

Looted Artifacts: Historical Heists and Their Impact

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ABSTRACT

This investigation sought to understand how art theft works. Then, understand its implications on cultural legacy, museums, and the black market. Art theft has its category due to its complexity compared to other crimes. It is often associated with other illegal practices like drug trafficking. Stolen art then enters the black market. These stolen pieces often have emotional and historical significance. For example, the Nazis stole many pieces that belonged to Jewish individuals. Pieces that had been in a family for years were taken and displaced. Museums need to be careful about how they obtain their pieces with provenance. Art is a way to express emotions, depict history, and capture culture. When it is stolen, it causes adverse effects on cultural heritage. This investigation studies this phenomenon to bring awareness of the legal importance of obtaining art.

Introduction

Today, there are thousands of missing artworks and ancient artifacts; many are currently in the black market or private collections. This investigation will focus on multiple occasions throughout history in which museums, countries, and even families have been victims of looting. Looting artifacts and artworks have constantly introduced the topic of morality and cultural heritage. Specifically, how the looting of cultural artifacts representing an entire community can have a grave effect on the culture; it is a form of erasure in history; it is no different from burning books, for example, how the change of the names of paintings can cause the erasure of the history behind the painting; this occurred multiple times during the Second World War when Jewish paintings were unnamed to promote the erasure of Judaism and its people. These can be seen in many restitution cases where cultural heritage is vital to their patients. During WW2, Jewish homes were ransacked and completely looted; Jewish people were known to be patrons of the arts and filled their houses with artworks; many of these pieces were stolen and donated by Nazis to national museums and galleries. The restitution cases have allowed the descendants of the Jewish families that suffered and were victims of the holocaust to reunite with their ancestral artworks. The historical significance of looting throughout history shows the gaps in which the people have lost their cultural identity. Especially when they can never know if it will ever be returned or found, many of these artworks will be either in the black market or trafficked, later bought for illegal private collections. Art trafficking is one of the biggest trafficking businesses in the black market, with many comparing it to trafficking drugs. It is one of the many tragedies of the art business, in which many historical pieces or artifacts are stolen just to be sold on the black market. Looting artworks and cultural artifacts is not new and has been seen throughout history when colonizers and conquerors would take over lands to grow their empires, which is why this investigation needs to be made and brought to light.

Problem Statement

The historical context of this source is the multiple events throughout history in which the looting of artworks has affected the cultural heritage of the victims. An example of this is the conquests of France and Spain, where

they would loot cities and steal their artistic paintings and historical artifacts. Another example would include the lootings during World War 2, where Nazis would raid Jewish homes and either keep the images or sell them to galleries or museums, as well as today's time with the topic of the black market and art trafficking, which is the leading cause of art looting. This research started with the case of Austria vs. Altman, an issue that impacted the art world. This case is one of the first successful restitution cases combating an entire country; this will be discussed later in this research. This case is one of the most important success stories for restitution and gave hope to families of the Second World War victims. This investigation will research the history behind looted artworks and learn of the importance of these pieces regarding their cultural heritage. Art helps create a culture representing an entire group of people and developing a sense of identity; what would happen if that were taken away or stolen? It leaves a gap in the culture; that sense of identity is stripped away and may never be seen again. While for many, art is not as valuable, it is still one of the most significant forms of representation in culture. Each culture has a different way of self-expression. Throughout time, one can identify where a piece of art was made, creating an identity for the culture. However, stealing this sense of identity can create a void in the cultural community.

Purpose

This investigation researches a different perspective on issues in the art market. Currently, the art market faces a significant issue regarding looting. Art is culture and, in a way, represents communities; this research focuses on moments in history where the looting of art has affected these communities. This investigation aims to provide a sequence of historical events that show the effects of stealing art and how this affects not only culture but the history of human civilization and its origins.

Justification

Today, one of the biggest trafficking markets is art trafficking. Art trafficking is one of the many issues in the art market, which is a fact that is not very well known or acknowledged. Art looters sell these pieces underground to big buyers in the market; this generated more looting since art is a market that can never die. Art is unnecessary, but it is still among the many luxuries people will pay millions of dollars for. As mentioned before, art is culture, and what is humanity without culture? Art looting affects culture in multiple ways; today, it is one of the many issues.

Research Questions

1. How has the act of looting effect culture heritage?
2. How has the FBI solved cases of art looting and art trafficking?
3. How does getting back stolen cultural stuff help a community feel more connected to its history?

Research Objectives

1. To determine how cultural heritage, looting messes up old sites, takes away important things, and makes it hard to know about history.
2. To solve cases of art looting and art trafficking, the FBI employs a combination of investigative techniques, collaboration with international law enforcement agencies, and advanced technology.
3. To help a community feel more connected to its history, getting back stolen cultural items is important because it restores their cultural identity.

