects from outside their collections and assist in returning those. So it's a little bit answering your question in reverse, but I think that museums can support the Waystation Initiative by perhaps coming to us with possibilities for internships for our students. So far, we've had some students go to consulates, we've had some students work in museums, and we have one student who is going to work with the collection of the Museum of the Cherokee People, we hope. But providing opportunities for our students so that they go on to, as professionals in the cultural heritage field, make a difference in the direction that we're all working toward is really, I think, what museums can do.

Nancy E. Weiss:
There are so many opportunities. One is bringing people together, sharing resources, sharing contacts. There's a program that I did want to mention that IMLS [Institute of Museum and Library Services] supported with the Penn Cultural Heritage Center, and it's called Cultural Property Experts on Call. There are those moments when looted objects have been identified, or something has been identified as looted, but the government or whoever is in possession of it has no idea what it is. And so this is an opportunity for museums and cultural experts to really help the process of identifying materials to make sure that they are restored. So that's one.

I think of bringing people together to share information, and museums are wonderful places for that. One of our dreams is bringing together the NAGPRA officer, the Tribal Heritage Preservation Officer, and museums to really create that network and community that can help in this area.

Henrietta Lidchi:
I always think that museums don't have money, but we have even less time. It's all about how we make the best use of our time and how we give time to things that require it. I know that when we were working with Indonesian officials in the Netherlands, we didn't always need big groups to make things happen, but we needed big groups at certain key points. We have

to be better as a museum community [by] using everybody else's time wisely. Therefore, we need to find the shortest distance between two points. There are certain people who have the luxury and opportunity to travel in our field. They've done a lot of traveling, they've seen a lot of collections, and they have a lot of knowledge. And those people need to be used for that [expertise], because other people don't have the possibility of traveling to quite the same extent.

I feel that it's important, particularly for a generational transfer. There are a lot of people who've had [that] opportunity. I've had the opportunity of working in seven different institutions, so I have a pretty good idea of what's in their collections. And it's important that—I'm not quite in my dotage, but it's not that far off—I can hand it on to younger generations. So I think that whole thing about generational transfer is really important because otherwise, everybody's going to have to start the process all over again, and none of us have the time and we don't have enough money. So I think that's really, really, really important.

And then to use the systems. I mean, my point was [that the] international relationship is a system. So in the Netherlands, lots of it is a state-to-state principle. You might not get on with one's government or have complete affinity with one's government, but the government is unfortunately the state, and the state-to-state principle, when it applies, requires you to get on with your government.

Audience Member:
We all appreciate your perspectives because you can see the U.S. experience but also international experience; not many people have that. But if one were to look into a crystal ball, where do you see repatriation in the next five years?

Stapleton:
My crystal ball is rose colored. So, I really think that our efforts are very parallel. And I do see that with other initiatives and institutions, at least in the U.S. with most of the officials that I work with, that we are all oriented toward making [it]—whether it's voluntary returns or repatriations or whatever you want to call it—more regular, more standardized, and more doable. Even the Homeland Security Investigations agents that I work with are seeking to engage with communities as well as nations.

I think that one thing I didn't get to say during my presentation is that while the history of NAGPRA as a law has not always been great, it has forced some changes that are making the things that I'm doing much more possible. So [NAGPRA has] forced museums to acknowledge the rights of communities, engage in conversations with them, and consider their viewpoints when it comes to their objects and also the ability to deaccession things from institutions. I do think that we're moving in a very positive direction, and I'm hoping that that ball will start to roll downhill instead of us shoving it uphill. Fingers crossed.

Weiss:
I tend to be an optimist, and I'm also very rosy [in] that I feel that we have been seeing increased understanding and sensitivity. We see that in popular culture, the stories and the history, the first-person narratives that are conveyed in movies and literature. We are thirty years on in NAGPRA, and I'm excited about the new regulations that came out earlier this

year (2024), which I feel are also helping to bring together different ways of understanding the world and thinking. The White House recently issued guidance on incorporating traditional knowledge into policymaking. And every time I read it, I actually see more things in it. And I'm also pondering how to expand it. There is more and more experience in understanding the process of repatriation and connecting knowledge. It needs to be a little bit more standardized, and both colleagues here have really put together a lot that I'd like to learn from and help bring forward.

Lidchi:
So what would I say? I would say five years is not a long time, and that if the most expeditious return that had the greatest amount of political will, the best weight of evidence, and was a single object took a year. So that's number one.

Number two, my hope for the museum community is that we can establish a way of reconciling our differences and our different perspectives. What I mean there is that the conversation around return and the emotional charge that is invested in that conversation doesn't derail people and then get them to refuse. My hope is that we can actually disagree in a way that allows us to understand that we're actually in principle aligned.

I'm an international observer, and the rise of the far right makes that a greater requirement from all of us in the room. All of us in this room, we may have different perspectives, but in principle, we're all orientated toward the same destination. So we have to be able to argue and reconcile because it's going to be much harder with a bunch of other people. And so that's my viewpoint, that we need to be quite self-disciplined because we're coming into a period where that self-discipline and that purpose is what will guarantee the goals that we are all aiming for.

Because I am an optimist, I'm a cynical optimist. I always believe there is a fight around the corner, and we should be prepared for it. So I think that the Dutch have enshrined it in national policy. There's no going back, and they're making a huge amount of progress. The Germans are very well-disposed, and the French take a lot more. The British are still [operating on a] case-by-case basis. One must move everybody around the chessboard to kind of influence other people, and it requires a staunch orientation to purpose and self-discipline.

The Role of ATALM's Going Home Fund

W. Richard West Jr.
Shana Bushyhead Condill and Evan Mathis
Jordan Poorman Cocker

Returning Native Objects and Cultural Patrimony: Strengthening the Good Red Road

W. Richard West Jr.

When Stephen Aron and Joe Horse Capture asked me to deliver remarks in the nature of a "valedictory" for this year's Marshall McKay Seminar, I was instantaneously intimidated. I had seen the illustrious roster of participants for this year's event. I despaired, candidly, about what I might add that had not already been fully analyzed in addressing the theme, "Going Home: Returning Material Culture to Native Communities."

Given my tenure as a museum director, however, I decided to muscle up as best I could to trace what I believe are the profound, change-making threads of that worthy theme. My maiden voyage in the museum field as the founding director of the National Museum of the American Indian began a full generation ago, months before the enactment of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA). Now, in the autumn of that career, as a member of the Board of Governors of the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums (ATALM), I am honored to serve as the chair of one of the repatriation movement's offspring—namely, ATALM's important current initiative, the Going Home Fund.

There are vital and undeniable linkages between the two—NAGPRA and the Going Home Fund. They sit squarely in the same museological matrix and serve as a context for transformational changes in museum practice. I want to focus on that connection with you this afternoon as valedictory to what you have discussed so ably and with such heart during the past two days.

But I want to do so in a very particular manner. Tempted as I might be, with my law degree at the fore, to immerse you in statutory prescriptions and legalisms, I have no intention of deploying that approach solely. I am a Native octogenarian who has directed museums and overseen extensive Native collections for more than a quarter century at two different institutions. What interests me most, and what I choose to leave with you today, is a strong sense and sensibility of the tangibles and intangibles of a larger schema. That context touches and defines broad and enduring shifts, changes museological paradigms, and dramatically alters philosophies and attitudes of museum practice that have undergirded and inspired Native communities and museums, at long last, to send Native cultural objects home.

Let's then first turn to origins and begin at the beginning with NAGPRA. I want to start our journey by quoting the prescient words and wisdom of Elaine Heumann Gurian, a dear friend and former colleague at the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) and the Smithsonian Institution. She served as

NMAI's deputy director for public program planning and probably has forgotten more about twenty-first-century museum best practices than I yet know. Here is what she said in 1991:

> The American Indian claims—in their persistence and in their assertion and reliance on [the] creation and prosecution of law—have been the most visible catalysts for the current industry-wide reappraisal of museums as social institutions. For this pressure, all of us, even in our most fearful and anxious states, should be grateful.
>
> We will, I believe, learn more about museum possibilities in the next decade, thanks to the American Indian community, than we have learned in the previous several. And museums will become different in a way that will, in the future, seem logical and self-evident. I predict that we will not be able to re-create what all the fuss was about.[1]

You and I know the bones and legal requirements of the NAGPRA legislation enacted in 1990. It requires the return, after due process, of Native ancestral remains, associated and unassociated funerary materials, sacred and ceremonial objects, and cultural patrimony to affiliated Native communities. It applied to virtually all American museums.

