

## Potlatch Treasures, Wampum Belts, and Sacred Masks

### North American Repatriation Cases preceding NAGPRA

Since the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA)<sup>1</sup> was passed by the U.S. Congress in 1990, the impression has become widespread in Germany that repatriation in North America is a post-NAGPRA phenomenon. While there is no doubt that the number of repatriations has increased since NAGPRA in both the United States and Canada, where the law does not apply, returns did already take place in earlier years. The following brief excursion into the subject offers a reminder. It is important to first note that, in the North American context, the term „repatriation“ is applied to the return of both „human remains“ and „cultural heritage“.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, use of the term differs in other parts of the world, where „repatriation“ designates the return of „human remains,“ while „restitution“ refers to the return of „cultural heritage.“ Numerous dictionary definitions of „repatriation,“ however, are not bound only to the return of ancestral remains, but refer to objects, too.<sup>3</sup> It is important to understand the North American preference for using the term „repatriation“ for both aspects. This preference may have its roots in an aversion to the word „restitution“ by some leading American museum directors, who appear to have rejected the term for its possible negative connotations: i.e., returning something to its rightful owner, which implies that the objects in their collections are in some way not rightfully owned (Feest 1992: 40).<sup>4</sup> Today, such a broadly defined understanding of „repatriation“ that encompasses both „human remains“ and „artifacts“ may even be used to consider Indigenous ontologies. As such, it could acknowledge a desire to not draw a strict line between the importance of the return of human ancestors and „objects,“ i.e. potentially animated entities, of which some are assigned to human-like characters.

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While the subject of the repatriation of ancestral remains from museum repositories is of fundamental importance, it warrants a more generally framed discussion due to ethical, moral, and other implications that cannot be reduced regionally to North America. I will therefore exclude this complex from my brief reflections on the issue of repatriation in North America, and will focus on the return of material objects of „cultural heritage.“ As originating communities' demands for the return of their cultural heritage are inherently directed at collecting

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<sup>1</sup> The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act or NAGPRA is a United States federal law passed on November 16, 1990 (Pub. L. 101-601, 25 U.S.C. 3001 et seq., 104 Stat. 3048). It requires all institutions that receive federal funding, and only these, to return human remains and culturally particularly sensitive or significant artifacts to the descendants of the associated Native American tribal nations they originated.

<sup>2</sup> This includes material and other forms of heritage, e.g. recorded cultural knowledge, songs, speeches, etc.

<sup>3</sup> See the definitions of the term given in Merriam Webster, the Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, and the Cambridge English Dictionary.

<sup>4</sup> As above.

institutions, it is no surprise to learn that the first were voiced by the end of the 19th century. After all, this period marked the height of anthropological collecting for museums and the emergence of a private collectors' market for „ethnographic objects.“ Yet demands for repatriation did not emerge as a broader phenomenon until the 1960s and 1970s.

As a result, there were several successful, by now iconic, repatriation claims, such as the transfer of fourteen medicine bundles to the Navajo in 1977, the first returns of War God figures (Ahayu:da) to the Zuni in 1978, the restoration of three kachina masks to the Hopi in 1980, and the 1988 repatriation of the Omaha Nation's sacred pole to its rightful owners. But there were other repatriation claims as well, of which I would like to detail three pre-1990 examples in order to convey how unique each case is in terms of its history, goals, and results.

## Potlatch Treasures

One of the first significant repatriation cases before the era of NAGPRA did not occur in the United States, but in Canada. It involved the demand for the return of cultural treasures of the Kwakwaka'wakw („Kwakiutl“) that had been taken from them in 1921 based on an 1884 amendment of the *Indian Act* legislation (first introduced in 1876). It reads, „*Every Indian or other person who engages in or assists in celebrating the Indian festival known as the „Potlatch“<sup>5</sup> ... is guilty of a misdemeanor, and shall be liable to imprisonment for a term not more than six nor less than two months ...*“

While the Kwakwaka'wakw found ways to work around this difficult-to-enforce law, missionaries and government officials pressed matters repeatedly and most viciously in the early 1920s. This led in 1921 to the break-up of one of the biggest potlatch celebrations of that period, in which three of the eight Kwakwaka'wakw tribes were deeply involved. The potlatch was hosted by Chief Daniel Cranmer who, with this potlatch, conducted a traditional divorce (Cranmer Webster 2012: 1).<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, forty-five participants were arrested. Twenty were eventually convicted and served jail time for up to three months; others received suspended sentences by handing over their potlatch regalia. In that way, some 750 pieces of regalia were confiscated in 1922. With these items, the Indian agent arranged an exhibition in the Kwakwaka'wakw community of Alert Bay, for which he charged entry. While the Canadian government allegedly paid a total of \$1,495 for most of the confiscated items,<sup>7</sup> this amount was next-to-nothing compared to their real value. Many of those arrested claimed that they never received any money.

