

Can Repatriation Heal the Wounds of History?

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ABSTRACT: In 1990, the US Congress passed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), which in part established a legal procedure for Native Americans to reclaim cultural items and ancestral remains from museums and federal agencies. Many advocates have framed NAGPRA as a kind of restorative justice in which “healing” is fundamentally integrated into the repatriation process. This article engages with a growing literature that ensures questions of healing are not just casually asserted but closely examined, by critically analyzing why and how NAGPRA has led to the kinds of conflict resolution and peace-building envisioned by some of its proponents. A survey of tribal repatriation workers reveals that “healing” for Native American communities is not uniform in practice or merely the end point of conflict. Rather, it is expressed in five different themes, illustrating that healing is one component of a complex socio-political process that circles around the law’s implementation.

KEY WORDS: healing, NAGPRA, restorative justice, museums, Native America

INTRODUCTION

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) became US federal law on November 16, 1990; it revolutionized the relationship between American museums and Native America. One key provision in the wide-ranging law establishes a legal procedure for Native Americans to claim and receive human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony from museums and federal agencies.¹ Nearly three decades after its enactment, the law has allowed for more than 50,000 sets of human remains, 1.4 million funerary objects, and 14,000 sacred objects and objects of cultural patrimony to be reclaimed by Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, and lineal descendants.²

¹ Kathleen S. Fine-Dare, *Grave Injustice: The American Indian Repatriation Movement and NAGPRA* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002); Tamara L. Bray, ed., *The Future of the Past: Archaeologists, Native Americans, and Repatriation* (New York: Garland, 2001); Thomas W. Killion, ed., *Opening Archaeology: Repatriation’s Impact on Contemporary Research and Practice* (Santa Fe: SAR Press, 2008); Devon A. Mihesuah, ed., *Repatriation Reader: Who Owns American Indian Remains?* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

² National Park Service, National NAGPRA website, FAQ page, https://www.nps.gov/nagpra/FAQ/INDEX.HTM#How_many.

Although NAGPRA and its regulations do not include the words healing, reconciliation, or justice, these concepts have come to be seen as a core part of the law's implementation. Even with the prominence of these concepts, they have been asserted more often than analyzed. Much of the scholarly analysis of repatriation in the United States has focused on the historical, moral, and political conflict over the control of Native America's cultural heritage.³ To concentrate on discord and disputes over reconciliation and healing is perhaps not surprising when scholars have generally tended to focus on war at the expense of peace.⁴ Yet there is no reason to assume that the resolution of conflict is passive, uncontested, and motionless. We thus need to consider healing in repatriation as an active and complex socio-political process—not the mere absence of conflict.

A close examination of repatriation raises a number of questions regarding healing as a process and product: What are the different constructs of healing by different social actors? How is healing experienced? Under what conditions does repatriation foster a sense of healing—and why? What is the relationship between repatriation-as-healing and museums' decolonization? Why, ultimately, does healing matter to the politics and lived experiences of repatriation?

The answer to each of these questions would be its own article, so in this one my aim is to build on the nascent scholarship that has investigated repatriation as healing, in order to offer a kind of analytical scaffold. In this piece, I begin by tracing the emergence of the healing concept in the repatriation literature. This review suggests the early adoption of healing as an implicit goal and explicit outcome of repatriation, and its linkages to concepts of reconciliation and restorative justice. I suggest that this framing situates repatriation closer to institutions such as truth and reconciliation commissions than with the simple return of stolen property. To explore how healing is perceived and experienced on the ground, I then turn to a 2010 survey I conducted of tribal repatriation workers.⁵ Although this survey was conducted some years ago, my experiences in the years since suggest that these results are still accurate and relevant today. Even as we near NAGPRA's thirtieth anniversary, the work of repatriation is nowhere near done, and so the question of healing is just as pressing as ever. The responses from this survey help reveal that healing is not conceived as a single or simple endpoint, but a complex process that is encapsulated in five different themes. Healing *as process* is

3 Roger Downey, *The Riddle of the Bones: Politics, Science, Race and the Story of Kennewick Man* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 2000); Greg Johnson, *Sacred Claims: Repatriation and Living Tradition* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007); Samuel J. Redman, *Bone Rooms: From Scientific Racism to Human Prehistory in Museums* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

4 Leslie, Dwyer, "After Aceh's Peace," *Anthropology News*, 53, no. 9 (November 2012).

5 Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh, "The Work of Repatriation in Indian Country," *Human Organization* 71 no. 3 (Fall 2012): 278–91.

emphasized in the conclusion, drawing further from a deeper ethnographic project that involved interviews with tribal leaders and elders.⁶

The Concept Of Healing In Repatriation

In the years before NAGPRA became law, most Native advocates couched their arguments in the language of historical injustice, religious freedom, and property rights.⁷ Yet when the US Congress took up the issue of repatriation in 1986, elected officials quickly grasped the sense of violation felt in many Native communities as well as the importance of the basic human rights of respectful burials and freedom of religious beliefs and practices.⁸ Over the next four years of Congressional deliberation, most of the arguments for legislation turned on this understanding of the inequitable treatment of Native Americans and the universal right to control one's cultural destiny.⁹ Still, even though moral outrage underpinned much of the debate, it is difficult to find even passing mention of the concepts of healing, reconciliation, or reparation.

And yet, from the beginning, legislators did not propose a law that was retributive (punishing museums for past actions) or distributive (redistributing cultural objects in an equitable way, contributing to a social good such as education or health care). Rather, Congress envisioned legislation that was geared towards a kind of restorative justice in which the history of disrespect would be replaced by respectful repatriations. It is notable that the first drafted federal repatriation legislation was titled the "Bridge of Respect Act."¹⁰ The subsequent bills Congress proposed followed this approach of finding a middle ground between the disparate interests of the Native and museum communities in which history could be overcome by replacing an emphasis on the fundamental need to respect Native rights, beliefs, and practices. As NAGPRA became law, some of its sponsors emphasized how the legislation offered the beginning of a new relationship,¹¹ as well as being a "true compromise" between the interests of science and Native communities that was an act of conscience.¹²

6 Chip Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits: Inside the Fight to Reclaim Native America's Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

7 Walter Echo-Hawk, "Museum Rights vs. Indian Rights: Guidelines for Assessing Competing Legal Interests in Native Cultural Resources," *NYU Review of Law and Social Change* 14, no. 2 (1986): 437-53; Steve Talbot, "Desecration and American Indian Religious Freedom," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 12, no. 4 (1985): 1-18; Gerald Vizenor, "Bone Courts: The Rights and Narrative Representation of Tribal Bones," *American Indian Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (1986): 319-31.