In moral and practical terms, the tangibles of the repatriation legislation are seminal and substantial. The return of human ancestors and funerary materials was nothing less than the confirmation of a moral imperative that corrected vast wrongs committed during the nineteenth century, when the U.S. military's battlefield sweeps sent the remains of thousands of Native ancestors to Washington, D.C., for "cranial studies."

The law required the return of sacred objects and cultural patrimony that had everything to do, as a practical matter, with securing the cultural future of living contemporary Native communities throughout the United States. The congressional determination, explicit in the legislative history and definitive of its legislative philosophy and spirit, was that these cultural materials should never have been in a museum in the first instance. Instead, they should be returned to communities to sustain and, in some cases, revive sacred and ceremonial practices and secure a cultural future for contemporary Native communities.

In addition, and consistent with the spirit of this repatriation charter, implementation of the legislatively mandated legal requirements should not be stingy. Under the law, museums were required to develop and publish inventories of a Native community's cultural materials they held. That mandate signaled an approach premised on proactivity and not reticence or delay. As a director, both here previously and at the National Museum of the American Indian, ours was an institutional approach that encouraged ongoing outreach and follow-up with Native communities whose materials we believed to be covered by NAGPRA—we wished to hide nothing "under a bushel," so to speak, or to avoid making any moves before being asked to by a Native community.

1. Elaine Heumann Gurian, "Repatriation in Context: The Important Changes Brought to Museums by Indigenous Communities, 1991," in *Civilizing the Museum: The Collected Writings of Elaine Heumann Gurian* (Routledge, 2006), 194–99.

And a word to the wise, to museum staff, and to museum fiduciaries: the foregoing spirit and philosophical approach will need to be especially in play as Native communities turn to material that is in the category of "cultural patrimony" under NAGPRA. It is perhaps more tender territory for museums and, in the view of some, less clear-cut than other categories of repatriation. But—and let me emphasize—it is identified explicitly legislatively and associated directly with revisions in recent federal regulations that call out Native viewpoints and defer to them in making such determinations.

In the end, of equal importance and to my earlier point, NAGPRA also contained profound change-making "intangibles" beyond its tangible substantive legal provisions. Those intangibles possessed true cultural potency for future relationships between museums and Native America. They may not have been perfectly understood at the time by many parties, including Native communities, but the implicit message was this: NAGPRA forever changed the fundamental power relationship between museums and contemporary Native communities.

My point is not limited to the return of Native material and objects, as important as that provision is. I always considered that requirement only the tip of the iceberg that sometimes concealed below the waterline an even larger revolution in philosophy and practice for the museum community. Specifically, the definitions in the museum world of terms like "authority," "authenticity," and "expertise"—questions such as "Who has knowledge and cultural authority?" "How do museums define 'interpretive expertise'?" and "Who are the 'experts' entitled to sit at the table of museum interpretation?"—were profoundly and enduringly altered. Those alterations have completely revolutionized twenty-first-century curatorial practice in America's museum community.

No one captured more eloquently and accurately this seminal power shift and the transformative changes in the classical museum paradigm, its philosophical underpinnings, and the resulting museum best practices than a person who most certainly should have known—namely, my first boss at the Smithsonian Institution, Secretary Robert McCormick Adams, himself a distinguished anthropologist. Here is how he described the NMAI at the very time it was being created and shortly after I had arrived as its founding director:

> This is a national museum . . . [that] takes the permanence . . . the authenticity . . . the vitality and the self-determination of Native American voices . . . as the fundamental reality . . . it must . . . represent.
>
> . . . [W]e move decisively from the older image of the museum as a temple with its superior, self-governing priesthood to . . . a forum . . . committed not to the promulgation of received wisdom but to the encouragement of a multicultural dialogue.[2]

And a final point concerning a specific bone I have to pick with certain sectors of museological thought—but I feel very strongly about it. In 2002, the Declaration on the Importance and

2. Meeting Notes of the International Founders Council, National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, D.C., 1990. [Unpublished]

Value of Universal Museums defined a “universal museum” as “an institution that serves all humanity.” The Declaration further describes “global objects” as items that are not considered to belong to a “single country or people.”

Others more cynical than I have charged that the Declaration was primarily a device to establish immunity from claims to repatriate objects or materials from their collections. So let me stop short of being accusatory and say, simply, that institutions like the National Museum of the American Indian and the Autry Museum of the American West are not, emphatically, “universal museums” where matters of the repatriation of Native materials are involved. They well may not be “global objects” and indeed may belong to a “single people.” Any other result would be a violation of federal law in the United States and possibly a breach of the Code of Ethics of the International Council of Museums.

The foregoing represents the transformative impacts of the repatriation legislation, both its literal legal requirements as well as its far broader consequences for twenty-first-century museological thought and museum practice. Let me now turn to that equally seminal and inspiring descendant I referred to earlier, ATALM’s Going Home Fund, which I am privileged to oversee, along with others, as a member of ATALM’s board of governors and the chair of the Fund’s advisory committee. I will state its broad mandate now as you will be hearing more specificity in the presentations that follow mine.

The Going Home Fund’s mission is clear: to support the voluntary return of cultural objects and materials to Native communities from museum collections, private collections, and other sources. ATALM believes in the paramount importance of these items finding their way home and being reunited with the people to whom they rightfully belong as the communities of cultural origin. We want to foster partnerships and raise greater awareness so that this mission becomes an international priority, grounded in mutual respect and shared responsibility.

As the title indicates, the Fund is beyond “repatriation” and even beyond “museums.” While it is about returning cultural objects to their origin communities, it serves a far broader purpose—a far deeper purpose. While it provides the financial support that has prevented the return of cultural heritage, it also stimulates awareness that Native communities are ready, willing, and capable of caring for their own cultural materials. Returning cultural materials is thus an act of restorative justice, a step toward healing, and a reclamation of heritage that extends beyond objects and back to people.

The Fund is intended to build bridges over the troubled waters of past collecting practices that were plainly colonial in origin and practice. Over those bridges, cultural objects and other materials will be brought home, and cultural continuity for many Native communities will be enhanced. The ultimate aim of the Going Home Fund is not a “return of things.” Instead, and far more profoundly, it constitutes an effort to support, on as broad a basis as possible, the restoration of living Native cultures and a secure Native future.

In closing, beyond the words I have shared with you this afternoon, their message and essence were captured perfectly in far fewer words by a favorite Native poet of mine, Simon J.

Ortiz, of the Pueblo of Acoma in the State of New Mexico. I wish to honor him by speaking his words here. Ortiz was writing of his own personal quest for cultural survival as a contemporary Native person, but he well could have been speaking collectively for all of Native America:

It doesn't end, of course.

In all growing
from all earths
to all skies,

in all touching
all things,

in all soothing the aches
of all years,

it doesn't end.[3]

Ortiz's statement is not mere beautiful rhetoric. It is not gratuitous. It is culturally real. It is a plea, and a demand at the same time, that the abiding legal and ethical foundations of America's repatriation laws and undertakings like ATALM's Going Home Fund remain honest and true—that Native cultural objects and patrimony should sit closest to those places and peoples where their meanings and histories are deepest and forever abide.

May it ever be so—and thank you for your kind attention.

3. Simon J. Ortiz, *Going for the Rain* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 147–48.

Reuniting Relatives: The Ethical Responsibilities of a Tribal Museum

Shana Bushyhead Condill and Evan Mathis

For many of us who work in Native museums, walking into collections storage spaces is difficult. We respond to the energy in the room but often feel helpless due to the sheer volume of materials, our lack of power to care for them, and our inability to return them home. For us, walking into collections housing at the Museum of the Cherokee People (MotCP, formerly the Museum of the Cherokee Indian) for the first time was no different. We might expect to feel that way in non-Native spaces, like the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History or the Field Museum, but this is our community's museum, and the experience was heartbreaking.

The truth is, even though the Museum of the Cherokee People is the tribal museum of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI), we had never clearly defined our collecting scope. As a result, well-meaning people in the area had sent us materials from all over the world. We are located in the southeastern United States, amid removal states—the places where Native people were forcibly and violently displaced from our ancestral homelands and relocated to Indian Territory in the West as dictated by the Indian Removal Act of 1830. The EBCI is blessed to remain on our ancestral homelands, but that leaves us as the caretakers of one of the few federally recognized tribal museums in the region. And while we are honored to steward these Indigenous objects from all over the world, we believe that these objects, like our Cherokee objects, are living—they contain a part of the maker, and we live in relation with them. The energy we feel in our collections space is not only about our own objects needing care but also about our visiting objects who need to return home. In the same way we work and pray for our objects to return home, it is our ethical responsibility to do our part to return our visiting objects to their homes.

