



PART 1

Read the text below and answer questions 1–13.

THE REPATRIATION DEBATE: WHO OWNS CULTURAL HERITAGE?

A

Museums in Europe, North America, and beyond hold enormous collections of objects originating from almost every region of the world. These holdings include sculptures, ritual items, manuscripts, architectural fragments, and everyday artefacts that have travelled far from the communities in which they were produced. Over the past few decades, however, requests for restitution—the return of cultural property to its place or community of origin—have grown louder and more organised. Governments, heritage agencies, and Indigenous groups argue that certain objects form part of cultural patrimony and should not remain permanently abroad. Museums, in turn, often stress their responsibilities to protect collections and to make them accessible to an international public.

B

To understand the current repatriation debate, it is necessary to consider how many museum collections were formed. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, wealthy Europeans travelled on the Grand Tour, acquiring antiquities and artworks as souvenirs of education and status. At the same time, colonial expansion created new channels for collecting: administrators, soldiers, missionaries, and private traders transported objects to imperial capitals, sometimes as gifts or purchases, and sometimes through coercion. Archaeological excavations also contributed to the movement of objects. Early digs frequently operated under permits that allowed foreign teams to export large shares of what they uncovered, reflecting legal systems that privileged outside institutions. While some acquisitions were meticulously recorded, others were not, leaving later generations to reconstruct the provenance—the documented history of an object's ownership and movement—often from incomplete archives.

C

Well-known case studies show why repatriation can become both symbolically powerful and practically complicated. The Benin Bronzes, for example, were taken from the Kingdom of Benin (in present-day Nigeria) during a British punitive expedition in 1897 and later dispersed through auctions into major museums and private collections. For many Nigerians, these works are not merely decorative art but evidence of historical sovereignty and court culture. Another frequently cited dispute concerns the Parthenon Sculptures, removed from Athens in the early nineteenth century and now held in London. Supporters of return argue that the sculptures are integral to a specific monument and cultural



landscape, while opponents stress the legality of their removal under the period's arrangements and the long history of their display abroad. In both examples, debates extend beyond ownership to questions of identity, historical trauma, and the meanings attached to place.

D

A key defence used by large institutions is the “universal museum” argument. Museums such as the British Museum or the Louvre have described themselves as spaces where visitors can encounter multiple civilisations side by side, encouraging comparison and cross-cultural understanding. From this perspective, curatorial stewardship involves caring for objects not only on behalf of one nation but for a global public. Supporters of this view also argue that large museums often possess specialised conservation laboratories, trained staff, and climate-controlled storage, which may be difficult to maintain elsewhere. They caution that widespread restitution could fragment collections built for education and research, potentially reducing public access to world heritage. Critics respond that “universal” display can conceal unequal histories of acquisition and can place the benefits of global access above the rights of origin communities.

E

Legal frameworks do not always provide clear answers, which is why moral reasoning often plays a central role. The UNESCO 1970 Convention was designed mainly to combat the illicit trade in cultural property by discouraging the import and transfer of objects removed unlawfully after the Convention's relevant dates. As a result, many removals from earlier centuries fall outside its strict scope, even when they are widely considered unethical today. Meanwhile, provenance research can uncover ambiguous chains of custody: documentation may be missing, terminology may be inconsistent, and earlier transactions may have occurred under legal rules that excluded local participation. Museums may be able to retain an object under the law while still facing pressure to demonstrate ethical accountability. In practice, many disputes are negotiated individually, with institutions weighing legal positions, diplomatic relationships, and the expectations of the public.

F

Because the debate is rarely resolved by a simple “keep versus return” decision, a range of hybrid solutions has emerged. Long-term loans allow objects to be displayed in their places of origin without requiring an immediate transfer of ownership. Some proposals emphasise shared custody agreements, in which museums and claimant communities jointly determine how objects are conserved, researched, and exhibited. More recently, the idea of “circulating artefacts” has gained attention: rather than remaining permanently in one museum, certain objects could rotate through multiple institutions, widening access



while acknowledging origin claims. Digital repatriation—high-resolution imaging, 3D scanning, and open online archives—can expand education and scholarship internationally. Yet digital access does not fully address situations where physical presence is tied to spiritual practice or ceremonial responsibilities.