8 C. Timothy McKeown and Sherry Hutt, "In the Smaller Scope of Conscience: The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Twelve Years After," *UCLA Journal of Environmental Law and Policy* 21, no. 2 (2003): 153-212.

9 C. Timothy McKeown, *In the Smaller Scope of Conscience: The Struggle for National Repatriation Legislation, 1986-1990* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013).

10 *Ibid.*, 5.

11 Daniel K. Inouye, "Repatriation: Forging New Relationships," *Arizona State Law Journal* 24, no. 1 (1992): 1-3.

12 McKeown, *In the Smaller Scope of Conscience*, 162.

This language of compromise, conscience, and forward-looking relationships perhaps helped provide an initial interpretative framework of repatriation as a kind of restorative justice that could lead to healing. Although US legislators did not use the phrase “restorative justice” (that I’m aware of), their aims and expectations were seemingly in line with the kind of justice sought in the commissions that have emerged in the wake of modern civil wars and internal strife. In parallel to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), for example, US federal repatriation law is not a “victor’s justice,” but a form of reparation arrived at through compromise and a balanced interest in the current and future well-being of different communities.¹³ In both cases the problem was an institutionalized violence that turned a class of individuals into victims, while the perpetrators were spread so diffusely that punishment would be nearly impossible.¹⁴ Although its task proved difficult in practice,¹⁵ the South African TRC sought a restorative justice that was profoundly concerned with “the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator.”¹⁶ Repatriation can be understood as a means to restore not just basic rights to a minority group, but also to heal broken relationships between communities—which, between Native communities and the US government as well as many museums, had often been based on mistrust, resentment, and fear.

In the end, nowhere in the law’s or its regulations’ “dense text can the words ‘reconciliation’ or ‘healing’ be found.”¹⁷ Only within several years of NAGPRA’s passage does a discourse of healing explicitly emerge among its observers, advocates, and practitioners. (It is thus notable that the concept of healing emerged most powerfully not out of arguments for NAGPRA’s creation but out of its implementation.) One of the first to explicitly frame museum as wounds and repatriation as healing was Rick Hill, a scholar and member of the Tuscarora Nation, who, in response to the first major repatriation by the Smithsonian Institution, observed that, “The museums’ possession of our dead and our religious objects has become the main wound that exists between our peoples. The time for healing has come—as mandated by Congress.”¹⁸ In other words, he both suggested that healing *should*

13 Martin Meredith, *Coming to Terms: South Africa’s Search for Truth* (New York: PublicAffairs, 1999).

14 Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh, “History, Justice, and Reconciliation,” in *Archaeology as a Tool of Civic Engagement*, ed. Barbara J. Little and Paul A. Shackel (Lanham: AltaMira, 2007), 23–46.

15 Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois, “Making Sense of Violence,” in *Violence in War and Peace*, ed. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 1–31.

16 Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 54–55.

17 Lawrence E. Sullivan, “Some Thoughts about Museums, Reconciliation, and Healing,” in *Stewards of the Sacred*, ed. Lawrence E. Sullivan and Alison Edwards (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2004), 19–25, quotation 22.

18 Rick Hill, “Repatriation Must Heal Old Wounds,” in *Reckoning with the Dead: The Larsen Bay Repatriation and the Smithsonian Institute*, ed. Tamara L. Bray and Thomas W. Killion (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 184–86, quotation 185.

happen, and that, in his reading of the law, Congress essentially expected healing to be an aftereffect of the law.

The logic of repatriation as healing came to be largely framed in the language of postcolonial psychology.¹⁹ Russell Thornton was among the first to theoretically conceptualize museum collecting as a “trauma of history”²⁰ for individuals and communities that must be resolved for mental health. In these terms, extant museum collections constitute an “unresolved trauma,” which “is intergenerationally cumulative, thus compounding the mental health problems of succeeding generations.”²¹ Thornton describes the parallels between the Holocaust of World War II and the holocaust experienced by Native Americans.²² These include the problems of mourning mass deaths, collective grief, and the need for community memorialization. Additionally, in the postcolonial context, Native Americans as victims continue to live alongside the perpetrators of their subjugation, which “also has hindered a healthy grieving process.”²³ Repatriation precisely becomes a tool for “closure,” a time when “tears are shed,” and the pain of the past “can be eased.”²⁴ In metaphorical terms, repatriation does not erase “scars” but ensures that there are not “open wounds,” so that “collective mental health will improve.”²⁵

Although Thornton focused on psychological health, others have come to emphasize how repatriation contributes to a broader sense of well-being in indigenous communities. The groundbreaking 1996 report of the Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal People describes “healing” in this context as “personal and societal recovery from the lasting effects of oppression and systemic racism experienced over generations.”²⁶ Australian museum theorist Moira G. Simpson draws from this expansive, holistic idea of Aboriginal health in Canada, arguing that repatriation contributes to the idea of “wellness” because the return of cultural objects and ancestors’ remains so often encompasses “physical, social, emotional, and spiritual spheres.”²⁷ In this way, healing is used not strictly in a “biomedical

19 Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran. *Native American Postcolonial Psychology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

20 Russell Thornton, “Repatriation as Healing the Wounds of the Trauma of History: Cases of Native Americans in the United States of America,” in *The Dead and Their Possessions: Repatriation in Principle, Policy, and Practice*, ed. Cressida Fforde, Jane Hubert, and Paul Turnbull (New York: Routledge, 2002), 17–24.

21 Bonnie Duran, Eduardo Duran, and Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, “Native Americans and the Trauma of History,” in *Studying Native America: Problems and Prospects*, ed. Russell Thornton (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 60–76, quotation 64.

22 Thornton, “Repatriation as Healing the Wounds of the Trauma of History,” 21.

23 *Ibid.*, 21.

24 *Ibid.*, 22–23.

25 *Ibid.*, 23.

26 René Dussault, Georges Erasmus, Paul L.A.H. Chartrand, J. Peter Meekison, Viola Robinson, Mary Sillett, and Bertha Wilson, *Gathering Strength*, Vol. 3 (Ottawa: Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996) 100–1.