History of the Museum of the Cherokee People

Our museum opened its doors in 1948 under the direction of Tom Underwood (non-Native) in a log building in Cherokee, North Carolina, on the Qualla Boundary, the sovereign lands of the EBCI. The original collection consisted primarily of artifacts donated by a local non-Native businessman named Samuel Beck.[1] Beck, a collector of Native American antiquities, saw an opportunity to generate revenue by placing a tribal museum within the tourism-based economy that sustained the town during the mid-twentieth century. The museum then began acquiring other collections, including individual donations by EBCI tribal citizens and community members, the Kirksey Collection, the Weatherly Collection, and donations by ethnologist Frank Speck. EBCI-enrolled tribal citizen Mose Owle served as the curator and chief lecturer then,

1. "Samuel Edmund Beck, Founder of the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, 1898–1966." Date unknown, 1987.013.029, Box 10, "Museum of the Cherokee People Collection," Museum of the Cherokee People, Cherokee, NC.

educating the public about accurate representations of Cherokee people. Owle spent a large portion of his time combating harmful stereotypes fueled by Western movies and businesses around Cherokee, North Carolina, that made their living appealing to tourists' uneducated expectations of what an "Indian" looked like.

Beginning in the early twentieth century with the opening of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (the most visited national park within the United States), tourism became the main economic driver on the Qualla Boundary. This development was primarily thanks to the EBCI tribal leaders, who had the foresight to negotiate the town of Cherokee as one of the main entrances to the national park. The community then had the audience and consistent traffic needed to maintain a healthy tourism economy. The main feature of Cherokee, North Carolina, that set it apart from other towns in the region is that it is home to a federally recognized tribal nation. However, tourists' knowledge of Indigenous peoples came from Western movies and Hollywood stereotypes, which portrayed Native Americans as a monolith with cultural traditions mostly based in the Great Plains and the American Southwest, with random totem poles scattered in. These stereotypes continue to permeate the minds of tourists to a shocking degree here in the Southeast; many visitors do not even realize that Native people still exist in 2024. Rather than sell their own Cherokee culture, members of the EBCI chose to lean into the misconceptions tourists held about them. This practice is commonly referred to as strategic essentialism, which "represents the idea of an oppressed group intentionally taking on stereotypes about itself in order to disrupt or subvert the dominance that oppresses or marginalizes it."[2] By playing into Hollywood stereotypes, generations of EBCI peoples sustained their families on the ignorance of non-Native tourists.

However, EBCI tribal leaders were also incredibly innovative in marketing authentic Cherokee artwork in compliance with the Indian Arts and Crafts Act (IACA) while simultaneously participating in strategic essentialism. The Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, Inc., which first opened its doors in 1946, is the oldest Native American cooperative in the United States and has a long history of selling authentic Cherokee art that is IACA compliant. EBCI-enrolled artists must apply and complete a juried demonstration (an in-person interview and demonstration of the processes and techniques used to create the artwork they claim they can produce) in front of a panel of Qualla board members—all of whom are EBCI-enrolled tribal citizens and artists themselves. Once accepted as a member of the cooperative, these artists may sell their artwork as authentic Cherokee art in the store. This system has had a noticeable financial impact on generations of EBCI families and has positively influenced the perpetuation of Cherokee artwork. Promoting culturally embedded art while fostering the financial sustainability of Indigenous artmaking incentivizes the EBCI community to pass these traditions to the next generation.

In 1958, a devastating fire destroyed the historic log cabin building that served as the original museum, along with much of the provenance documentation that accompanied the collections. Thankfully, the museum's object collections were being stored in an off-site facility, sparing them from the destruction. After the fire, the museum reopened in a temporary location owned and operated by the Cherokee Historical Association, which purchased and assumed operations of the museum in 1952. By 1975, Duane H. King, PhD, (non-Native) began his

2. James Lindsay, "Strategic Essentialism," *New Discourses*, 2020, https://newdiscourses.com/tftw-strategic-essentialism/. Accessed October 10, 2024.

museum career as executive director. On July 4, 1976, after years of fundraising and economic investments from multiple sources, the museum reopened its doors to the public in its current location.

In the 1990s, Director Ken Blankenship (EBCI) and the board of directors agreed that it was time to update the permanent exhibition. Immersion was the key word in exhibition design at that time—hear the voices, see the Cherokee creation story, and feel the cold of the Trail of Tears. The ceiling was lowered and the lights dimmed to create the feeling of being enveloped in the exhibition. The museum worked with Walt Disney Imagineering, implemented cutting-edge technology (including holograms), and reopened in 1998 with a new experience for its visitors.

What we must consider now, which was not so much the focus of conversation in 1998, is who the Museum of the Cherokee People is for. Since its founding, the museum has always been an economic driver for and centerpiece of Cherokee, North Carolina. This purpose aligns with Indigenous social movements in the 1970s toward self-determination and the rise of tribal museums across the country. But what we see when we step back and look at the exhibition today is that much of the scholarship derives from non-Cherokee sources, over one hundred ceremonial and funerary objects are on view, the timeline methodology does not reflect a Cherokee worldview, and area tourists constitute the primary visitorship. We know from visitation data that our Cherokee community rarely visits the museum, except for field trips. As the EBCI continues to diversify its income sources, we are at a moment where we can and should consider prioritizing our community as our primary audience.

In the late 1990s, the common refrain from Native activists was, “We are still here.” When asking our young people today what they most want non-Native people to know about us, they answer, “We are still here.” *This most fundamental recognition of existence is still a goal and rallying cry. We have work to do*. Centering community and self-representation by making this tribal museum a truly first-voice museum will create an authentic experience for our own tribal members, as well as local and nonlocal visitors who come to learn.

Our Shared Responsibilities

MotCP has implemented many strategies to shift our focus and transition into a first-voice museum that serves our community and takes our place in Indian Country as a partner tribal museum. We have undergone a rebranding and renaming that affirms this museum as our community’s museum. Since we had never had our name recorded in the Cherokee language, we collaborated with our Cherokee Speaker’s Council and specifically our board member and first-language speaker, Marie Junaluska (EBCI), to determine what we wanted our name to convey. It was important to ensure it is clear that our museum, despite its non-Cherokee founding, is ours. In Cherokee, our name is now ᏣᎳᎩ ᎢᏗᏴᏫᏯᎯ ᎢᎦᏤᎵ ᎤᏪᏘ ᎠᏍᏆᏂᎪᏙᏗ [Tsalagi idiyvwiyahi igatseli uweti asquanigododi]. It means, “All of us are Cherokee people. It is all of ours, where the old and interesting things are stored.” The Cherokee naming was an important step in ensuring our community feels a sense of ownership over our museum.

We have also dedicated significant time and resources to NAGPRA compliance, which felt unexpected but very necessary. As a tribal museum and the official repository of the EBCI,

we never expected our facility would be out of compliance. However, upon investigating our collections, working toward some of the first known collection inventories, and collaborating with the EBCI's Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO), we realized our tribal museum had some catching up to do. We also recognized the cultural risks of the work ahead and began preparing ourselves mentally, emotionally, and culturally. Upon initial investigation of our collections housing area, we found human ancestral remains that had never been accessioned or included as part of our official museum collection. Based on correspondence letters attached to the boxes in which the human ancestral remains were found, the ancestors entered the museum beginning in 1992, two years after the passage of NAGPRA, and likely as a direct result of the law's implementation. Ancestors continued entering the museum until 2012.

Since beginning this process, we have collaborated with professional osteologists from the University of Tennessee–Knoxville. These individuals built an inventory of the human ancestral remains found in the MotCP collections housing area, preventing our staff from having to handle or view the human ancestral remains, which was a significant concern for the cultural health of our staff. We have also consulted with nineteen tribal nations to ensure these human ancestral remains return to the correct home communities. Upon completion of our consultation process, we will submit our inventory to the National NAGPRA Program. We look forward to these ancestors being placed back in the ground, where they can continue their journeys.

