



HR0211

LRB104 12755 LAW 23907 r

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HOUSE RESOLUTION

2 WHEREAS, The Benin Bronzes are a collection of several
3 thousand metal plaques, sculpture heads, jewelry, and other
4 objects that adorned the royal palace of the Oba, or king, of
5 the Benin Kingdom, in what is now Edo State, Nigeria; they were
6 made of brass, leather, wood, and ivory by Edo artists from the
7 12th to 19th centuries; and

8 WHEREAS, The Benin Bronzes hold profound spiritual,
9 historical, and cultural significance to the Edo people;
10 however, the 16th to 19th century brass relics hold particular
11 cultural and ethnical significance to heirs, also referred to
12 as descendants, of enslaved captives because this group of
13 relics, referred to as "slave trade Benin Bronzes", were
14 created through the melting and refabrication of metal manilla
15 currency exchanged for their captive ancestors who were sold
16 to European transatlantic slave traders by the Benin Kingdom
17 over a 300-year period; and

18 WHEREAS, During the Punitive Expedition of 1897, the slave
19 trade Benin Bronzes were taken by British forces to cover the
20 cost of a retaliatory war in response to the Benin Kingdom
21 committing a massacre against an unarmed party of 12 British
22 envoys and 250 African porters, which left only a few
23 survivors; and

1 WHEREAS, The Benin Bronzes are currently held in various
2 museums and private collections around the world, including
3 one-quarter of the known relics being located in the United
4 States, with the third largest collection in the world,
5 consisting of 393 pieces, being held at the Field Museum in
6 Chicago; while most of the slave trade Benin Bronzes are blood
7 metal bronzes, their slave trade origins are not shared and
8 remain largely unknown to the world; and

9 WHEREAS, Benin Kingdom heirs have been engaged in a
10 repatriation effort of the Benin Bronzes since 1933, calling
11 for the return of the slave trade Benin Bronzes for moral
12 reasons; however, heirs of enslaved Africans have required
13 modern technology to trace their DNA to Benin Kingdom captives
14 and officially joined the effort in 2022, demanding the
15 following:

16 (1) The slave trade Benin Bronzes be shared with them
17 as they have the highest moral grounds for ownership,
18 considering their ancestors were sold for the metal needed
19 to make the bronzes;

20 (2) The slave trade Benin Bronzes remain in trust at
21 institutions in the West and the Americas, where the
22 institutions can have access to them for aesthetic,
23 academic, and cultural education; and

24 (3) They share in all the benefits of co-ownership;

1 and

2 WHEREAS, DNA research verifies that 93% of African
3 Americans have Nigerian DNA from ancestors sold into the
4 transatlantic slave trade from the region now called Nigeria,
5 while 82% of Caribbean people have it, as do descendants of
6 captives sold to Portuguese slave traders by the Benin Kingdom
7 and transported to Brazil from the 1500s until the prohibition
8 of the slave trade in 1888; and

9 WHEREAS, Neither the Benin Kingdom nor Nigeria has ever
10 apologized for the Benin Kingdom's stealing of people and
11 selling them for the manillas used to make the Benin Bronzes;
12 however, heirs of enslaved Africans still suffer from the
13 vestiges of slavery such as racial violence, discrimination,
14 and wealth gaps, and they have never been offered
15 dual-citizenship or been invited to repatriate back home to
16 Nigeria; and

17 WHEREAS, The Benin Kingdom and Nigeria have been
18 unresponsive to demands by descendants of their captives to
19 share the slave trade bronzes, while Edo State, the home of the
20 ancient Benin Kingdom, still bears a lasting legacy of the
21 historic crime against humanity exemplified by media reports
22 of organ harvesting and human trafficking of Edo girls for sex
23 slavery in Europe and the Middle East; and

1 WHEREAS, Rewarding the heirs of slave traders with
2 repatriation of their ancestors' ill-gotten gains, the slave
3 trade Benin Bronzes, sends a misguided message to modern Edo
4 State human traffickers and fails to address the historical
5 injustices associated with the relics; and

6 WHEREAS, The Benin Bronzes must be shared between the
7 heirs of the enslaved captives who paid for the relics with
8 their lives, and the heirs of the Benin Kingdom slave traders
9 must acknowledge the shared cultural history and Benin
10 Kingdom's responsibility; and

