



HR0885

LRB104 20990 MST 34861 r

1 HOUSE RESOLUTION

2 WHEREAS, The Benin Bronzes are a collection of intricately
3 crafted plaques, sculptures, ceremonial heads, and other
4 artifacts created by Edo artists of the Kingdom of Benin,
5 located in present-day Edo State, Nigeria, primarily between
6 the 13th and 19th centuries, representing one of Africa's most
7 sophisticated and enduring artistic traditions; and

8 WHEREAS, These works embody the political authority,
9 religious symbolism, and social organization of the Benin
10 Kingdom, serving as historical records, memorials to royal
11 ancestors, and expressions of the cultural and spiritual life
12 of the Edo people; and

13 WHEREAS, The materials and wealth used in the production
14 of the Benin Bronzes were, in part, obtained through extensive
15 regional and international trade networks, including
16 transatlantic exchanges that were deeply intertwined with
17 European commercial expansion and the transatlantic slave
18 trade; and

19 WHEREAS, This history reflects the complex and often
20 painful legacies of African and European interaction,
21 including the participation of multiple actors in systems of
22 trade, coercion, and colonization that caused profound human

1 suffering and long-lasting harm; and

2 WHEREAS, In 1897, during the British Punitive Expedition
3 against the Kingdom of Benin, the royal palace was destroyed
4 and thousands of culturally and spiritually significant
5 objects, now collectively known as the Benin Bronzes, were
6 removed and subsequently dispersed throughout museums and
7 private collections around the world; and

8 WHEREAS, Today, the Benin Bronzes are held across Europe,
9 North America, and elsewhere, with approximately one quarter
10 of the known works located in the United States, including
11 significant collections at the Field Museum in Chicago and
12 other Illinois cultural institutions; and

13 WHEREAS, The global dispersal of the Benin Bronzes has
14 become emblematic of broader histories of colonial extraction
15 and cultural loss, prompting renewed international dialogue
16 around ethical stewardship, historical accountability, and
17 public education; and

18 WHEREAS, The Edo people and the Federal Republic of
19 Nigeria have long advocated for the return and appropriate
20 care of the Benin Bronzes, emphasizing their importance to
21 cultural identity, historical continuity, and
22 intergenerational learning; and

1 WHEREAS, Descendants of people impacted by the
2 transatlantic slave trade have also sought fuller
3 acknowledgment of the historical contexts surrounding the
4 creation, exchange, and movement of these works, underscoring
5 the need for inclusive and truthful interpretation; and

6 WHEREAS, Museums, universities, and cultural institutions
7 around the world are increasingly engaging in collaborative
8 approaches to conservation, interpretation, and public
9 programming that reflect evolving best practices in cultural
10 ethics and historical scholarship; therefore, be it

11 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE
12 HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that
13 we recognize the extraordinary artistic, cultural, and
14 historical significance of the Benin Bronzes, including their
15 craftsmanship, symbolism, and enduring global importance, and
16 that we further recognize the historical injustice associated
17 with the original creation of the Benin Bronzes and the
18 subsequent British acquisition and distribution of the relics;
19 and be it further

20 RESOLVED, That we acknowledge the interconnected histories
21 of the Benin Bronzes, the transatlantic slave trade, and
22 colonial violence and affirm the importance of presenting

1 these histories accurately, responsibly, and with cultural
2 sensitivity; and be it further

3 RESOLVED, That we encourage museums and cultural
4 institutions to continue engaging with source communities,
5 scholars, and the public to promote ethical stewardship,
6 shared understanding, and educational access to this heritage;
7 and be it further

8 RESOLVED, That we support efforts to use the Benin Bronzes
9 as instruments for learning, dialogue, and cultural healing,
10 fostering greater awareness of Africa's rich artistic
11 traditions and the historical forces that shaped their global
12 journey; and be it further

13 RESOLVED, That we commit to using the platform of the
14 Illinois General Assembly to promote public education,
15 historical literacy, and constructive international cultural
16 engagement grounded in respect, collaboration, and truth.