Also present within the MotCP collection were many materials that were not Cherokee. The presence of these items is due to the lack of a formal collections policy and collections scope, which currently guides how we steward and accept acquisitions into the MotCP collections. Because of our experience visiting other collections that hold Cherokee materials, we understand well the bittersweet feeling of being allowed a short visit with a museum object (that we consider a living relative) and then having to leave them behind, not knowing when or if you will ever see them again. Because we have a very clear scope, and because of our experiences visiting with Cherokee materials in other collections, we wanted to ensure that we never hold another community's objects hostage. We also recognize that source communities are the best stewards of their own material culture, and we advocate best practices of care and stewardship of these objects. With the support of our executive director, we began working with ATALM's Going Home Fund and UCLA's Waystation Program to get materials from other tribal nations and Indigenous communities throughout the world back home.

The first repatriation ATALM's Going Home Fund made possible for us was a Kiowa cradleboard (fig. 1) and a pair of Kiowa boy's moccasins in 2023. The cradleboard and moccasins had been transferred to the MotCP around 2012, along with a large collection of Native objects from throughout North America that had previously been housed at the Greensboro Science Museum. These materials had never been accessioned or tracked by previous museum staff, so it was as if they never existed at the MotCP. We could tell the cradleboard and moccasins were from the Southern Plains, so we first reached out to a close family friend, Marita Wockmetooah Jimenez (Comanche Nation), to come and view the cradleboard and moccasins. She confirmed they were from the Comanche/Kiowa/Apache Reservation in Southern Oklahoma but recommended we speak with another close family friend, Kelly Banderas (Comanche Nation/Kiowa Tribe/Crow Tribe), who worked with

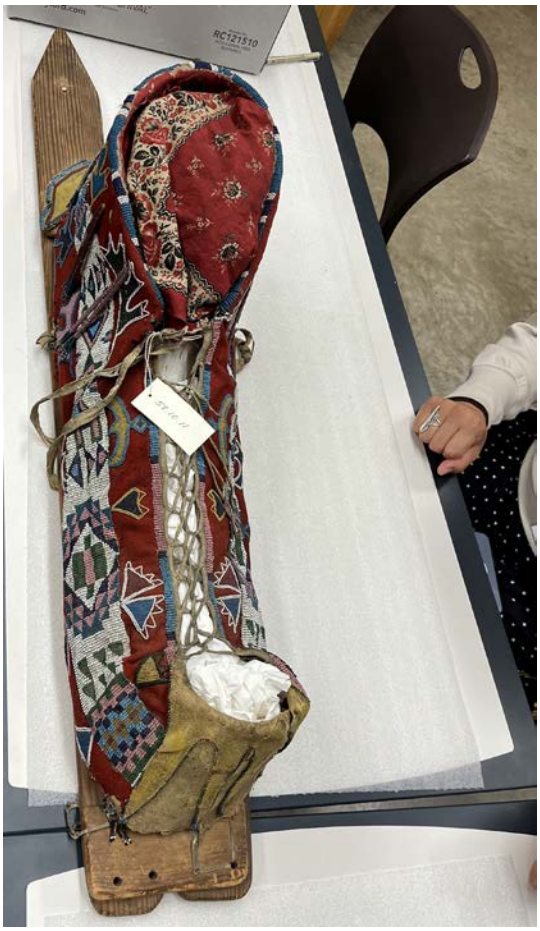


Fig. 1. Ruby Onco's cradleboard. Courtesy of Evan Mathis, Museum of the Cherokee People

Fig. 2. Back of Ruby Onco's cradleboard with visible pencil notations on wooden frame. Courtesy of Evan Mathis, Museum of the Cherokee People

the Comanche Nation's THPO. Kelly also connected us with the Kiowa Tribe's THPO. After speaking with both THPOs, the parties agreed that the cradleboard and the moccasins were of Kiowa origin. We then consulted Tahnee Ahtone (Kiowa/Mvskoke/Seminole), who comes from a long line of cradleboard makers and was the director of the Kiowa Tribal Museum at the time. Tahnee confirmed that both the cradleboard and moccasins were from the Kiowa Tribe.

While packing the cradleboard for transport, our manager of education, Shennelle Feather (EBCI/Navajo/Lakota), realized there was faint writing in pencil down the back of the wooden boards that compose the frame of a Kiowa cradleboard (fig. 2). We could see the words "ELLA Ruby ONCO'S CRAdLE" as well as the year "1906." We immediately texted museum colleague and friend Jordan Poorman Cocker (Kiowa/Tongan). Within fifteen minutes of this inadvertent discovery, Jordan confirmed that she was related to the Onco family and that she would contact them to be present at the time of the rematriation. Jordan worked with Amanda Hill (Kiowa), the Kiowa Black Leggings Society, Kiowa Tribal Chairman Lawrence Spotted Bird (Kiowa), and the Onco family to ensure the appropriate people were invited to welcome this cradleboard back home to their tribal nation (figs. 3 and 4).

Fig. 3. Tribal elders and community members, including the Onco family. Pictured from left: Patrick Tsotigh (Kiowa; Black Leggings Warrior Society leadership); Goldie Kaulaity (Kiowa; Black Leggings Warrior Society leadership); Tribal Chairman Lawrence SpottedBird (Kiowa); two members of the Onco family, Anita Onco-Johnson (Kiowa) and Amanda Hill (Kiowa); Deborah Cocker Toyebo (Kiowa); Jordan Poorman Cocker (Kiowa/Tongan); Blas Precidio (Kiowa; Black Leggings Warrior Society leadership); and Tugger Palmer (Kiowa; P'ah Tdo K'ee, Black Leggings Warrior Society leadership). Courtesy of Jordan Poorman Cocker

Fig. 4. Repatriation ceremony for Ruby Onco's cradleboard at the 2023 Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums Association (ATALM) conference. Pictured from left: Walter Echo-Hawk (Pawnee), Jacob Zotigh (Kiowa), Shana Bushyhead Condill (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians), Onco family descendant (Kiowa), Tribal Chairman Lawrence SpottedBird (Kiowa), Onco family descendant (Kiowa), Anita Onco-Johnson ([seated] Kiowa), Onco family descendant (Kiowa), Amanda Hill (Kiowa), Jordan Poorman Cocker (Kiowa/Tongan), and Evan Mathis. Courtesy of Robin Crowe Swayney (EBCI), Museum of the Cherokee People

Conclusion

The Museum of the Cherokee People is honored to participate in ATALM's Going Home Fund, which has made both our tribal relationships and funding goals possible. As the repository for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and the descendants of those who created the objects that often live in museums and collections all over the world, we are always honored to care for these items whose journeys have been disrupted. But what we know, along with all our Native relations, is that nobody can care for these objects better than their home communities. Together with our Native museum community and ATALM, we imagine a future where all our objects are returned home.

The Going Home Fund Returns Pahn Tdope: Journey of a Kiowa Cradleboard

Jordan Poorman Cocker

My name is Jordan Poorman Cocker, and I am the curator of Indigenous art at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and a NAGPRA officer. I also now serve on the board of the ATALM Going Home Fund, as well as the Native American Art Studies Association (NAASA) Board, and I teach at the Institute of American Indian Arts in the Studio Arts MFA program as an artist mentor.

I am so thrilled to talk about this pahn tdope. I am going to do a little language class with y'all. My grandmothers Dolores Harragara and Dorothy Delaune have taught the Kiowa language for many years. The correct way to say Kiowa cradleboard is "pahn tdope." So I will say it, and then I will turn time over to you to say it: pahn tdope.

I am pleased that Shana Bushyhead Condill and Evan Mathis have written about the journey of this cradleboard, this pahn tdope, coming home. I would like to expand the story. I received a text from Evan a few days before ATALM concluded, and he mentioned that the Museum of the Cherokee People was trying to reach the Kiowa Tribal Museum interim director, Dr. Phil Dupoint. I called Uncle Joe (my nickname for Dr. Dupoint) and Amanda Hill, who is our THPO. Uncle Joe wasn't feeling well and said, "This is important. Can you come out and take care of this?" I replied, "I am in the car right now. I'm going to head over." It means a lot to have these items return home to the Kiowa Tribe where they belong. While cradleboards aren't sacred objects in that they are not culturally sensitive or ceremonial, they are important because pahn tdope are tied to our Kiowa children.

This cradleboard was made by the Onco family for Ruby Ella. Her grandniece, Anita Onco-Johnson, who is a relative, came to ATALM to receive the cradleboard with us, which was so special. I think a lot about the work of repatriation, return, and that period of colonialism and salvage anthropology when objects were intentionally removed, stolen, displaced, and then erased from their historical contexts. I thought Henrietta Lidchi's presentation about the intentionality of those acts as a form of violence and humiliation was wonderful because it described the feeling and experience of having something removed intentionally and withheld from the community by institutions that fail to adhere to NAGPRA law. We know that colonialism removes objects, people, humanity, context, and evidence as acts of violence and humiliation, but what does it mean to return something? What does restoring connection across time and space between descendants and those tangible objects mean for the community and descendants?