Theoretical Framework

Art theft is one of the most significant issues in the art market, with many valuable pieces of art either stolen or destroyed (Boser, 2009). The restitution of looted works not only helps Jewish families but also helps countries rebuild a sense of national cohesion to overcome their fascist past (Gaudenzi, 2021). The looting and systematic plundering of artworks that the Napoleon administration caused in Europe can still be seen today, leaving many historical paintings and important texts missing and never recuperated again by their native regions (Gietz, 2018). UNESCO Conventions prohibit and prevent the importation, exportation, and transfer of cultural property; these laws are essential to protect and retrieve these looted pieces from the art trafficking scheme (Iglesias Kuntz, 1999). They focus on eight main points, including what a private museum is, its history, where it is, how it grows, its connection to public museums, government involvement, its role in the art world, and how it affects social fairness (Kolbe, 2022).

Definition of Terminologies

Restitution cases are legal cases that restore something to its rightful owner, making good of or giving an equivalent for some injury. A legal action is serving to cause restoration of a previous state (Webster, 2024). As the dictionary describes, the black market is an illicit trade in goods or commodities in violation of official regulations and a place where such trade is carried on (Webster, 2024). Privatization is selling an industry, company, or service owned and controlled by the government so it becomes privately owned and controlled (Cambridge, 2024).

Review of Literature

Mona Lisa's Popularity

What made the Mona Lisa so famous was the fact that it was stolen. The purpose is to understand why the Mona Lisa was stolen and the effect it had. The source explains that it was stolen by Vincenzo Peruggi, an Italian man fed up with being mistreated by the French. Initially, he was going to steal Mars and Venus but decided on the Mona Lisa because it was easier to transport. He thought returning the Italian painting to Italy would be seen as a patriotic act. However, when he tried to sell it, he was promptly arrested. This news was in the newspapers for months until the Titanic sank and overshadowed the event. Since then, the painting has been vandalized and now has a protective covering. The source states:

The theft of the *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre Museum in Paris, just over 100 hundred years ago, on the Monday of August 21, 1911, made headlines throughout the world. Only the sinking of the *Titanic* several months later moved its theft from the front pages. Although the *Mona Lisa* (cover) was admired over the centuries before its theft and even though Leonardo da Vinci was internationally recognized for both his science and his art, the publicity surrounding its theft from the Louvre and its safe return made it the most recognizable painting in the world and assured its future iconic stature. Pablo Picasso was among those suspected of stealing the *Mona Lisa* because he owned two ancient Iberian stone sculptures that had been stolen from the Louvre... (Harris, 2013)

The importance of this source is that it shows how the most iconic art piece in history has been affected by theft. After being stolen, it widened its popularity. More importantly, it shows specifically how one man was affected by art theft. He stole the painting because he was fed up with being provoked by French people. He

wanted to reclaim an Italian art piece. In court, he was able to argue mental deficiency due to the treatment of the French towards him; this clearly shows the harmful effects when art is taken and placed elsewhere.

Napoleon's Conquest of Art

Besides being a military strategist, Napoleon was a collector and even considered a conqueror of art. The objective of the source is to provide historical context on the effects of the French Empire taking over Venice and plundering many artworks and historical texts. During Napoleon Bonaparte's conquest of Europe, Venice was one of the many areas affected by this. Napoleon had a strong interest in art and ordered the appropriation of famous artworks from the lands they conquered, including Venice. Pietro Edwards, a Venetian art expert, cataloged over 7,000 paintings in Venice for Napoleon. Many of these artworks later were lost or damaged in the process. Only half of the Italian artworks returned after Napoleon's exile in 1815. This historical event prompted the concept of protecting cultural heritage. The following source explains this further by stating:

As commander-in-chief of the French army in Italy, Napoleon Bonaparte had developed an intense interest in the peninsula's artistic patrimony from his first victories there in 1796. He recognized the propaganda value in bringing the most famous artworks from areas he conquered across Europe, and beyond, to Paris. To this end, Bonaparte ordered experts from the French Arts Commission to follow shortly behind him as his victorious troops swept east across northern Italy. Sometimes they arrived in a town only two days after its conquest, ready to select whichever artistic and scientific objects had been demanded by the invaders during the peace settlements. (Gietz, 2018)

The importance of this source regarding the investigation is to provide historical context on the effects of Napoleon's rule in Venice and how it damaged their cultural heritage. Napoleon's catalog of all the artworks and pieces he appropriated from each region he conquered highlights his love for art. Later, this prompted many issues after he was exiled, leaving many of these pieces lost or damaged. Venice was one of the many regions' victims of this; the catalog had over 12,000 artworks and essential texts, and the French picked 7,000 paintings from this catalog to ship to France later. The plundering of artworks damaged Venice's cultural heritage and helped create many laws to protect the country's cultural heritage. Napoleon's conquest of the Italian and Iberian Peninsula was seen as "liberating" by the French and made it seem as though they did nothing wrong to these regions since all they were doing was liberating them from others' rule. The looting and systematic plundering of artworks that the Napoleon administration caused in Europe can still be seen today, leaving many historical paintings and important texts missing and never recuperated again by their native regions.