G

Repatriation debates continue to reshape museum policy in a shifting ethical landscape. Public opinion, activism, and diplomacy increasingly influence outcomes, and institutions may seek to avoid reputational damage by improving transparency and consultation. At the same time, claimant groups emphasise that heritage is not only a matter of display but also a living connection to community history, belief, and identity. As more museums publish provenance records and establish dedicated restitution teams, the focus has moved toward negotiation rather than absolute claims. The question of who “owns” cultural heritage may resist a single global answer, but the ongoing process of restitution discussions is changing how museums define responsibility, authority, and access in the twenty-first century.

Questions 1–5

Select the correct answer.

1 What tension does Paragraph A introduce in the repatriation debate?

- A** Whether responsibility for protecting collections should belong to museums or heritage agencies.
- B** Whether objects should return to their communities of origin or remain accessible through museums abroad.
- C** Whether cultural patrimony should include everyday artefacts as well as ritual objects.
- D** Whether governments or Indigenous groups should have priority when making restitution requests.

2 In paragraph B, which factor is mentioned as contributing to the movement of artefacts overseas?

- A** Grand Tour travellers were required to supply European museums with the objects they acquired.
- B** Colonial administrators introduced rules that prevented locally produced objects from leaving imperial territories.
- C** Excavation permits allowed foreign teams to export substantial quantities of their finds.
- D** Archaeological teams divided their discoveries equally with institutions in the countries of origin.



3 Why are the Benin Bronzes discussed in paragraph **C**?

- A** They show how colonial seizure can acquire lasting cultural and political significance.
- B** They illustrate how displaced artworks were reunited with the monument for which they were created.
- C** They demonstrate that legal approval at the time of removal can settle modern ownership disputes.
- D** They provide an example of objects remaining together in a single collection after their removal.

4 What is one reason supporters give for the “universal museum” model in paragraph **D**?

- A** It gives origin communities direct authority over the conservation of their cultural objects.
- B** It preserves original cultural contexts by displaying objects from different civilisations separately.
- C** It enables major museums to share their conservation facilities with claimant communities.
- D** It allows visitors to compare different civilisations within one institution.

5 What limitation of the UNESCO 1970 Convention is described in paragraph **E**?

- A** It applies retrospectively only when earlier transactions excluded local participation.
- B** It mainly targets unlawful movements after relevant dates, leaving many earlier removals outside its scope.
- C** It determines whether museums have an ethical duty to return objects they may legally retain.
- D** It requires all restitution disputes to be resolved through individual negotiations.

Questions 6–9

Complete the notes below. Choose **ONE WORD ONLY** from the text for each answer.

Key issues and responses in repatriation debates

Arguments for retention

- Supporters point to the combination of trained personnel, regulated storage and specialist conservation **6** available at major museums.

Obstacles to resolving claims

- Provenance investigations may be slowed by missing **7** and ambiguous ownership histories.



Alternative solutions

- Long-term **8** and shared custody arrangements are two proposed alternatives to permanent retention or immediate return.

Limits of digital access

- Digital copies may not fully meet communities' needs when an object's physical **9** has spiritual or ceremonial importance.

Questions 10–13

Choose **TRUE** if the statement agrees with the information given in the text, choose **FALSE** if the statement contradicts the information, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if there is no information on this.

10 The passage indicates that some museum collections were built through travel, colonial expansion, and excavation.

11 The passage states that the UNESCO 1970 Convention fully resolves disputes over objects removed in earlier centuries.

12 The passage states that long-term loans are normally restricted to a maximum period of ten years.

13 The passage suggests that digital repatriation may not satisfy needs connected to the physical object.

Answer Key

1. B
2. C
3. A
4. D
5. B
6. laboratories
7. documentation
8. loans
9. presence



10. TRUE

11. FALSE

12. NOT GIVEN

13. TRUE