I descend from Kiowa cradleboard makers and beadworkers. Cradleboards were made—and still are made—for the smallest members of our society, the

Little Rabbits or the little children, who are so invaluable. If you have children in your family or camp, you are regarded as wealthy because the children are the future. Cradleboards were created with the intention of placing a child within the Little Rabbit Society. These cradleboards are made within a family unit and used throughout a child's first year of life. A cradleboard does not have just one maker; there would be multiple makers, and the time to create a cradleboard would often span the entire nine-month gestational period. Pahn tdope were designed to help the baby develop during its first year. The vestibular system, responsible for spatial awareness and balance, is developed in the first nine months of life. The fine motor skills the cradleboard provides help the child to develop in a good way. My aunties and my grandmothers say that children who go on the cradleboard have less anxiety and depression, sleep longer, and are more settled. These cradleboards carry many benefits.

To have one come back from the period of removal and the period just after our treaty was signed was incredible. I was overjoyed when I received the text from Evan because this is the reason that I entered the field, to bring these moments of not just connection through object making and the learning of specific beadwork techniques that will now occur in our communities, but also intellectual kinship and healing between descendants and their ancestral belongings.

There were tender in-person reunions between descendants and this cradleboard. My mother, Deborah Cocker Toyebo, sang a song as we waited at the hotel before the repatriation ceremony. It is a song sung to soothe children when they are small. I felt privileged to be there and was honored to help facilitate connections between the tribe and the Going Home Fund in this return. Our tribal chairman, Lawrence SpottedBird, mentioned in his remarks during the repatriation just how important and tender it is to have this item returned to us. We were thinking about those little children and how they are the most vulnerable among us. I'm grateful to Christina Burke, curator of Native American art and fellow board member of the Going Home Fund. We discussed thinking into the future, which is really the intention behind pahn tdope. One of my aunts, Vanessa Mopope Jennings, said that cradleboards are created to carry a child into a world that sometimes as mothers or grandmothers, we will never see. The benefits and impacts of that reunion are profound. Something that came up during the celebration dinner was that because our tribe is somewhat short-staffed, as many tribal nations are, we needed support from Christina Burke to transport the cradle back to Carnegie, Oklahoma, to the tribal headquarters. Her assistance was so helpful in realizing the pahn tdope's return.

In closing, our children are the heart of the Kiowa people. The more opportunities we have to support this work of return beyond repatriation, the better our communities will be, the stronger they will be, and we will be better able to face today's challenges. Again, I want to express my gratitude to the Mellon Foundation for their vision and support and for helping this work to come to fruition. And to all those who had a hand in this important return.

Joe Horse Capture:
Jordan, on one side you are a curator, and on the other side you are a community member. How do you balance that, especially since you were involved in the repatriation of a pahn tdope created by your relatives?

Jordan Poorman Cocker:
That's a really good question. I was raised to think about what it means to carry things—items, ceremony, songs, knowledge—for our collective. And so, I think when I was actually inspired to go into the museum field, it was when I was going to university in New Zealand. And for the first time, [having grown] up in Oklahoma, I saw there that Natives were not just janitors in the museum, but they were directors and curators. And you could go into a space and come out—and I don't want to romanticize what's going on there—relatively unharmed to an extent. I don't think they always get it right, but it really was a place of social learning and connection, and I was inspired by that. And so, I think the decision to go into the museum field was driven by the disconnect between our communities and our material cultures that are in museums.

Horse Capture:
I think a part of your presentation brings us back to the beginning: What is cultural patrimony? If you recall when I read the official definition, it said something that was inalienable from community, doesn't belong to an individual, et cetera. But I think the way that you described how pahn tdope are created is that they are created by multiple people within the family. The blessings imbued in the creation of that object go to the child. Then that child, as it grows up within the community, passes those blessings on to others as their responsibility of being a citizen of that community. So in a way, it is cultural patrimony. Am I interpreting that correctly?

Poorman Cocker:
I think that there's definitely a Venn diagram of definitions going on, but similar to the presentation that was given about the shields (see Brien, "Apsaalooktatchia Ishbinnaache Iiwaaatchiluuk Crow Shields: A Case Study of Patrimony," p. 11), even though there may be direct descendants [of] the makers and, of course, [of] who the pahn tdope was made for, [the pahn tdope] is meant to be seen in our society, and it's meant to be passed down as an heirloom. So when [the pahn tdope was taken and the lineage] was interrupted intentionally, [it was] a great example of that humiliation, [similar to when] General Pratt and other folks took Kiowa, Comanche, Apache, and Cheyenne warriors to Fort Marion.

That humiliation—I mean, it was moccasins, it was shirts, it was pipes, it was tobacco bags, anything and everything that could be taken. And it reminds me of what happens when you go to prison. All your possessions are taken away to dehumanize you and to create this dynamic of power. But in that, going back to that sort of construction and patrimony, it's a tough term because [if] I think of the opposite side of the coin, it would be an item of matrimony. I don't know. I think there are a lot of layers to those definitions, but really it is up to the tribal nation to decide what is not cultural patrimony.

Horse Capture:
Rick, do you have a perspective?

W. Richard West Jr.:
I would say the very same thing that's just been said. With my lawyer's hat on, I would say that what the new regulations have made quite clear is that there is considerable deference that has to be paid to the tribe's own construction in answering that question. And I don't rule out that it may vary from tribe to tribe on a case-specific basis. Unfortunately, I just got here this morning, so I didn't hear the previous discussions. But the way that Jordan just described it, it really is something more than just an individual family object, if you will. It sits in a matrix that is bigger than that and has other layers of meaning to the community.

I know that's complicated, but it will have to be sorted out. And what I do believe is a bottom-line manner I referred to in my remarks (see West, "Returning Native Objects and Cultural Patrimony: Strengthening the Good Red Road," p. 100), and that is what the regulations have now made clear is there is a viewpoint coming from the Native side that has to be taken seriously. In the past, what I would say on this and other kinds of questions where there was Native viewpoint, I think the feeling by the revisers of the regulations was, and the comments that led to those revisions, is that [Native viewpoint] kind of was not taken as seriously. And so I think it has been put in a position just in terms of description and the regulations where it must be taken more seriously.

Horse Capture:
Rick, in your presentation you emphasized, particularly with NAGPRA, the directions in which many museums are moving because of the law as well as priorities for the different institutions. Please talk about the preference for Native viewpoint, Native knowledge in interpreting works and objects. What is the relationship between Native knowledge and curators in museums? How would they work together?

West:
They shouldn't be seen as in opposition. One of the other underlying theses of what I was saying is, for a moment, pull back, if you will, just a little bit from the explicit provisions that we're in about the return of certain kinds of materials. My larger point is a contextual one. And that is, as far as I'm concerned—and I did try to refer to it at least briefly in the comments that I made—one of the most significant aspects of the repatriation law is it basically upset the apple cart in ways that are terribly significant for the future. Because it literally altered—certainly in the context of returning objects, but in other ways, too—the balance of power between museums and Native communities.

That is just very, very important to keep in mind. Its impact on museums, which does have to do with the curation and curators, is that it, just as in repatriation, is the projection and the value of first-person Native voice. So it should be throughout the museum, and that includes specifically the curatorial side of the museum. At the NMAI, I dealt with your father on this subject and then I dealt with you on this subject at the Autry, and fortunately you're both consistent with each other, so there was no problem.

The point is that just as repatriation relies on first-person Native voice, so should interpretation and representation. There should not be a clash. I think in museums that have really worked it out, they've worked it out either by at long last hiring Native curators who sort of bring the matrix with them when they come just because they're Native, or even in those who are not, it is simply I think in 2024 vastly different than it was in 1990 in terms of the attitudes of non-Native curators and how that whole process works now.

Horse Capture:
If we can focus on your presentation regarding the Going Home Fund, we saw from Shana and Evan (see Condill and Mathis, "Reuniting Relatives: The Ethical Responsibilities of a Tribal Museum," p. 105) the example of the Museum of the Cherokee People with the pahn tdope. That's just one example in this vast network of possibilities of return initiated by museums for voluntary returns as opposed to NAGPRA, but also by private collectors. For our audience, because the possibilities are so vast, how do we get our head around all of this?