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<sup>5</sup> The „Potlatch,“ a term in the Chinook language meaning „to give,“ is a catchword for a variety of celebrations on Northwest Coast that mark all stages of life as well as the passing of ceremonial family treasures and privileges, including the installing of hereditary chiefs. These celebrations originally went by different names, even on a tribal level. They are marked by the giving of property on the part of the host. The host thereby rewards the invited recipients according to rank for witnessing and thus approving what is taking place.

<sup>6</sup> At a later point, Daniel Cranmer married Agnes Hunt, a granddaughter of George Hunt, Franz Boas's main collaborator.

<sup>7</sup> This price was determined by anthropologist and linguist Edward Sapir, then directing the Anthropological Division in the Geological Survey of Canada in Ottawa. However, this price did not cover the confiscated ceremonial coppers, individually named objects of particularly high material value. For these, no compensation was ever paid (Cole 1985: 252-253).

Afterward, the „Potlatch collection“ was dispersed: some thirty-five pieces were sold to collector George Heye and his private Museum of the American Indian in New York. Most of the rest went to the Victoria Memorial Museum (later the National Museum of Canada, and now the Canadian Museum of History) in Ottawa, which then transferred some one hundred pieces to the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto one year later. A few more pieces became part of private collections, including those of the Deputy Superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs, the arresting police officer, and the prosecutor at the trials.

Although the Kwakwaka'wakw community never forgot what happened in 1922, there was no change in the situation concerning the „Potlatch Collection“ until 1951, when the *Indian Act* was amended yet again, with Section 149 – the section criminalizing the potlatch – being simply dropped from the legislation. It took a few more years before Comox Chief Andy Frank, who was married to a granddaughter of George Hunt, requested his local Member of Parliament in 1958 to locate the collection at the then National Museum of Canada. He was an important figure in the revival of Indigenous and Kwakwaka'wakw cultural affairs after the Potlatch ban was lifted. Then another five years passed until, for the first time in 1963, the dedicated Kwakwaka'wakw leader Chief Jimmy Sewid approached the National Museum in person to explicitly ask for the return of its holdings of the Potlatch Collection. He even offered to repurchase it for the ridiculous amount the government had paid in 1922—an offer that was, of course, rejected (Jacknis 2002: 349).

Many more visits and much public pressure were needed until the National Museum finally gave in, but only under the condition that the objects were to be transferred to a tribal museum – not directly to the descendants of the former owners. Probably it was feared that the artifacts would soon end up on the art market and leave the country.<sup>8</sup> This condition was backed by governmental and provincial funding. As the affected families now mostly lived in two villages, Alert Bay and Cape Mudge, it was decided to build two museums. That, of course, was not a conflict-free process, a situation intensified by the fact that the objects had been poorly documented when confiscated. Nevertheless, in 1979 the „Kwagiulth Museum“ opened at Cape Mudge and in 1980, the U'mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay. Notably, the driving force behind the latter was the daughter of Daniel Cranmer, Gloria Cranmer Webster, who acted as the U'mista's founding director from 1977 to 1990. She continued the anthropological tradition in her family that started with George Hunt's and her father's close collaboration with Franz Boas. Gloria Cranmer Webster became the first trained Kwakwaka'wakw anthropologist in 1956, and went on to serve as a consulting curator for museums and many major exhibition projects.

Next, in 1984, negotiations began for the repatriation of those objects held at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto. But these posed a different kind of challenge, as the ROM claimed to have a legitimate right to its collection and demanded something in return. This condition was refused by the Kwakwaka'wakw. Finally, the ROM gave in and returned its part of the Potlatch collection in 1987, with pieces arriving in the two tribal museums in 1988.

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<sup>8</sup> It has to be noted that, at the same time, the Canadian government invested significant money and energy to buy up old collections on the European market. This was an attempt to make up for the losses of the late 19th century, when competitive European and American collectors bought up what they could in Canada, depriving the country of its own people's heritage.