27 Moira G. Simpson, “Museums and Restorative Justice: Heritage, Repatriation, and Cultural Education,” *Museum International* 61, no. 1 (2009): 121–29, quotation 125.

sense,” but has “broader social meaning, resting on the link between changed social behaviors and improved mental and physical health.”²⁸

Repatriation is perceived as contributing to a broader notion of wellness when it is considered a cultural revitalization movement. This view is predicated on the notion that if colonialism rubs out cultural values and practices from subjugated communities, then postcolonial healing must involve redrawing what has been erased. Healthy communities, with a strong sense of identity, with secure rights, with a thriving cultural life all are necessary for cultural survival.²⁹ Museum collecting during colonial exchanges, in particular, removed certain kinds of information from communities and interrupted intergenerational knowledge transmission. Thus, cultural revitalization entails rediscovering the cultural information embedded in objects.³⁰ Restoration involves materially recovering what was lost so that spirituality can be regenerated; the physical control of sacred objects facilitates religious practices. A return to tradition provides liberation from the traumas of the colonial experience.³¹ As a member of the Mnjikaning First Nation once explained, “the term ‘healing’ can also be called ‘reviving,’ ‘rebuilding,’ or ‘recreating.’”³²

Objects embody knowledge and identity, but also relationships. The Blackfoot of Canada have been given access to collections with ceremonial shirts, whose respectful care is based on a cultural sense of sociality.³³ The exchanges of stories, gifts, memories, and knowledge that circle around the shirts nurture relationships between people, and between humans and the spirits. “When I went and had the opportunity to see them at the museum,” Darnell Rides at the Door, a Blackfoot ceremonialist and educator said, “it was like holding a piece of my grandmother’s teaching in my hands.”³⁴ The care of the shirts becomes “ceremonies of renewal,” in which “the shirts/ancestors themselves became crucial links within social relationship among Blackfoot people, bringing them together, teaching them, strengthening identity: healing.”³⁵

Repatriation conceived as an act of healing notably also took hold outside the United States. The return of Saami human remains in Norway was described in

28 Laura Peers, “‘Ceremonies of Renewal’: Visits, Relationships, and Healing in the Museum Space,” *Museum Worlds* 1, no. 1 (2013): 136–52, quotation 141.

29 Moira G. Simpson, “Is there Space for Spirituality in the Contemporary Museum?,” *Museums & Social Issues* 8 nos. 1–2 (2013): 22–35, quotation 23.

30 Gordon L. Pullar, “Repatriation, Cultural Revitalization, and Indigenous Healing in Alaska.” in *Utimut: Past Heritage—Future Partnerships—Discussions on Repatriation in the 21st Century*, ed. Mille Gabriel and Jens Dahl, (Copenhagen: Greenland National Museum & Archives, 2008), 108–15, quotation iii.

31 Moira G. Simpson, “Indigenous Heritage and Repatriation: A Stimulus for Cultural Renewal,” in Gabriel and Dahl, *Utimut: Past Heritage—Future Partnerships*, 64–77, quotation 67.

32 Simpson, “Museums and Restorative Justice: Heritage, Repatriation, and Cultural Education,” 124.

33 Peers, “Ceremonies of Renewal,” 138.

34 Peers, “Ceremonies of Renewal,” 144. Helen Chatterjee, Sonjel Vreeland, and Guy Noble,, “Museopathy: Exploring the Healing Potential of Handling Museum Objects,” *Museum and Society* 7, no. 3 (2009): 164–77.

35 Peers, “Ceremonies of Renewal,” 146.

these terms,³⁶ and the term has been applied to the return of non-Native remains, such as those found in massacre sites in the former Yugoslavia.³⁷ In Australia, the Ngarrindjeri claimed that the suffering caused by acts of “racialized power”—the removal of Aboriginal ancestral remains to museums—has been handed down through the generations, and can only be healed through funeral ceremonies.³⁸ As early as 2003, the Council of Australian Museum Associations emphasized the need for collection policies “that speak to reconciliation and healing.”³⁹ Healing was understood to be such a basic part of repatriation that the 2013 Australian Government Policy on Indigenous Repatriation stated that the return of ancestral remains is “a vehicle for healing and justice in Australian society”—specifically by recognizing the dignity of indigenous peoples, restoring the dead’s humanity, acknowledging wrongs done to them, and honoring “the unbreakable bond, customary obligations, and traditional practices between the living, the land, and the dead.”⁴⁰

Case studies highlight a range of disparate effects repatriation seems to contribute towards healing. One aspect identified early on was the role of repatriation in acknowledging past injustices.⁴¹ Although many communities are intimately familiar with their dark histories, this knowledge is not often brought to light. Repatriation often requires that the past be directly confronted and publicly acknowledged.⁴² Repatriation may also heal by restoring broken relationships between the living and the dead,⁴³ as much as between the scientific and indigenous communities.⁴⁴ Repatriation heals by visibly shifting power; it symbolizes freedom from colonialism.⁴⁵ Repatriation heals as a form of justice, which

36 Berit J. Sellevold, “Skeletal Remains of the Norwegian Saami,” in Fforde, Hubert and Turnbull, *The Dead and Their Possessions*, 59–62.

37 Maja Petrović-Šteger, “Anatomizing Conflict: Accommodating Human Remains,” in *Social Bodies*, ed. Helen Lambert and Maryon McDonald (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 47–76.

38 Steve Hemming and Chris Wilson, “The First ‘Stolen Generations’: Repatriation and Reburial in Ngarrindjeri Ruwe (Country),” in *The Long Way Home: The Meaning and Values of Repatriation*, ed. Paul Turnbull and Michael Pickering (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 183–98, quotation 186.

39 Lawrence E. Sullivan, “Some Thoughts about Museums, Reconciliation, and Healing,” in *Stewards of the Sacred*, ed. Lawrence E. Sullivan and Alison Edwards (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2004), 19–25, quotation 22.

40 “Indigenous Repatriation,” Department of Communication and the Arts (Australia), <http://arts.gov.au/indigenous/repatriation>.

41 Barbara Meister, ed., *Mending the Circle: A Native American Repatriation Guide* (New York: American Indian Ritual Object Repatriation Foundation, 1996), 70.

42 Kieran McEvoy and Heather Conway, “The Dead, the Law, and the Politics of the Past,” *Journal of Law and Society* 31, no. 4 (2004): 539–62, quotation 542.

43 James Riding In, “Repatriation: A Pawnee’s Perspective.” *American Indian Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1996): 238–50, quotation 243.