West:
They are, but that's a plus in the end because it shows it is complicated and a complex matter to embrace much larger territory, if you will, beyond the requirements of repatriation itself. But it shows you, I think, where things are going. That is where they're headed. And it may take us a little while to figure that out. I think the ATALM through the Going Home Fund was as interested in trying to model certain kinds of things or explore paths and processes to try to get this done as it was in being the perfect model from the beginning. I do invite people to explore the ATALM website for this particular project, because literally everything we are now dealing with is up and there, with the exception of objects [where] the view may be limited because of our perceived nature of the object, but otherwise everything is there.

And what we've tried to do is, first of all, get the objects up and make it publicly known that we can be a clearinghouse for that kind of thing. And then assemble a cadre of everybody from curators to conservators to collections folks, et cetera, whom we can bring to bear in trying to figure out the objects we get and assist in getting them back to where they should be. We have dollars as well as people as resources to try to help in that process. That is what it is going to take. But it is something which is in full swing right now. The progression is really toward more liberalism and liberality in this transfer of objects coming from private collectors and beyond, to trying to figure out how to get them back to the tribe. It's much more open territory than it was certainly when I became a director in 1990.

Poorman Cocker:
And just to speak to that, having the right folks in these positions to make the connections is everything. I was so appreciative of Christina Burke offering to drive the cradleboard to Carnegie from Oklahoma City, because we're a small tribe and we did not have the capacity at that time, and still don't, to transport that pahn tdope. So having flexibility in the process was absolutely critical to that success.

West:
I think you will find it's both the people and just the tasks of transporting any kind of Native objects which are sort of inherently fragile because they're often organic material, et cetera. So just the process of packing and transporting can be both complex and expensive. Some

tribes simply don't have the resources to do that. And museums sometimes don't, either, or aren't willing. We [ATALM Going Home Fund] are willing, and we intend to do that, and we've put more money into the project ever since it started at ATALM to try to heavy up the financial support we can lend to tribes in that regard.

Horse Capture:
For the parameters of the Going Home Fund, yesterday we heard presentations that mentioned how objects are coming back to the tribe either voluntarily or through NAGPRA, but tribes don't necessarily have a place to store them. Can the Going Home Fund assist with that? Or is the assistance provided by the Fund more of facilitating the process of objects coming back to the tribe?

West:
We do require that there is some suitable place to which the object can go. Now that depends upon what the object is. I mean that may be one thing, one place, and sort of another thing, another. But what I will say is that there are instances when the tribe doesn't have a museum or a cultural center. And there what we have tried to do is figure out any number of things, and it causes museums themselves to think somewhat differently.

For example, large museums normally have—but not any of which I have ever sat—collections management policies that restrict what they can hold to that over which they have title, period. Nothing else. We changed the collections management policy at the NMAI so that that was not the case. So sometimes, it may be a case where [the object] may not go physically back to the tribe, but title is transferred, and we provide some kind of housing for that. Or it may be that in the area where the object is returning to geographically, there's another tribe that can assist. But we're trying to explore those possibilities, which help solve that kind of problem, too.

Horse Capture:
Questions from the audience?

Audience Member:
Kind of a silly question, but I was just curious, where would you repatriate objects from groups that are no longer around, such as pottery from the Anasazi Indians?

Poorman Cocker:
I think that's a good question. The process of consultation is important. Identifying source communities takes time. For works that are historical and predate removal periods and predate the designations of even tribal nations as we know them today, having a discussion with a conglomerate of nations is imperative to really open the door for listening and taking in the recommendations from the THPOs [Tribal Historic Preservation Officers] and other cultural preservation folks, the staff.

West:
That's true. One answer would be, and I don't mean to be flippant at all, I'm not sure that contemporary Pueblo tribes would necessarily agree with the statement you made that there is no place a pot like that can go in contemporary communities. So that's one answer.

The other, though, does play exactly on what Jordan said, and we found this in repatriation, but there's [an] analogy, I think, to how you would handle it through the Going Home Fund, and that is listening and consultation. Museums have not been fantastic about listening sometimes, but they're getting better at it. And so what we did, where there was an analogous kind of problem with respect to material that was being repatriated, where there could be multiple claims to it, or [there] were multiple claims to it, is we listened.

And quite frankly, we normally let them figure it out. Often they wanted us to figure it out, the museum, and we said, "No, we're not going to do that. It is you who must figure it out." And we ultimately succeeded every time with that. [It] took a while to make it work, but it does. So the process of listening and consulting, astutely and widely, I think, is a big, big help.

Horse Capture:
Any other questions from the audience?

West:
A good question.

Audience Member:
Actually, [this is] more of a question for Jordan, partly because of the experience with New Zealand. So my feeling, from a European perspective, is that Te Papa was a very successful institution in arguing for and successfully for restitution in particular. And I wonder if you had a way of . . . now that you are doing this work here and that you witnessed the work in New Zealand, what do you think are some takeaway points that might be helpful in international contexts?

Poorman Cocker:
I think that's a great question. The first repatriation that I had the privilege of playing a small role in was [when] I was working with Grace Hutton, who is [the] Kaitiaki Taonga collections manager for Pacific Collections at Te Papa. And it was the return of [an] 'ahu'ula cloak that belonged to Chief Kamehameha to the Bishop Museum. [The process] took a number of years, so it actually didn't come to fruition during my placement there.

But what really inspired me about that space was seeing the policy and the practice in action. And I think it continues the work that's happening in New Zealand. [Repatriation efforts at] Te Papa and across the country continue to inspire me, because I think it's a great example of how Indigenous people can utilize sovereignty in a way that really does the work of indigenizing colonial institutions and museums. And in terms of what it looks like to be informed by those policies and practices as a practitioner, I think [it] is really focusing in on the processes and the steps that were taken as well as the policies themselves.

Something that I incorporate into my work as a curator [is] practices that center sovereignty. And to center sovereignty means having an understanding and working with folks who have an understanding of the treaty. Te Tiriti o Waitangi [the Treaty of Waitangi, an 1840 agreement between the Māori and the British Crown] is really the skeleton, or the structure, of the policies that we see emerge from New Zealand.

And here in the U.S., we rarely hear folks talk about whether they're indigenous or not, the treaties, but it's in those laws and bylaws that we really know what is ours to have claim on, and stake claim on, and take action toward having more autonomy and authority over, and maybe what isn't. And oftentimes, it's actually quite open-ended. I think the more that Indigenous communities here—including my own—the more that we take authority [over] those treaty rights, the better these sorts of conversations will be in the coming years.

West:
Can I add something? Yeah, if I could add something, just sort of invoking the other half of my experience as a museum director was spending a lot of time on ICOM's executive board and being an officer in the organization. And I'd make a couple of points. One is that the ground is generally shifting a bit, I think even in Europe. Not to get too personal, but I remember when Joe's father, George, and I visited the then Musée de l'Homme in Paris—and you don't mistake George for [not] being Native. I'm accused frequently of being an Italian businessman—he and I were making our way through the Musée de l'Homme, and we were never more than a foot behind or ahead of the collections manager. I swear they thought we were going to lift something right off the shelves as we were going through. It's not quite the same now. I think the Te Papa, which I am a great admirer of—I sort of followed that museum from the time it was in the open harbor in Wellington to the time that it was actually operating, because I wanted to see that as a model of how that kind of thing was done—they did almost act, as I think I implied, on a legal basis. I mean, there was a treaty, quite frankly. And the fact was that they whupped the British badly, and there was some perverse respect, I think, for Te Papa when they were making those kinds of claims.

So there's that. And then the other thing, just around the edges, you see things that are happening differently. When I was the director at the Autry, the president and CEO of the Autry, I was approached on a confidential basis, which I think is okay to disclose at this point, by the Annenberg Foundation. Because the Annenberg Foundation had put itself in a position—and I won't describe exactly how it happened—but in the position of itself putting up the cash to bid on the kachinas that were being sold in Paris, and this was what, five to ten years ago or so?

There are a number of ways to skin the cat, and you will find allies now that you wouldn't have found then. But I think you also will find that overall . . . Oh, the last thing I would add is that the legal committee, I guess you might know better than I, of ICOM is now chaired by an American. And I know that we and some others I know have been working with that legal committee as they do their revision of the ICOM Code of Ethics to try to tighten up things on that end, too. There have been three different provisions relating to collections, exhibitions, et cetera, in the ICOM Code of Ethics since 2007. But now there is more focus on restitution and repatriation, and we have been in touch and have been asked to comment on some things that committee is trying to do in redoing the ethics code.

Horse Capture:
Any other questions from the audience?