11 WHEREAS, Efforts should be taken to bring these heirs
12 together for healing and to ensure that they collectively
13 benefit from the ownership and preservation of the Benin
14 Bronzes; therefore, be it

15 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE
16 HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that
17 we acknowledge and condemn the historical injustice associated
18 with the original creation of the Benin Bronzes, the
19 subsequent British acquisition and distribution of the relics,
20 and the current possession of the Benin Bronzes by museums and
21 collectors who are unwilling to share the relics with the
22 heirs of the enslaved people who paid for them with their lives

1 and the heirs of the Benin Kingdom slave traders, emphasizing
2 the need for redress and equitable sharing and repatriation;
3 and be it further

4 RESOLVED, That we urge the following steps be taken in
5 regard to the Benin Bronzes:

6 (1) That all museums and private collectors who
7 possess slave trade Benin Bronzes enter into discussions
8 and negotiations with the descendants of the enslaved and
9 the heirs of the Benin Kingdom for the sharing and
10 repatriation process, with particular concern paid to the
11 Field Museum and all other stakeholder museums located in
12 the United States;

13 (2) That a Repatriation Committee shall be
14 established, comprising of representatives from the
15 Restitution Study Group and other relevant advocates on
16 behalf of descendants of the enslaved captives, the heirs
17 of the Benin Kingdom, relevant academia, cultural
18 associations, and international experts, and the Committee
19 shall facilitate negotiations, oversee repatriation of
20 select relics, and ensure equitable sharing and ownership;

21 (3) That the Repatriation Committee shall work with
22 museums and collectors to create an inventory and
23 comprehensive documentation of the slave trade Benin
24 Bronzes and all other Benin Bronzes, ensuring their
25 accurate identification and classification;

1 (4) That the Repatriation Committee shall develop a
2 transparent and inclusive decision-making process which
3 includes the voices and perspectives of the descendants of
4 the transatlantic enslaved Benin Kingdom captives and the
5 heirs of the Benin Kingdom, ensuring their equal
6 participation in determining the future of the Benin
7 Bronzes;

8 (5) That the Repatriation Committee shall develop a
9 framework for sharing the Benin Bronzes, considering
10 factors such as display language in museums and cultural
11 institutions both in the Benin Kingdom and
12 internationally, touring exhibitions, educational
13 programs, and initiatives that promote cultural
14 understanding and healing;

15 (6) That resale royalties shall be collected from
16 private sale of Benin Bronzes anywhere in the world based
17 on agreements with auction houses or laws passed in
18 legislative bodies, and these royalties shall be paid into
19 a trust shared by descendants of Benin Kingdom captives
20 sold into transatlantic enslavement and Benin Kingdom
21 heirs and used for the management of relics and other
22 matters to be determined by the two groups of heirs;

23 (7) That adequate resources shall be allocated from
24 museum exhibit, loan, and resale royalty fees to ensure
25 the sustainable preservation and conservation of the Benin
26 Bronzes, safeguarding their historical and cultural value

1 for future generations;

2 (8) That the Repatriation Committee shall initiate
3 programs and initiatives aimed at bringing the heirs of
4 the enslaved and the heirs of the Benin Kingdom together
5 for healing and reconciliation, with efforts being made to
6 support the economic, educational, and cultural
7 development of the heirs, ensuring they share in the
8 benefits of ownership of the Benin Bronzes through a trust
9 created with exhibit, loan, and resale royalty fees; and

10 (9) That each group of heirs is expected to
11 participate in the repatriation process, but should either
12 group of heirs refuse to participate in the Repatriation
13 Committee process after being given proper notice, the
14 proceedings shall move forward without their involvement;
15 and be it further

16 RESOLVED, That we urge all nations, stakeholder museums,
17 and collectors to support and adhere to this resolution,
18 recognizing the importance of equitable sharing, redress, and
19 healing in the context of the Benin Bronzes; and be it further

20 RESOLVED, That suitable copies of this resolution be
21 delivered to the Congressional Black Caucus, the National
22 Black Caucus of State Legislators, the Illinois African
23 American Family Commission, The African American Genealogy &
24 Cultural Society, the Restitution Study Group, and the

1 American Alliance of Museums.