44 Brenda J. Baker, Tamara L. Varney, Richard G. Wilkinson, Lisa M. Anderson, and Maria A. Liston, “Repatriation and the Study of Human Remains,” in Bray, *The Future of the Past*, 69–90, especially 81; Robert J. Mallouf, “An Unraveling Rope: The Looting of America’s Past,” in *Repatriation Reader: Who Owns American Indian Remains?*, ed. Devon A. Mihesuah, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 59–73, especially 73.

45 Stacey R. Jessiman, “The Repatriation of the G’psglox Totem Pole: A Study of its Context, Process and Outcome,” *International Journal of Cultural Property* 18, no. 3 (2011): 365–91, especially 371.

seeks to remedy histories of violence, disrespect, and dispossession.⁴⁶ Some community members report that repatriation is a form of mourning, which heals broken hearts.⁴⁷

In one analysis of repatriation at the American Museum of Natural History, anthropologists Martha Graham and Neil Murphy suggest healing has happened, but that the process varies among tribes.⁴⁸ One Kootznoowoo representative, Garfield George, from southeast Alaska, said he hadn't ever thought of repatriation as healing, but that it had helped to reconnect broken cultural links by bringing together potlatch songs and objects.⁴⁹ Yet this benefit of reconnection George observed does not apply to all tribal communities. Gordon Pullar, for example, reports the skeptical view of one Alaska Native man who said that items in museums are "dead objects" because they are no longer properly used in ceremony, and thus they can "serve no purpose in reviving Native cultures."⁵⁰

The most extended critique of repatriation as healing comes from Steven Conn, in his polemic, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?*⁵¹ He sees NAGPRA as a political articulation of religious fundamentalism. Conn claims the resurgence of Native claims to religious freedoms in the 1980s was linked to "right-wing fundamentalism, with Ronald Reagan at its head," associated with "the neocreationist movement that has played havoc with school curricula."⁵² Conn is pointing to a period in US history in which Christian evangelicals gained a measure of political power in alignment with the Republican Party. They used their newfound influence to try to impose their faith in public education, health care, work places, and in other public spaces.

Conn further sees NAGPRA as an outgrowth of American obsession with therapy and individual improvement. Addressing Hill's early pronouncement that "repatriation must heal old wounds,"⁵³ Conn is dubious about how "repatriation is couched in the language of therapeutic identity."⁵⁴ He also questions Thornton's meshing of personal and psychological welfare and the realities of law. "After all," Conn writes, "can 'healing' be mandated, even by so powerful a body as Congress?"

46 James Clifford, *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: University of Harvard Press, 2013), 124.

47 Fine-Dare, *Grave Injustice*, 179; Cara Krmpotich, "Post-Colonial or Pre-Colonial: Indigenous Values and Repatriation," in *Anthropologists, Indigenous Scholars, and the Research Endeavour: Seeking Bridges Towards Mutual Respect*, ed Joy Hendry and Laara Fitznor (New York: Routledge, 2002), 162–70, especially 170.

48 Martha Graham and Nell Murphy, "NAGPRA at 20: Museum Collections and Reconnections," *Museum Anthropology* 33, no. 2 (2010): 105–24.

49 *Ibid.*, 116–17.

50 Gordon L. Pullar, "Repatriation, Cultural Revitalization, and Indigenous Healing in Alaska," in Gabriel and Dahl, *Utimut: Past Heritage—Future Partnerships*, 108–115, quotation 109.

51 Steven Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

52 *Ibid.*, 66.

53 Hill, "Repatriation Must Heal Old Wounds," 184–86.

54 Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?*, 67.

Will repatriation be judged a failure if ‘collective mental health’ among Indians does not improve?”⁵⁵ Conn thus sees the framing of repatriation as therapy as problematic because “[t]herapy speaks to individual needs, not to collective, achievable goals.”⁵⁶ He suggests that Native Americans have tapped into mainstream popular American culture, and thus repatriation advocates participate “in the whole culture of therapy and ‘self-help’ that has become such a major preoccupation of many Americans. The language Thornton uses to discuss repatriation is exactly the language of Oprah Winfrey.”⁵⁷

Conn concludes that blaming museums for cultural loss is “patently absurd. Museums aren’t really the enemy here. The repatriation fight is thus a proxy battle where museums are substituted for corporate media, McDonalds, the Internet, and a dozen other acids of postmodernity that people like Hill feel are irreparably corroding Indian identity.”⁵⁸ He rebukes repatriation with a slippery slope argument—asking how far we should extend these concepts. “Are the French still ‘traumatized’ by the Franco-Prussian war? By Agincourt?” Conn rhetorically asks, “The English by the Viking Invasions?”⁵⁹ Conn is not alone in his skepticism; other communities, such as some African Americans, offer similarly distrustful views of “therapeutic” approaches to the past.⁶⁰

Perhaps Conn would be correct if NAGPRA *mandated* healing. But, as noted, NAGPRA itself does not. Even the Australian government’s guidelines only suggest that repatriation may be a “vehicle” to healing. Thornton and others explore healing as a potential social and psychological *effect* of repatriation, not a legal dictate of it.

But Conn’s argument is most flawed because of his historical nearsightedness. Although repatriation demands gained traction in the decade before NAGPRA, many Native peoples have resisted the appropriation of their ancestral remains and sacred objects since the rise of archaeology and the modern museum.⁶¹ More significantly, Conn’s observation of therapy as serving individuals ignores how centuries of colonialism have perpetrated intergenerational harms to individuals as well as to whole communities. Although one may not agree with Thornton’s proposed remedies, his diagnosis that collective suffering requires collective healing is harder to dismiss. In Canada, research shows that First Nation’s collective work to ensure cultural continuity is associated with improved well-being, better health, and lower suicide rates.⁶²

55 Ibid., 68.

56 Ibid., 68.

57 Ibid., 69.

58 Ibid., 69.

59 Ibid., 69.

60 Clarence Walker, *We Can’t Go Home Again: An Argument about Afrocentrism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

61 Karen Coody Cooper, *Spirited Encounters: American Indian Protest Museum Policies and Practices* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2008).

62 Simpson, “Museums and Restorative Justice: Heritage, Repatriation, and Cultural Education,” 123.

If the English were still traumatized by the Vikings, then they'd require our sympathy and action, too. But they're not still traumatized, because, unlike Native Americans, they did not suffer five hundred years of ongoing genocide, which has aimed to strip them of their lands, beliefs, languages, lifeways, cultural objects, and dignity. Native peoples understand the removal of artifacts and ancestors as inextricably tied to historical traumas of forced assimilation, boarding schools, and other colonialist acts.⁶³ It is reasonable—and possible—to consider how museums can redress these wrongs and become sites of reconciliation.⁶⁴

Do You Believe Repatriation Has Led To Healing?