Audience Member:
There's a lot of talk about how museums and institutions are catching up with this, and how the times are changing. Everyone in this room is really excited about this. But I wonder, too, that if this is work of repair, what responsibilities do museums and institutions have to communities to facilitate a good transfer, to facilitate mediation? I was recently in a conversation that was casual, and I don't think it was meant to be so offensive, but someone had [inquired about] how involved we [should] get with family squabbles. And I think to myself, well, it was colonial disruption that caused those squabbles. So, in what ways . . . what sorts of things do you two think museums can be doing to mediate that process and create repair for our communities to become whole?

West:
Museums have to get themselves to the point of not doing these things and enhancing communications with tribes just because they know they have to obey the bloody law. They need to go much more distance in building kind, mutually respectful, and substantive relationships with tribes. That sits at the very bottom. Forget repatriation for a moment. The fact is, most museums don't have anything but that relationship with tribes at the present time, and they need to have something different. And I will say so simply because I know more about it because I was there, but the Autry has gone to the point of having a formalized memorandum of understanding that has substance to it, in addition to anything relating to repatriation, about how we conduct the relationship, how the Autry conducts its relationship with the Tongva and other communities in the L.A. Basin area.

I sit on the board of the Denver Art Museum, which has gone to great lengths—because that is another city in which there's a large urban Native community—to build up a relationship, a connection, where the Native community actually looks to the institution for assistance, support, and help in dealing with issues that may be museum related. But it is just cultivating relationships that have more breadth and depth and are not only hanging on the hook of repatriation. They must do that because they have to. But if it could be something more than that, which is much more mutual and much deeper in terms of the number of ways in which they link with each other and support each other in a mutual way, that's much better.

Poorman Cocker:
That's a great question. Rethinking the roles museums play is integral to this work, [as is] having a museum leadership and board that supports rethinking about museums [not] as temples [but rather] as repositories meant for education and social benefit. I think the [curator's role is being deconstructed], moving away from the role of authority and that institutional voice and [instead] really thinking about how to incorporate facilitation. So we use the words *dialogue* and *consultation*, but really that means being in one way or another in relation—and hopefully good relation—with people. But if we don't have folks in these positions who have the experience or the ethical frameworks or methods to take the time to speak with people and get into community with people, then that [lack] poses huge challenges to the success of that work.

I think the role of museums is a great question and a very broad question. But what I was told is that if something takes 150 years or 400 years to be off-kilter, and 150 years of harm in colonialism, then it's going to take as long to repair. So, we think about the work that we do as generational or one step toward something better. And then, again, that sort of goes into the

responsibility that museums have to recognize that Indigenous folks are not a monolith, and what works for one community is not going to work for another community. There is specificity to the objects that are repatriated as well and different levels of sensitivity. And hopefully, as Rick mentioned, more museums [will] include the voices and work of Indigenous curators and scholars in those processes.

Contributors

Weshoyot Alvitre
James Bier
Michael Black Wolf
Aaron Brien
Gerald Clarke
Jordan Poorman Cocker
Shana Bushyhead Condill
Jordan Dresser
Sven Haakanson Jr.
James Pepper Henry
Henrietta Lidchi
Evan Mathis
Lyssa C. Stapleton
Nancy E. Weiss
W. Richard West Jr.

Contributors

Weshoyot Alvitre is a Tongva comic book artist, writer, and illustrator. She was born in the Santa Monica Mountains on Satwiwa, a historic Indigenous territory and later the site of a cultural center founded by her father, Art Alvitre. She grew up close to the land, raised with traditional knowledge that inspires the work she does today, which focuses on an Indigenous lens and voice in projects ranging from children's books to adult-market graphic novels. Alvitre consciously works primarily with Native-owned publications and educational avenues to support and emphasize a self-directed narrative on past, present, and future Native issues.

James Bier is a member of the Santa Ynez Chumash and the director of the Santa Ynez Chumash Museum and Cultural Center. He leads the development and operation of this new tribal museum, which is dedicated to preserving and sharing Chumash culture. Initially hired as a consultant, Bier was soon appointed director and has since led the institution through critical phases of development and revitalization. Under his leadership, the museum has implemented advanced 3D scanning and printing technologies, laying the foundation for future repatriation initiatives.

With over thirty-five years of experience in the museum, conservation, and cultural heritage fields, Bier brings extensive expertise in collections management, exhibition development, and cultural preservation to his director role. He earned dual Bachelor of Science degrees in industrial engineering and systems engineering, which underlie his structured approach to operations, logistics, and strategic planning. He is a lifetime member of the Professional Picture Framers Association and has contributed to many notable preservation and conservation initiatives, including the Agua Caliente Cultural Museum Project and international work with Art Basel. He remains committed to community engagement, cultural stewardship, and building a museum that will serve as a lasting resource for education and heritage preservation.

Michael Black Wolf is an enrolled member of the Aaniiihnen of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation, homeland of the Aaniiihnen (Gros Ventre) and Assiniboine (Nakoda) Tribes. He belongs to the Fast Travelers Clan on his mother's side and descends from the Nehiyaw (Cree) of the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation on his father's side. Black Wolf was raised in the traditions and customs of both the Aaniiihnen and Nehiyaw People. He earned an Associate of Arts in natural resources from Aaniiih Nakoda College (formerly known as Fort Belknap College) and has served as the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) at Fort Belknap since January 2014. In this role, he has represented the Aaniiihnen and Assiniboine Tribes in countless government-to-government consultations regarding reservation lands, treaty lands, and ancestral homelands, working closely with the Tribal Historic Preservation Offices of the Great Plains states and surrounding regions. Black Wolf previously served a three-year term as a board member of the Montana Archaeological Society.

Aaron Brien is member of the Apsáalooke (Crow) Nation, Big Lodge Clan, and a child of the Whistling Water Clan. He was born in Sheridan, Wyoming, and raised in the Crow Reservation's Center Lodge (Reno) District. His Crow name is Bachiakuashdesh ("Goes to the Middle of War"). He also is a member of the Night Hawk Dance Society.

Brien serves as the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer at Crow Agency, Montana. He has worked variously in the cultural heritage field as an archaeologist, anthropologist, ethnographic researcher, educator, and lecturer, advocating Indigenous approaches to archaeological documentation and interpretation. Brien's ongoing research on Apsáalooke war shields informs the future of Indigenous cultural heritage management, as he educates the next generation of archaeologists about the importance of incorporating tribal perspectives into resource management. He studied at Salish Kootenai College and graduated from the University of Montana–Missoula with a Master of Arts in anthropology.

Gerald Clarke is a visual artist, educator, tribal leader, and cultural practitioner whose family has lived in the Anza Valley for time immemorial. An enrolled citizen of the Cahuilla Band of Indians, he lives in the home his grandfather built on the Cahuilla Indian Reservation and oversees the Clarke family cattle ranch.

Clarke's work has been exhibited extensively and is part of numerous museum collections. He was awarded an Eiteljorg Museum Fellowship for Native American Fine Art and served as an Artist-in-Residence at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico. In 2020, the Palm Springs Art Museum hosted *Gerald Clarke: Falling Rock*, the first major retrospective of his work.

Clarke is a frequent lecturer on Native art, culture, and social issues. He holds a BA in studio art from the University of Central Arkansas and dual MA and MFA degrees in painting and sculpture, respectively, from Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. He currently serves as a professor of ethnic studies at the University of California–Riverside, where he teaches courses on Native American art, history, and culture.

Jordan Poorman Cocker, an Indigenous curator and artist from the Kiowa Tribe and the Kingdom of Tonga, serves as the first full-time curator of Indigenous art at Crystal Bridges Museum of Art. She holds a Master of Museum and Heritage Practice from Victoria University of Wellington and a Bachelor of Design from Auckland University of Technology. Poorman Cocker's curatorial work centers Indigenous ways of knowing and doing by linking relational worldviews to Indigenous futurisms. Raised in Oklahoma, Poorman Cocker is a lifelong member of several Kiowa societies and a participant in Kiowa cultural activities. Her cultural upbringing, along with her tertiary education in New Zealand, provides her with an international perspective of Indigenous art, design, and research.

Shana Bushyhead Condill, a citizen of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, has worked in the museum and cultural field for over twenty years. In her current role as executive director of the Museum of the Cherokee People (MotCP) in Cherokee, North Carolina, Condill furthers a career-spanning commitment to cultivating Native representation and self-representation in public spaces, advocating for the intentional fusion of mainstream best practices with Native best practices in cultural preservation.