Also in 1984, negotiations began with the Museum of the American Indian (MAI) in New York. These were still not resolved by the time the MAI became the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), a part of the Smithsonian Institution, in 1989. In terms of repatriation, a serious challenge emerged: how to discern which specific objects were part of the original Potlatch Collection, as George Heye was actively present and collecting in Alert Bay when he acquired his selection of confiscated materials. Again, the issue was exacerbated by poor documentation. The part of the Potlatch Collection belonging to the former MAI was eventually returned in several groups between 1993 and 2002.

Aside from the larger groups of objects associated with the former Potlatch Collection, over time individual pieces were sold on the private market. Some were purchased by European collectors and ended up in such public institutions as the British Museum. The sun mask in the British Museum's possession, for example, was „returned“ to Alert Bay in 2005 by the British Museum as a „permanent loan“ – a strategy that helps to avoid legal complications and delays of repatriation. Other pieces are now in private collections. When one such object was repatriated to U'mista in 2019, I was fortunate to be present at the event. It involved the return of a different sun mask confiscated in 1921. It had been part of the more than 30 pieces bought by George Heye, and subsequently one of the ones he sold when he ran into financial difficulties. French anthropologist Claude Levi-Straus later acquired the mask, and after World War II took it to France. There he sold it at an auction in 1951 to a collector, whose son then tried to sell it at Christie's. At this point, the mask was discovered by anthropologist Marie Mauzé; she in turn informed Canadian art dealer Donald Ellis, who eventually bought and donated the treasure to U'mista.

## Wampum Belts

Another complex early repatriation case involves the Confederacy Wampum Belts of the Onondaga Nation. This is one of the best-documented early repatriations, dating back to 1892.

The term „wampum“ derives from the Massachusetts and Narragansett Algonkian word *wampumpeag*, meaning „white strings (of shell beads)“; purple beads were also produced and used, but were fewer in number. As these beads were difficult to make, they were of high value. Depending on regional accessibility, wampum was used as adornment, as currency, or in the form of strings and „wampum-belts“<sup>9</sup> in ceremonial and diplomatic rituals. The belts grew in both number and size after European contact, triggered by the introduction of metal tools and the mass production of beads that followed. Eventually, even commercially produced „wampum beads“ made of glass („imitation wampum“) were introduced. In ceremonial and political contexts, wampum strings and belts were and are conceived as mediums to recall words once „spoken into“ them. In the 19th century, for example, Ottawa Chief Assiginack was still able to recall the following „words spoken into“ an 18th-century belt handed over by British colonial agent Sir William Johnson, who had been an Iroquois-trained, generally acknowledged master of wampum diplomacy: *„you see that wampum before me, the body of my words, in this the spirit of my words shall remain, it shall never be removed“* (Bohaker, Corbiere, and Phillips 2015: 58). More current Indigenous reflections on belts reverberate in the following quote from Margaret Bruchac, deeply involved in recent Haudenosaunee wampum repatriation processes:

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<sup>9</sup> They were never used as belts but rather held in hand or draped over the shoulder.

... in both Algonkian and Haudenosaunee ontology, the category of „personhood“ is not limited to humans alone. From an Indigenous ontological perspective, wampums embody the literal weaving together of thoughts from living human beings and materials from living marine, floral, and faunal beings. Wampum belts are thus entangled in social (and not just material) relationships with the non-human persons (e.g., flora, fauna, and mollusks) who provide the raw materials. Yet, a wampum belt is more than just an inanimate assemblage. If an object is both imbued with meaning and embodied with memory, it can potentially recall and communicate its own history ...

(Bruchac 2018: 69)

The Onondaga belong to the Haudenosaunee, the „People of the Longhouse.“ Commonly known as the Six Nations, these consist of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and the Tuscarora. The first five nations mentioned once formed the original Iroquois confederacy, presumably in the second half of the 16th century, with the Onondaga as its designated wampum keeper. The Five Nations became the Six Nations after the Tuscarora joined the confederacy in 1722. The American War of Independence (1775-1783) led to a geographical breakup of the confederacy. Ever since, members of all nations have lived on both sides of the US-Canadian border, maintained two „council fires“ or gathering places, and split the confederacy’s wampum collection. Reportedly, some twenty-five to thirty belts remained with the Onondaga on the American side, who live on the Onondaga reservation in New York State, while about the same number of wampums was taken to Canada by those Onondaga who chose to settle on the Six Nations reserve in Ontario (Fenton 1971).