In the summer of 2010, I designed a survey instrument for tribal repatriation workers. The self-administered survey combined open- and close-ended questions asking respondents to reflect on their own personal experiences and relate how the tribal governments they represent approach NAGPRA. Invitations to participate in the survey were sent to 739 federally recognized tribes, Native Hawaiian Organizations, and Alaska Native villages and corporations active in NAGPRA work in the fall of 2010. The results of the overall survey have been published elsewhere.⁶⁵ While a full analysis of repatriation as healing would include voices of both museums and Native Americans, this survey provides an important starting point for the close study of healing from the perspective of those whose wounds left by historic collecting practices run deepest. In the results below, I first look broadly at responses through collating numerical data, and then provide quotes to ensure that the voices of tribal representatives are heard directly.

A total of 115 repatriation workers took part in the survey (representing an unexpectedly strong response rate of 16 percent), of which 93 constituted valid survey participants.⁶⁶ The respondents comprise a broad array of tribal memberships, tribal governments, and religious and political backgrounds. Of the respondents, 81 percent self-identified as Native American, representing 67 different nations, tribes, and Hawaiian groups. Of the total respondents, 85 percent currently work for 73 different tribal governments, Indian groups, or Native Hawaiian

63 Stacey R. Jessiman, "The Repatriation of the G'psglox Totem Pole: A Study of its Context, Process and Outcome," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 18, no. 3 (2011): 365–91, especially 371.

64 Rebecca Tsosie, "Native Nations and Museums: Developing an Institutional Framework for Cultural Sovereignty," *Tulsa Law Review* 45, no. 1 (2009): 3–22.

65 Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh, "The Work of Repatriation in Indian Country," *Human Organization* 71, no. 3 (2012): 278–91. In this publication, I did not include data on the healing question, as I anticipated that these answers were of such importance that they should be addressed in their own articles.

66 For all numbers below, "respondents" now refers to these 93 individuals. A valid respondent had to meet two base criteria: (1) either a person of self-ascribed Native American ethnicity with direct experience in repatriation work, or a person of any ethnicity who currently works for a Native American tribe, Indian group, or Native Hawaiian Organization; and (2) answered at least 75 percent of the questions.

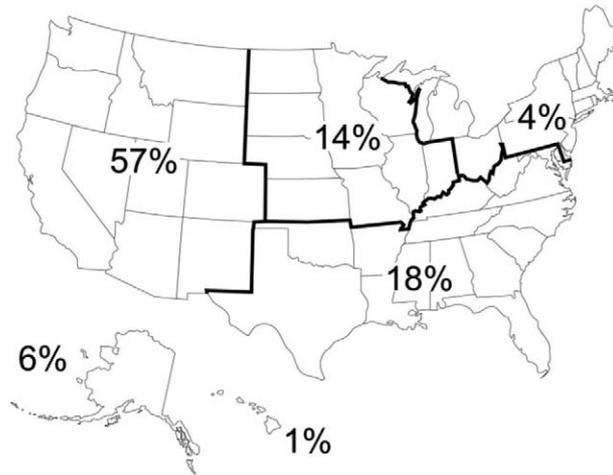


Figure 1. The regional representation of the respondents who currently work for 73 different tribes, Indian groups, and Native Hawaiian Organizations.

organizations. Only three of these tribal governments are not federally recognized.⁶⁷ The tribal governments represented in the survey include nations from across the United States (figure 1). The remaining 15 percent are Native Americans who have been directly involved in repatriation work but are currently employed in non-tribal capacities, or are unemployed or retired.

The average time that the respondents have “actively” worked on repatriation is 10 years (22 is the most), while the average time that the respondents have held their current position is 9 years (37 is the most). The average age of the survey respondents is 50 years old (21 is the youngest; 77 is the oldest); 39 percent are women. Additionally, 28 percent have held a political position with the tribe (ranging from tribal chairman to tribal councilperson to election board chairman) and 56 percent have held a traditional or religious position with the tribe (ranging from medicine society initiates to a Sun Dance Priest).⁶⁸

The survey asked the question: “Do you believe repatriation has led to healing?” Of the respondents, 54 percent said yes, 31 percent were unsure, and 15 percent answered no. Thus, a modest majority answered a confident yes. Deeper analysis of these data suggests that the region in which the workers work provides some broader variation (table 1).⁶⁹ Respondents from Hawaii and the Northeast all

67 The three nonfederally recognized groups are the Chugach Alaska Corporation, Salinan Layehm, and the Wanapum; additionally, one respondent works for Hui Ho’oniho, which is not federally recognized, but is nonetheless recognized under NAGPRA as a Native Hawaiian Organization.

68 The survey’s informed consent portion—digitally signed by all survey participants—stated that the survey was *not* anonymous. Hence, when appropriate, individuals are identified by name in this paper. Additionally, a final draft of this paper was shared with all of the survey participants.

69 Note that for all tables, a respondent is only counted if s/he provided answers to both questions.

Table 1. Regionally grouped answers to the survey question, “Do you believe repatriation has led to healing?”

Region	N	<i>Led to Healing?</i>		
		Yes	No	Unsure
Hawaii	1	100%	–	–
Northeast	3	100%	–	–
West	45	58%	16%	29%
Midwest	11	55%	18%	18%
Southeast	14	43%	22%	36%
Alaska	5	40%	–	60%

answered in the affirmative, while those in Alaska were more skeptical; however, the small number of total respondents from these regions explains the dramatic percentages. The larger number of respondents from the West, Midwest, and Southeast provides more compelling data, suggesting that those in the American West and Midwest are more likely to believe that repatriation has led to healing than those from the Southeast.

A few key traits of the respondents do not seem to correlate with answers to the question about healing. Neither the amount of time respondents have worked on NAGPRA (table 2) nor if they hold a religious position within their tribes (table 3) seem to shape a belief in whether NAGPRA has led to healing. Likewise, respondents’ identification as a non-Indian or as a Native American does not seem to greatly matter to the question (table 4). Answers to the survey question about whether or not NAGPRA is a spiritual burden for tribes did not strongly correlate with the healing question, although those who feel NAGPRA is *not* a spiritual burden believe in a higher proportion that repatriation is healing (table 5). A tabulation of answers to a question to respondents about what three aspects of NAGPRA they would like changed does not lead to any discernable patterns (table 6).

