

Losing Your Marbles and Other Cultural Objects

Three Case Studies in
Repatriation

Repatriation: The Basics

- Museums will possess stolen art
- Cultural patrimony
- Cultural property
- For museum directors, short-term benefits no longer outweigh long-term costs
- Hague 1954
- UNESCO 1970

What are the Elgin Marbles

- Symbol of objects that have not been repatriated
- Series of marbles
friezes in the Parthenon
erected in 5th Century BCE
as a temple to Athena



Removal of the Marbles



- Removed by Thomas Bruce
- July 1 1801-Elgin asked for permission to enter Parthenon to draw and make plaster models of sculptures
- unclear whether the Ottomans gave Elgin permission to remove the marbles

Early Controversy



- 1815-questions raised in House of Commons over whether or not Elgin had exceeded his authority
- Parliament voted in favor of purchasing the marbles 82 to 30

Nazi Era Art Theft



- Unprecedented scale also much more methodical than what came before
- Laws passed stripping Jews of property
- Jews forced to sell paintings to escape

Post-War Challenges

- Lack of a central authority to arbitrate claims for artwork
- Pieces of artwork dispersed throughout the world
- Records in a number of different countries, many sealed off during Cold War

What Is NAGPRA

- Signed on November 16 1990
- NAGPRA: Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act
- Exemptions: objects found after 1990 on state-owned lands, items acquired in private collections before 1990, or objects found on private land

Successful Repatriation

- National Museum of the American Indian in New York City
- *Ahayu:da* = *protectors* of Zuni tribe
- 80 missing Zuni war gods



Anti-NAGPRA

- Major difference between other countries law and NAGPRA
- NAGPRA harms study/research