The extent to which these circumstances have led to a breakdown of wampum traditions is now a subject of debate. In any case, when the run for collecting ethnographic artifacts reached its height at the end of the 19th century, Indigenous societies were greatly weakened through catastrophic population decline from introduced diseases, combined with drastic social changes. As a result, wampum keepers on both sides of the border had started selling belts to outsiders. Such sales were not isolated cases, as is proven by the over 400 belts held in museum collections worldwide by the middle of the 20th century. Whether this was a breach of trust by those designated as wampum keepers or, in the Onondaga case discussed in the following, reflected a widespread conviction that the confederacy, its offices, and its old wampum collections had turned meaningless became a matter of debate. Indeed, this question, on which I will now focus, was the subject of the first significant repatriation trial that took place in New York State in 1898.<sup>10</sup>

The event that instigated the trial was the selling in 1891 of four belts for \$75 (then the value of a wagon and a horse) by New York State Onondaga wampum keeper Chief Thomas Webster to General Carrington. It seems that the General had told Webster that he would take the belts to Washington D.C. and deposit them for safekeeping at the National Museum. Webster gave Carrington four of the most important belts from the collection of eleven still in his possession. Among the first belts he sold was the so-called Hiawatha belt, whose design honors the Confederacy's formation and graces the Haudenosaunee's flag today. Webster reportedly felt that no one was still interested in the belts, and he feared that they would be lost or stolen (Fenton 1971: 449). After trying in vain to sell the belts to the National Museum, Carrington sold them for \$350 to a friend in Boston, who in turn sold them to Mayor Thacher from Albany

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<sup>10</sup> At about the same time, around 1893, wampum belts disappeared from the wampum collections on the Grand River Reserve in Canada. But this is a different story.

for \$500. Thacher had feared that these precious pieces of heritage would be lost to the State of New York. However, after the state declined to reimburse him, he held on to the belts.

Similar concerns also activated Harriet Maxwell Converse (1836-1903), a wealthy poet, folklorist, and defender of Indian rights who had been adopted by the Seneca. As the owner of an old and precious collection that included ten wampum belts (mostly from the Seneca), Converse had turned the collection over to the New York State Museum for safekeeping. Now, she and a group of like-minded individuals set out to secure the remaining belts. They approached the Onondaga with this plan in mind, persuading some of the chiefs to choose the State University of New York the repository for their remaining wampum belts. She also convinced the chiefs to name her as their attorney so that she could sue Thacher in order to retrieve the four belts in his possession. In 1897 the case „Onondagas vs. Thacher“ began. It ended in 1900 with the assertion that Thacher was the rightful owner of the belts in his possession. The court also found that the Iroquois confederacy had ceased to exist after the American Revolution and that Chief Webster, therefore, could not have been its wampum keeper but rather only a private collector and owner of relics and curiosities (Fenton 1971: 454, Onondaga vs. Thatcher 1898).

Concerning her first goal, however, Converse was more successful. In 1898 she received approval from the council of the Onondaga Nation for the sale of the remaining wampums to the State University of New York for \$500, and for the University to be installed as wampum keeper.<sup>11</sup> The chiefs involved delivered five belts to the University, which in turn deposited them at the State Museum. The two missing belts making up the seven remaining belts after the 1891 sale were found shortly after Webster's death in 1897 under his bed, and were passed to the museum a year later. In 1927, the four belts in Thacher's possession also joined the collection, making the original 1891 Webster wampum collection complete again. A twelfth Onondaga belt, obviously sold by Webster before his dealings with General Carrington, was purchased in 1949 and was also added to the collection (Fenton 1971).<sup>12</sup>

A series of earlier attempts – all futile – to have wampum custody returned to the Onondaga seems to have occurred in the first half of the 20th century (Sullivan 1992: 10). This shows that not all concerned had been happy with the previous arrangements. Yet it was the emergence of Indian Rights activism, including the American Indian Movement (AIM), in the wake of the civil rights movement in the late 1960s that opened a new chapter in the repatriation story. The activist movements sparked a new spirit among Onondaga chiefs and other Iroquois leaders and intensified efforts for wampum retrieval. With more emphasis on publicity, a new generation of Onondaga leaders started to reach out and voice their views on what had happened in the past. They asserted they always were told that the wampum belts had been transferred to the State Museum as a loan, not a sale, and they questioned the legality of the original transfer. The controversy surrounding the matter of wampum belts held by museums and the demands for their return sparked several meetings in which the spirit of the old Confederacy was rekindled (Fenton 1971: 455). All this did have an effect on New York State legislators, who, in 1970, voted unanimously to give back all wampum belts in the State Museum's collection. After further hearings on the issue, however, they altered their position. By the time a respective law was passed in 1971, only the five belts received in 1898 were

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<sup>11</sup> At the request of the director of the State Museum, a ceremony was organized in 1908, which would officially install him as wampum keeper with the proper traditional title Ho-sen-na-géh-the.