However, a range of other answers does provide insights into which groups of tribal repatriation workers consider repatriation and NAGPRA as having healing effects. To begin, a few personal attributes would seem to correlate with the responses. Respondents under the age of 50 are more likely to see repatriation as healing (table 7), while conversely those who hold a political position within a tribe are unsure or less likely to see repatriation as healing (table 8). Most telling is a series of questions about how effectively NAGPRA has worked and some of the potential benefits that have flowed from working with the law. Those who believe museums usually follow NAGPRA’s legal mandates are substantially more likely to believe repatriation heals (table 9), as are those who reported new collaborations following from NAGPRA (table 10). Similarly, those who see NAGPRA as strengthening tribal sovereignty (table 11) and helping tribal youth learn about their culture (table 12) are

Table 2. Respondents’ work experience with NAGPRA and answers to the survey question, “Do you believe repatriation has led to healing?”

Years Worked on NAGPRA	N	<i>Led to Healing?</i>		
		Yes	No	Unsure
1 month to 10 years	48	52%	15%	33%
11 years or more	39	56%	16%	28%

Table 3. Respondents’ currently holding a religious position and answers to the survey question, “Do you believe repatriation has led to healing?”

Holding a Religious Position	N	<i>Led to Healing?</i>		
		Yes	No	Unsure
Yes	42	52%	12%	36%
No	49	55%	18%	27%

Table 4. Respondents’ self-identification as a Native American tribal member and answers to the survey question, “Do you believe repatriation has led to healing?”

Tribal Member	N	<i>Led to Healing?</i>		
		Yes	No	Unsure
Yes	73	55%	14%	31%
No	18	50%	22%	28%

Table 5. Respondents’ answers to whether NAGPRA is a spiritual burden for tribes and the survey question, “Do you believe repatriation has led to healing?”

NAGPRA is a spiritual burden for tribes	N	<i>Led to Healing?</i>		
		Yes	No	Unsure
Strongly Disagree	8	62%	13%	25%
Disagree	15	53%	20%	27%
Unsure	25	52%	4%	44%
Agree	29	55%	17%	28%
Strongly Agree	14	50%	29%	21%

noticeably more likely to believe repatriation heals. Those who take an optimistic view of NAGPRA’s usefulness as a law for years to come are also more likely to believe that repatriation heals (table 13).

Table 6. Respondents' answers to what three aspects of NAGPRA they would change and the survey question, "Do you believe repatriation has led to healing?"

If you could change three aspects of NAGPRA, what would they be?	N	<i>Led to Healing?</i>		
		Yes	No	Unsure
Strengthen authority of NAGPRA Review Committee	7	100%	-	-
Use NAGPRA to establish more collaborative relationships with museums	1	100%	-	-
Make NAGPRA more about social justice	8	63%	25%	12%
Make the National NAGPRA Program more effective	7	57%	14%	29%
Oblige museums to share more information on collections with tribes	9	56%	11%	33%
Legally amend NAGPRA to define Native American as "is or was" Indigenous to the U.S.	22	55%	18%	27%
Give tribes direct involvement in determining cultural affiliations	54	54%	15%	31%
Increase NAGPRA funding and grants	49	53%	16%	31%
Provide more training on implementing the law	8	50%	12%	38%
Oblige museums to consult with tribes more thoroughly	21	48%	10%	42%
Get more tribal youth involved	3	33%	-	66%
Make the NAGPRA process less hostile and confrontational	2	-	-	100%

Table 7. Respondents' age and answers to the survey question, "Do you believe repatriation has led to healing?"

Age	N	<i>Led to Healing?</i>		
		Yes	No	Unsure
50 or younger	41	61%	17%	22%
51 or older	47	46%	14%	40%

Table 8. Respondents' currently holding or having held a political position within a tribe and answers to the survey question, "Do you believe repatriation has led to healing?"

Holding/Held a Political Position	N	<i>Led to Healing?</i>		
		Yes	No	Unsure
Yes	26	42%	19%	39%
No	65	58%	14%	28%

These data are striking. Although perhaps intuitive, it's significant to have concrete support for the notion that when NAGPRA "works" repatriation is more likely to lead to healing from the viewpoint of tribal workers. "Working" in this case

Table 9. Respondents’ answers to whether museums usually follow NAGPRA’s legal mandates in their view and the survey question, “Do you believe repatriation has led to healing?”

Museums usually follow NAGPRA’s legal mandates	N	<i>Led to Healing?</i>		
		Yes	No	Unsure
Strongly Disagree	8	50%	38%	12%
Disagree	32	34%	28%	38%
Unsure	23	52%	9%	39%
Agree	30	73%	7%	20%
Strongly Agree	0	–	–	–

Table 10. Respondents’ answers to whether work on NAGPRA has led to any new and positive collaborations between museums and the tribe they work for, and the survey question, “Do you believe repatriation has led to healing?”

New Collaborations	N	<i>Led to Healing?</i>		
		Yes	No	Unsure
Yes	34	70%	15%	15%
Somewhat	34	44%	18%	38%
No	22	36%	14%	50%

can be defined as museums demonstrating to tribes that they’re complying with the law, seeking collaborations, acknowledging tribal sovereignty, and using NAGPRA to help community members learn.

Although these tabulations paint an answer as to whether repatriation heals in broad brushstrokes, the survey respondents’ detailed answers in an open comment field provided far more detail about attitudes towards healing and the mechanisms by which it does work—or doesn’t work. In fact, the largest number of comments came from tribal repatriation workers who were skeptical about repatriation’s healing effects.

While nearly all of the respondents seemed to accept the *goal* of healing as worthy, they were cautious about whether this could be achieved. Several tribes have not had success with NAGPRA and so for them healing could not begin. A handful of statements suggested that healing could only begin later, when *every* object and set of human remains has been returned or reburied. As Cecil E. Pavlat Sr. of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians wrote, “Every time we reinter our Ancestors, healing takes place, but we will never be completely healed until every last Ancestor, funerary object, sacred item, and items of cultural patrimony

Table 11. Respondents' answers to whether NAGPRA has increased recognition of tribal sovereignty and the survey question, "Do you believe repatriation has led to healing?"

NAGPRA has increased recognition of tribal sovereignty	N	<i>Led to Healing?</i>		
		Yes	No	Unsure
Strongly Disagree	8	25%	50%	25%
Disagree	17	41%	24%	35%
Unsure	22	55%	9%	36%
Agree	35	60%	11%	29%
Strongly Agree	9	78%	0%	22%

Table 12. Respondents' answers to whether NAGPRA has helped tribal youth learn about their culture and the survey question, "Do you believe repatriation has led to healing?"