Holding degrees from Illinois Wesleyan University and the University of Delaware, and currently pursuing a PhD in history at George Mason University, Condill's professional experience has taken her to museums and cultural institutions across the country. Before her appointment at MotCP, Condill worked in the communications and content strategy, publishing, and branding departments of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., serving on the museum's mission, values, and DEIA committees. Condill is currently a board member of the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area and has been appointed to the North Carolina Historical Commission.

Jordan Dresser is a member of the Northern Arapaho Tribe located on the Wind River Indian Reservation in central Wyoming. He graduated from the University of Wyoming with a Bachelor of Arts in journalism and received a Master of Arts in museum studies from the University of San Francisco. Dresser is a former chairman of the Northern Arapaho Tribe and currently serves as the curator of collections at the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery. He is also an accomplished filmmaker who explores sociocultural issues within Native communities, with credits including *What Was Ours* (2016), *The Art of Home: A Wind River Story* (2020), and *Home From School: The Children of Carlisle* (2021). Dresser's latest film, *Who She Is* (2024), is screening across the country.

Sven Haakanson Jr. is a leader in the documentation, preservation, and revival of Indigenous culture, including his own Native Alaskan Sugpiaq heritage. He earned an MA and a PhD in anthropology from Harvard University and is a recipient of numerous awards, including the MacArthur Fellowship, the Museums Alaska Award for Excellence, and the ATALM Guardians of Culture and Lifeways Leadership Award. Haakanson is an inductee of the Alaska Innovators Hall of Fame and the former executive director of the Alutiiq Museum and Archaeological Repository in Kodiak, Alaska.

In 2013, he joined the University of Washington as an associate professor of anthropology and curator of Native American collections at the Burke Museum, where he played a central role in the design of the new Burke "Culture is Living" gallery. Haakanson engages communities in cultural revitalization, using material reconstruction as a form of scholarship and teaching. His projects include the reconstruction of full-size angyaaq boats from ethnographic models and archaeological components, as well as halibut hooks, masks, paddles, and the processing of bear gut into waterproof clothing. He has worked with the community of Akhiok at the Akhiok Kids Camp since 2000. Through such hands-on collaborations, he revitalizes traditions and engages students through active learning methods. Haakanson serves as a board member of the First Alaskan Institute and Koniag, Inc.

James Pepper Henry has worked in the museum field for over forty years. He is a member of the Kaw Nation and is currently the principal at Pepper & Associates, a museum planning firm assisting in the design and development of cultural institutions and interpretive centers. He is director emeritus of the First Americans Museum, Oklahoma's premier cultural institution, located in Oklahoma City. He is the former director of the Gilcrease Museum, the Heard Museum, and the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center. He is also a former associate director of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian. Pepper Henry served as a commissioner on the Greater Tulsa Area Indian Affairs Commission and was a key proponent of and facilitator in establishing "Native American Day" as an official City of Tulsa Day of Recognition. Pepper Henry recently served as vice chairman of the Kaw Nation, a federally

recognized Native American tribe in Oklahoma. He is president of the Kanza Heritage Society, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and perpetuating Kaw culture, language, and historical sites. He is a graduate of the University of Oregon and a recipient of the university's prestigious Council for Minority Education Leadership Award. Pepper Henry is also a graduate of the Museum Leadership Institute at the Getty Center in Los Angeles, California.

Henrietta Lidchi is the executive director of the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian. She held prior appointments at the Wereldmuseum, National Museums Scotland, and the British Museum. Lidchi has worked for over twenty years in curatorial and leadership roles, with a focus on Native American art as well as critical museology, visual anthropology, military history, and the history of collections. Her publications include *Imaging the Arctic* (British Museum Press/Washington Press, 1998), *Visual Currencies* (National Museums Scotland Press, 2009), *Surviving Desires: Making and Selling Native Jewellery in the American Southwest* (British Museum/University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), and *Dividing the Spoils: Perspectives on Military Collections and the British Empire* (Manchester University Press, 2020 and 2022). Between 2017 and 2022, she focused on policy development related to colonial collecting in European museums and the issue of return. She developed the Dutch policy "Return of Cultural Objects: Principles and Processes" (Wereldculturen, 2019) and served on the Dutch National Advice Committee, which drafted the report *Colonial Collection and a Recognition of Injustice* (Council for Culture, 2020), and the Expert Committee (Objects Collected Out of Colonial Contexts in Federal Museums, 2023) convened by the Austrian Ministry of Culture.

Evan Mathis joined the Museum of the Cherokee People in 2021. Although not an enrolled tribal member, Mathis is an artist with strong ties to the Cherokee community. He began creating beadwork at the age of fifteen under the apprenticeship of Eastern Band of Cherokee artists and has traveled throughout the United States to study historic Cherokee beaded objects and material culture in hopes of making this knowledge more accessible to the community.

A graduate of the University of North Carolina–Charlotte with a Bachelor of Arts degree in history, Mathis graduated from the Institute of American Indian Arts Museum Studies Certificate Program in 2025. He is committed to fostering a welcoming, community-centered environment where tribal members can learn about the objects and archives in the museum's care. Mathis was co-curator of *Disruption* (2022), an artist intervention installed throughout the Museum of the Cherokee People's permanent exhibition, which invited thirty-six Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and Cherokee Nation artists to respond to the removal of funerary and culturally sensitive objects from public view. Most recently, he co-curated *sov·er·eign·ty: Expressions in Sovereignty of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians* (2024) at the museum and *Nvwoti: Healing Is Culture* (2025), a mini exhibit at Cherokee Indian Hospital Authority.

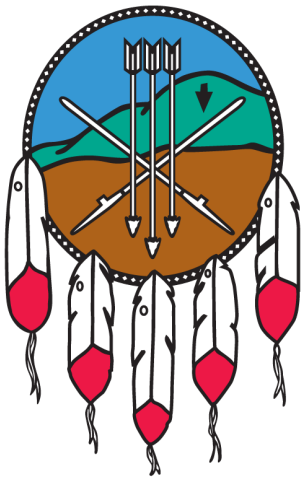
Lyssa C. Stapleton received her MA and PhD in archaeology from the University of California–Los Angeles. She earned a BA in anthropology, with a minor in museum studies, from California State University–East Bay. Her research examines the link between archaeological looting and the art market, as well as the impact that increasing awareness of the trade in illegal antiquities has on the market. She is interested in the evolution of collections stewardship in the twenty-first century, with a particular focus on unprovenanced cultural

objects in museums and private collections, in relation to the challenges of repatriation and voluntary returns. Trained as an archaeologist and curator, Stapleton has conducted fieldwork in Armenia, Albania, Hungary, and the United States, where her research explored the relationship between material culture in funerary contexts and social roles, with an emphasis on ancient woven artifacts. As a curator, she specialized in the stewardship of archaeological textiles, the decolonization movement, and the ethics of collecting. Stapleton joined the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA as the director of the Waystation Initiative in January 2023. As part of her role, she teaches courses in the graduate certificate program Cultural Heritage Research, Stewardship, and Restitution.

Nancy E. Weiss is a senior fellow at American University's Washington College of Law. She was appointed the Kaminstein Scholar in Residence at the U.S. Copyright Office in January 2024 and served as senior advisor to the Register of Copyrights and Director of the United States Copyright Office. Her work explores the nexus of cultural engagement and law. Weiss previously held the positions of general counsel of the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services, senior advisor for IP and Innovation at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, and deputy general counsel of the National Endowment for the Humanities. She holds a JD from the University of Michigan Law School and a BS in economics from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

W. Richard West Jr. is founding director and director emeritus of the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of the American Indian and president and CEO emeritus, and ambassador, Native communities, of the Autry Museum of the American West. He is a citizen of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes and a member of the Society of Southern Cheyenne Peace Chiefs. West served as chair of the board of directors of the American Alliance of Museums (1998–2000) and vice president of the International Council of Museums (2007–2010). His current board affiliations include the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums; Cheyenne and Arapaho Business Development Corporation; Cheyenne and Arapaho Museum Foundation; International Coalition of Sites of Conscience; Denver Art Museum; the MICA Group; and the UCLA Institute of Environment and Sustainability. West previously served on the boards of the Ford Foundation, Stanford University, and the Kaiser Family Foundation. He earned an MA in American history from Harvard University and a JD from Stanford Law School and has been awarded eleven honorary doctorate degrees.

Marshall McKay
Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation
1952–2021



YUHAAVIATAM

OF SAN MANUEL NATION

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