<sup>12</sup> All wampum belts were backed with linen in 1956 as a precautionary measure (Fenton 1971: 456).

stipulated to be returned, and on the condition that the Onondaga first build an apt repository for them. This point would prevent the return of belts for almost two more decades.

When Martin E. Sullivan became the director of the New York State Museum in 1983, and therefore also the new official „wampum keeper,“ Onondaga leaders soon reached out to him to once again bring up for discussion the issue of the wampum belts' return. Negotiations for wampum repatriation resumed. This time, though, Sullivan was willing to reach an agreement. He chose a different path, allowing a critical reading of the original 1898 sales agreement that signed away the belts „forever.“ He acknowledged that this document had been written by non-Indigenous people with legal expertise and was signed by Onondaga chiefs who spoke almost no English. He therefore accepted the question as to whether „informed consent“ had ever been reached. Sullivan's move reflected a fundamental shift in views then taking place, and which also found expression in the passing of NAGPRA.<sup>13</sup> After three sets of lawyers resolved numerous other issues, the Onondaga Nation finally received its 12 wampum belts from the State Museum in 1989. Since then, the Nation has stored the belts in a bank vault in Syracuse, taking them out only for ceremonial and educational purposes (Sullivan 2014).<sup>14</sup> The chapter was brought to a close when New York State legislators opted to repeal the 1899 law that established the State Museum as the state's official wampum keeper.

## Sacred Masks

Finally, I will briefly mention a further case associated with the Haudenosaunee that exemplifies a third aspect of repatriation essential to consider in this discussion: the changing cultural and spiritual significance of items made for cultural use and for sale. This aspect is brought to light in claims for masks of certain secret medicine societies, of which those of the False Face Society (*hadu:wi*)<sup>15</sup> is best known. The Haudenosaunee have become a spiritually diverse society over time; with some members identifying as Catholic, Methodist, or other Christian denomination and others being adherents of the Longhouse religion, different views on traditional practices have emerged.<sup>16</sup> Shifting power relations among the groups have also become a factor. This became evident after the faction of Longhouse religion adherents became stronger and more vocal in the 1960s and 1970s. During that time, not just wampum belts became a rallying issue for Iroquois activism, but also demands for the removal of False Face masks from museum displays and for their return. As in many other cases, such masks had left Haudenosaunee hands in large numbers at the turn of the 19th century. Often, non-traditionally inclined, newly Christian individuals – typically descendants of former mask owners – felt uncomfortable holding onto such medicine items. For them, selling these was an act to safely get rid of them and perhaps profit financially.

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<sup>13</sup> In NAGPRA the wampum belts of the Iroquois Confederacy were specifically listed as iconic examples of „cultural patrimony;“ i.e., as objects that have „ongoing historical, traditional, or cultural importance...“ (NAGPRA 1995, 43 C.F.R. § 10.2[d][4]).

<sup>14</sup> The same shift in politics had altered the position of the Museum of the American Indian in New York even slightly before. They had returned the 11 Haudesnosaunee belts with clear provenance records to the wampum keepers at the Grand River reserve in Ontario, in 1988.

<sup>15</sup> The English term „False Face“ has no relation to Iroquois beliefs connected with the represented being, a great healer with a broken nose, nor the different names associated with it.

<sup>16</sup> The Longhouse religion is an early 19th-century reform version of the beliefs of the past.

In the case of Haudenosaunee False Face masks, yet another dimension adds to the complexity of issues. In the 1930s, when the Great Depression set in and unemployment rates soared, a federal job program sought to remedy this situation by encouraging the production of non-ceremonial False Face masks for the tourist market (Colwell 2017: 173). While some Haudenosaunee were critical of this initiative, others saw no harm in complying, especially as they did not carve the masks in the same way as sacred ones. In contrast to the tourist masks, sacred masks were carved out of living trees and brought to life with proper ceremonies.