NAGPRA has helped tribal youth learn about their culture	N	<i>Led to Healing?</i>		
		Yes	No	Unsure
Strongly Disagree	5	40%	60%	0
Disagree	21	33%	19%	48%
Unsure	36	56%	8%	36%
Agree	28	68%	14%	18%
Strongly Agree	1	100%	-	-

Table 13. Respondents' answers to whether NAGPRA will be a useful law for tribes for many years to come and the survey question, "Do you believe repatriation has led to healing?"

NAGPRA will be a useful law for tribes for many years to come	N	<i>Led to Healing?</i>		
		Yes	No	Unsure
Strongly Disagree	4	100%	-	-
Disagree	8	-	38%	62%
Unsure	23	48%	13%	39%
Agree	43	58%	14%	28%
Strongly Agree	13	70%	15%	15%

are returned and laid to rest."⁷⁰ Michael DeSpain, who works for the Mechoopda Indian Tribe, similarly stated, "Healing will only start when all the remains are

⁷⁰ Written comments have been lightly copy edited for spelling and grammar.

returned to Mother Earth.” Audie Huber (Quinault), employed by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, acknowledged that repatriation heals, but it is an unending process in part because new ancestral remains will continue to be unearthed during research and development projects. “I expect the tribes will be implementing NAGPRA over generations,” she said.

One respondent observed that healing is not possible because federal repatriation law doesn’t apply to all Natives. As Cindi Alvitre wrote, “My tribe, the Gabrieleno/Tongva, is not the full recipients of NAGPRA compliance because of our non-federal status. We are still in a state of mourning as thousands of our ancestors are still confined in institutional holdings.”

Others seem to see the healing dimension of repatriation, but note that the rejection or delays of claims offset any potential healing benefits. As Vincent E. Randall of the Yavapai-Apache Nation wrote, “BUT in cases where repatriation is not forthcoming the repercussions are worse than the healing that would have occurred otherwise from claims which are successful.” Seth Pilsk, who has worked with Randall in his role as an employee of the San Carlos Apache Tribe, has similarly witnessed the healing process stalled when museums approach repatriation antagonistically.⁷¹ Similarly, Betsy L Chapoose of the Ute Indian Tribe wrote about the increased harm caused when repatriation law does not apply to ancestral remains: “I think that in some cases it has opened wounds even deeper and it has even confused things because state lands are exempt from the law. This has been a very hard pill to swallow that some things may not be returned because of the status of the land.”

Robert Cast of the Caddo Nation of Oklahoma hoped “that in some very small way that there is a healing effect” when repatriations occur, but he expressed uncertainty. For one, “NAGPRA is a constant reminder of being removed by force from homelands and places that still bear your imprint.” And also, “I’ve seen this take a toll on some of the elders and those that are involved in NAGPRA . . . that makes me doubtful that much healing has happened yet.”

In a second conception of healing, it is not for the living but rather those ancestors who are the focus of these efforts. As Brandon Reynon of the Puyallup Tribe of Indians replied, “I would say it heals the ancestor more than anyone. By successfully repatriating the ancestor, we bring them home to be with their people and be at rest among their loved ones. Those who, like me, that actually handle the repatriations and bring the Ancestors home, only get a partial healing.” Marilyn G. Jones, of the Suquamish Tribe, similarly wrote, “It helps us to give our ancestors peace and respect, and rest again where they belong and not in museum storage boxes or on display somewhere far from home.”

The returning of ancestors to their proper place is part of rites for the dead *and* the living, others emphasize. As dAVE Burlingame of the Cowlitz Indian Tribe

⁷¹ On these disputes, see Tom Mashberg, “Where Words Mean as Much as Objects,” *New York Times*, August 20, 2013.

wrote, “NAGPRA helps facilitate the spiritual journey we all must make, whether as repatriators or as those finally allowed to rest.” John A. Allen of the Fort Belknap Indian Community referenced a repatriation that brought both ancestral bones and spirits home from Washington, DC. “Through our native spiritual ceremonies,” he said, “this process has healed our native people both living and dead.”

In a third conception of healing, the result was more personal—feelings of harmony, peace, and closure. For Angela Neller (Native Hawaiian), who works for the Wanapum Heritage Center, repatriation offers “peace of mind” and “brings hope.” Kirkland Perry of the Chickasaw Nation wrote, “When returned a high feeling of honor and pride is shared by those involved.” Tamara Francis of the Delaware Nation said, “For tribes to feel a sense of closure about their ancestors finally receiving rest and being treated with respect and dignity.” Nick Angeloff of the Bear River Band of Rohnerville Rancheria answered, “With regard to human remains healing looks like a sense of peace has come over the membership.”

Such viewpoints hew perhaps most closely to what we might expect for ideals of individual psychological and collective healing. These virtues of healing are not always framed as present in people’s lives, although they may be seen as something to aspire to. As Ramon Riley of the White Mountain Apache said, “Healing is what we once had—it’s love, respect, hope and forgiveness.” In this way, Patt Murphy (Ioway), of the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, emphasized that healing is not external to the tribal experience, but an inward-looking process: “It is a connection to our past and in the process of repatriation and reburial we can experience taking care of our Old Ones. The healing is intra-tribal/self-healing.”

A fourth concept of healing might be broadly described as the repair of broken relationships. On the one hand, some such as Patt Murphy see this process as internal to Native nations. Teara Farrow Ferman of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation links the harm caused by disturbing graves to the social problems of a community, such that healing one relationship heals others—when the spirits of the dead are restless they cause a variety of social problems, but when the spirits are put to rest then the community slowly heals. In turn, Patrick M. Pavila (Yup’ik Eskimo), who works for the Tuntutuliak Traditional Council, suggested that regaining tradition helps heal: “I think if one increases their cultural knowledge and values, they would effectively strive on ‘healing.’” Vernon Lujan (Pueblo of Taos), a tribal official at the Pueblo of Pojoaque also framed these processes in terms of cultural revitalization.

He wrote that healing happens when “some tribes have been able to get back some of their ceremonial and religious items and revitalize their communities.”