This was the situation when, in the wake of the wampum controversy during the 1960s and 1970s, the False Face mask issue was also raised. Henceforth, and through the 1980s, the demands for the return of wampum belts and ceremonial False Face masks became intertwined. Notably, these demands were soon expanded by some Haudenosaunee to masks produced for the tourist market. Soon, museums were faced with a situation where some Haudenosaunee came to categorically demand the return of both ceremonial and tourist False Face masks, while others continued to offer masks of the latter kind on the market – for example, through arts and crafts shops and art galleries.

While this situation is often framed as „traditionalists“ versus „modernists,“ the distinction is not so clear. This is demonstrated by a 1994 letter from the late Chief Thomas to a major Canadian art gallery owner, who had requested clarification regarding the masks he sold. In his response, Chief Thomas stated the following:

The masks that I carve are not „blessed“ nor given any power for healing, and there is nothing wrong to sell these masks... I do agree when the people say that sacred masks should not be sold. Sacred masks are blessed and given power to heal and to cure. ... People are very critical but they overlook the practice to sell native medicine, to compete in native dances, and to sell their culture by smudging and by selling lacrosse sticks (it's medicine too). Today lacrosse sticks are sold and played all over the world. If masks are forbidden to be sold and it becomes too sacred then it will become a secret and no one will be able to carve a mask ... This is the way I make my living. I carve many forms of art and I make an honest living.

Chief Jacob Thomas (Chichester, Inc, n.d.)

Haudenosaunee views of this kind stand in stark contrast to those that categorically declare that „There cannot be a non-sacred Iroquois mask“ (Gonyea and Hill 1981: 2), and that the process of carving a mask from a living tree and the following consecrating ritual only adds power.

To conclude this brief review of the repatriation issues surrounding False Face masks, it is important to note that by about 2015 the more strict interpretation has prevailed: as far as I can determine, tourist False Face masks have been taken off the market. Yet, it seems that artists have found a way to work around the decree by carving animated wooden False Face figures. While the masks depicted on such figures still properly reflect all aspects of False Face masks, the miniatures are not, of course, functional masks. It remains to be seen whether, and if so how, the discussion will be expanded to these figures, too, or whether they will stay on the market as a compromise satisfying all parties.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> In other cases, the reproduction of a design or an image has turned up to be an issue, which shows that the subject of repatriation is by no means limited to material culture and that it affects all archival institutions.



## Closing remarks

The first example of historical repatriations that I described, dealing with the fate of the 1922 Potlatch Collection as a clearly defined body of objects, stood for the category of artifacts taken in contexts of apparent colonial injustice and wrong. The second example, which dealt with the fate of a collection of Confederacy wampum belts of the Onondaga Nation, stands for the category of objects of „cultural patrimony.“ The third example, dealing with Haudenosaunee False Face masks, stands for the importance of the concept of „sacredness“ as current in some contemporary cases of repatriation and how ideas of religious freedom and cultural self-determination unfold in these cases.

In contrast to the first example, the latter categories demonstrate that the concepts „objects of cultural patrimony“ and „religious significance“ (or „sacredness“) are more challenging to define. They allow - and require - multiple readings and perspectives that make them subject to ongoing debate. The wampum belt issue, for example, was not resolved with the return of the 12 original Confederacy belts to the New York Onondaga or the return of the 11 related belts in Canada, nor is the issue any longer confined to Haudenosaunee wampum belts. Instead, numerous other tribal nations' wampum repatriation claims have followed, based on the same reasoning as sketched above. The same had been true for demands for the repatriation of ceremonial False Face masks, which were expanded, as mentioned, to their tourist versions.

The examples cited above illustrate that repatriation claims are not limited to a particular, clearly definable list of object types. As a consequence, calls for repatriation will likely not simply vanish once specific cases have been resolved. One reason seems obvious: repatriation is not all about past actions. The North American cases cited here have shown that more recent views and values, and even new object categories, may be brought into play, as in the case of the tourist False Face masks. I would therefore like to highlight for the North American context the importance of concepts such as the right to „political/cultural self-determination“ and „religious freedom,“ which are of importance in other regions as well. Both rights are secured in the United States, for example, not only by the constitution but also by the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1979. We may conclude that, at least in the North American experience, repatriation is by no means a closed but rather an „open“ concept and process: as such, it is an expression of the fundamental need to come to terms with collections characterized by a highly problematic colonial past and its ongoing effects.

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