Others, in this vein, emphasized healing as externally focused—towards museums and scientists. Adrian John of the Seneca Nation of Indians wrote that repatriation increases respect for one’s culture and helps continue cultural practices. He added, “Healing is to know that you can start to trust these institutions a little, that maybe we can work together to further develop understanding for the broader public in regards to who native people are.” Lyle Balenquah (Hopi) noted that most

Hopis are still upset about past practices of exhuming ancestral remains. “Through the NAGPRA process, this attitude towards the scientific community can be changed, but perhaps not entirely,” Balenquah wrote. “Increased communication, awareness and respect for Hopi perspectives among the scientific community is one version of ‘healing.’” Jennifer Harrison, who works for the Chickaloon Village Traditional Council, similarly wrote, “I think it has created a partnership between Tribes and museums that did not previously exist. ‘Healing’ to me means that the Tribal citizens trust the museums and see them as partners, instead of thieves.”

A fifth concept of healing is tied to, if not dependent on, justice and correcting past wrongs. As Jimmy Arterberry of the Comanche Nation wrote, “Repatriation is simply the opportunity to acknowledge that something wrong occurred and that there is a potential right to that wrong. Healing to me is the acknowledgment of a wrong deed, followed by corrective action.” Alan Downer, who worked for the Navajo Nation, more forcefully expressed a similar notion: “I think this is some sort of newspeak, attempting to wrap a wrong up in language that makes it seem like correcting it was a wonderful thing. If healing means correcting a wrong, then I suppose it is healing. If it is intended as more than that, I think it’s baloney.” In this way, for Downer, healing cannot be more than a retributive or restorative justice.

The struggle to bring back cultural objects is also corrective in its aims for Frank Hecksher of the Peoria Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma, who said, “The profound act of reclaiming our cultural heritage, whether it be through repatriation of human remains or tribal artifacts, has given a sense of ‘making it right’ or ‘righting wrongs’ from past generations.” Gregg Castro (Salinan/Ohlone) of the Salinan Layehm draws on this theme. He at first relates victories as a vindication, but then ties it more closely to justice (doing right) and cultural expression. “Even the smallest ‘victory,’ vindication and return of what is ours is cause to celebrate,” Castro wrote. “Our ancestors have taught me to not count up victories as notches on our weapon, but to cherish each instance as an opportunity to do what is right and live out our beliefs.”

Conclusion

Beyond the return of cultural items, healing from repatriation can take several different forms: as a precept of public policy, aspiration for communities, and outcome of experience.⁷² In the United States, because NAGPRA does not include any statements about healing or provisions for reconciliation, healing is largely aspirational or experiential.

In these two ways, repatriation-as-healing joins a larger movement in which museums are part of the decolonizing project. As Amy Lonetree has written, museums can address historical trauma and unresolved grief by linking past,

⁷² Lawrence E. Sullivan, “Some Thoughts about Museums, Reconciliation, and Healing” in *Stewards of the Sacred*, ed. Lawrence E. Sullivan and Alison Edwards (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2004), 19–25, especially 21.

present, and future. In her careful analysis of the Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, Lonetree maps the different ways a tribally run museum serves to spiritually and culturally empower a local community.⁷³ Built in part to address the work of repatriation, the Ziibiwing Center explicitly seeks to help tribal members heal by reconnecting them to traditional Native values via ceremonies and teachings.⁷⁴ This is accomplished through programming as well as a circular exhibit space titled “Blood Memory,” which uses objects, images, and traditional knowledge to acknowledge the difficult past but also emphasize the Saginaw Chippewa’s strength, pride, resiliency, and beauty.⁷⁵ Repatriation is a part of these larger efforts—acknowledging the past, building strength for the future. These are but a few examples of how museum professionals and community leaders can open up the possibilities of healing.

Repatriation alone cannot heal all the wounds of Indian country. This was made most clear to me when I interviewed the Southern Cheyenne peace chief Joe Big Medicine for this research. When I asked him if repatriation heals, he answered, “NAGPRA doesn’t heal. But the process does.” What Big Medicine meant, I think, was that repatriation is just one aspect of an expansive effort to revitalize Cheyenne lifeways. The struggles have included establishing a national monument at Sand Creek Massacre site and hosting an annual Sand Creek Spiritual Healing Run, which starts at the massacre site and culminates 177 miles away in Denver at the steps of the state capitol building.⁷⁶ Similarly, when asked if repatriation heals Bobby Gonzalez of the Caddo Nation of Oklahoma once said, “There is a healing process that the tribe is going through in general with the taking of our land, and natural and cultural resources . . . Repatriation is one small step in a much larger healing process.”⁷⁷

These statements perhaps point to the very potential and limits of the word healing, which is derived from the Old English *hælan*—meaning, whole.⁷⁸ To be healed is to be whole again. Yet for Native peoples, the wounds of history may never fully disappear. “I myself will never be healed,” Karen Little Coyote, who now helps direct the Southern Cheyenne’s repatriation program, told me during an interview. “It’s like a close family member, one near and dear, who has died. Once you learn about it, and think about it, your heart doesn’t heal. I’ll always have that scar of what happened to our people.”

Repatriation alone cannot restore the whole of what has been lost—land, language, lives—but it is one part of the whole. As Moira G. Simpson has argued, repatriation is perceived as contributing to a broader notion of wellness when it is

73 Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

74 *Ibid.*, 125.

75 *Ibid.*, 133–54.

76 Ari Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling Over the Memory of Sand Creek* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

77 Graham and Murphy, “NAGPRA at 20: Museum Collections and Reconnections,” 120.

78 “Healing,” Dictionary.com, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/healing?s=t>.

considered a cultural revitalization movement. If colonialism strips culture from subjugated communities, then postcolonial healing must involve redrawing what has been erased. “If the return of ceremonial objects can assist indigenous peoples in continuing or renewing the values and practices essential to their cultural and ceremonial life and can contribute to community healing as part of contemporary life,” Simpson argues, “then the act of repatriation is surely the ultimate form of cultural preservation.”⁷⁹ For many, healing is that *act* of remembering.

Yet it is a particular form of healing, because the wounds do not disappear for most, but remain as scars. In the survey, Patricia Conway (Puyallup), who works for the Puyallup Tribal Housing Authority, made this point. “Healing is a process it doesn’t just happen overnight,” she wrote. “When an Ancestor is given back to a Tribe, healing takes time, wounds leave scars, scars don’t go away, they are always there, a reminder of the pain that was endured!” As a constant reminder of the original wound, scars can provide a source of strength for Native Americans to endure. Scars are proof of survival.

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⁷⁹ Simpson, “Museums and Restorative Justice: Heritage, Repatriation, and Cultural Education,” 129.