The Stolen Treasures

Iraq's National Museum housed beautiful pieces of art until a terrorist group stole it to irradicate history. The source aimed to spread knowledge about the looting in Iraq's National Museum, which housed some of the world's oldest art pieces. Academics worldwide were shocked by the looting and destruction of Iraq's National Museum, which included some of the earliest works of art ever discovered. It was compared to the demise of the Smithsonian and the Metropolitan Museum. Numerous valuable antiques were stolen from the National Museum, the National Library, and the Ministry of Religious Endowments. Many of the finds made by archaeologists since the 1920s are in the National Museum. Many of these discoveries were necessary to understand the origins of human civilization. Numerous archaeologists and museum representatives thought this event could have been avoided. Currently, there are multiple attempts to recover these artworks, and the following source goes into detail by indicating:

In just hours, it was gone. The towers of smoke and the sound of 1,000-year-old pottery shattering were ignored in the chaos that followed American troops into Baghdad. When order returned to the streets, Iraq's National Library, the National Museum in Baghdad, and even the Ministry of Religious Endowments,

which held rare, early copies of the Koran, had been ransacked. Scholars around the world were stunned, some comparing the devastation to losing the Smithsonian and the Metropolitan Museum of Art at the same time. (Curry, 2003)

The importance of this source concerning this investigation is to provide evidence of modern-day occurrences of looting artworks and artifacts. This source provided the news of looting in Iraq's National Museum; many of these artifacts were secured there for decades. This word shocked scholars worldwide and was compared to simultaneously looting the Smithsonian and the Metropolitan Museum. The artifacts looted were evidence of the oldest known art pieces and writings of human civilization. The looting of this has delayed research and scientific investigation of the origins of human civilization. Scholars and archeologists were affected, as was the cultural heritage of Iraqis. The earliest copies of the Quran were stolen with all the ancient artifacts, disrespecting Iraq's culture and religion.

Indigenous Art in Australia

Australia has a booming art industry that suffers from art theft. The following source focuses on stolen indigenous art in Australia and its psychological effects. Moreover, it details the different types of art theft, for example, thefts from museums and personal galleries. It talks about when forged art is sold. It goes into detail about how indigenous art in Australia is often stolen. Mentioning the effects on the indigenous population. Stating that:

There is a large, complex and vigorous art market in Australia. It consists of a wide range of different kinds of art, including paintings, photographs, sculptures, works in glass, ceramics, and antiquities, among others. There are hosts of artists, many alive and struggling, many deceased and revered, some deceased and perhaps undeservedly ignored. There are many different kinds of commercial enterprises that are devoted to art, including commercial galleries, auctions houses, arts and crafts shops, and of course, artists who sell directly to the public. There are many layers to the market as well, with a small number of established, mostly deceased, artists commanding exceptional prices for their art, ranging down to local (and living) artists where the costs for the art are quite modest. (Polk, 1999)

The article proved helpful because it provided a more economic point of view on art theft and its technical aspects. It shows that art theft happens around the world. It shows the perspective of Australia and how its market deals with stolen artworks and forgery. Most of the stolen work is Australian art, not international art, often being indigenous art. Additionally, it discussed the psychological effects of this. It states shock and mental unrest. Art theft is often linked with criminal activity, and this source backs that up.

Art Theft in Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico has suffered multiple art thefts throughout the decades. This source was an interview with the ex-director of La Galeria Nacional of Puerto Rico when it was robbed in 2010. They stole two José Campeche's (a famous Puerto Rican artist) and one from the school of Campeche. The first thing they noticed when they got the position was that they had analog cameras that were not working. So, they worked to install digital cameras for a year, which yielded no results. They followed the American Alliance of Museums to care for the items in the gallery. The paintings on exhibition were supposed to be correctly in place, but they were loose, and the locks on them were easily broken. A week before, the walking stick of Betances (an important cultural object) was stolen, and a few days before the theft in La Galeria, The Museum of the Americas had also suffered an art theft. It is believed that they were stolen during broad daylight. Local police were unequipped to deal with the situation since Puerto Rico has no specialized art theft division. The FBI and Interpol had to be involved. The interview states:

Interviewee: “Desde el primer día que yo llegue. ¿Dónde estan las cámaras de seguridad aquí? ¿Dónde estan las alarmas? No lo que pasa es que la subasta no ha pasado. Like you have to go through a subesta process. I don’t even know how to say that. Where you have to go through all these...Es que ni sé como explicarlo. Tienes de pasar por un proceso de subasta donde tienes de escoger tres suplidores diferentes y el más económico es el que se escoge. And you don’t choose. I can’t choose that as the director. There’s an office that chooses for you. Entonces, cada vez el más económico, eran cámaras de seguridad analogos. Y netonces yo le decía a la gente...primero que no existían. This is stupid. Me voy a gastar, let’s say a number. A hundred thousand dollars for a system that does not work. That is completely null and void.” (Ramírez, 2024)

This source is essential to the investigation because it provides a first-hand account of art theft from an administrative point of view. The ex-director empathized with how emotionally nerve-wracking this situation was for them. They were blamed in the press, even though they had been working on trying to avoid this. As an art historian they pointed out that it felt as if a piece of history was lost and that they had robbed Puerto Rico. They acknowledge that there are other Campeche’s in our possession, but losing them still caused much pain. Puerto Ricans were outraged at the loss of their cultural heritage. This event then caused cameras to be installed and security protocol to be followed strictly.

Controversial Ownership of Artworks

Art has been stolen for decades, which can make ownership controversial. The objective of this source is to provide information on various cases of artworks with controversial ownership history; in this specific article, they mention the looted Nazi artworks. During World War II, many Jewish homes were looted and ransacked by the Nazis. Many of these pieces have yet to be restored to their rightful owners, and others have never been found again. The articles describe the difficulties in tracing European art ownership, history, and provenance from that era. It also mentions the legal and moral complexities of restoring these artworks. The cases known as the restitution cases have helped restore these paintings to their original families. Each case has its complications, whether in the will or since most of the history was erased by Nazi looters, it is difficult to trace where precisely the paintings came from. The following source explains this further by stating:

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, for one, has had to defend itself publicly against a claim by the state museum in Budapest for an oil painting by 16th-century Florentine artist Giorgio Vasari, which was purchased by the Montreal gallery 15 years after the war. In the United States, there have been at least 20 instances of contested ownership in the past five years, culminating in January, when the Manhattan district court rocked the art world by impounding two paintings by Austrian expressionist Egon Schiele that had been on display at the Museum of Modern Art and are claimed by relatives of Holocaust victims. "I think the story is going to grow," says Constance Lowenthal, director of a Commission for Art Recovery set up in January by the World Jewish Congress. (Morris,1998)

This article helps provide information on different cases for the restitution of looted artwork. It also helped give context to the complexity of the issues, from questions of morality to the legal complications of ownership. Many laws today were created to help restore these looted works to their rightful owners. Not all pieces will be returned, and many few will be able to be traced back to what their previous owners were. Nazi Germany was dedicated to eradicating Jewish culture and their existence, which makes it difficult to track the history behind many of these artworks. Many museums around the world still today have donated works from Nazis and have refused to return these artworks to the descendants of these families. The restoration of these paintings is a form of returning the cultural heritage of these families and returning a part of their family's past to the victims of Nazi Germany.

Playing with Morality and Legality

During the Second World War, many art pieces belonging to people of Jewish ancestry were stolen. The main objective of this article is to examine how cultural restitution is used to restore Jewish cultural heritage in different countries. This article presents a study on the role played by restitution in Austria, Germany, and Italy. They discuss how cultural restitution was debated in these countries at the end of the world wars. The study examined the transition from the "politics of the past" to the post-war period in these countries. It looks at the change from a mild Vergangenheitspolitik, 'the politics of the past,' typical of the early post-war period, to later attempts at a Vergangenheitsbewältigung that characterized the post-Cold War years. These countries are still victims of War and fascism. Cultural restitution is the most crucial topic in this source and plays a vital role in this debate about restoring Nazi-looted artworks. The article also has a narrative on the dictatorial past of these countries and how this has affected cultural restitution in post-war memory politics. The following source explains this further by stating:

Far from constituting a mere exercise in cultural diplomacy, the restitution of cultural property played an integral role in these three countries' attempts at rebuilding a sense of national cohesion designed to overcome the ghosts of their fascist past. This often happened at the expense of an in-depth processing of their involvement in the Holocaust. Indeed, restitution came to perform a central function in the shift from amnesty to amnesia of the early post-war years in that it often reduced Wiedergutmachung to an economic transaction through which these countries could 'make amends' without effecting any deeper political and social defascistization. (Gaudenzi, 2021)

The importance of this source regarding the investigation is to provide a deeper understanding of the effects of restitution and how it is a way to try to amend post-war looting. The investigation set a clear tone on the gravity of the situation and how restitution, while not changing past events of the looting and ransacking of Jewish homes, is helping return cherished generational heirlooms and pieces of art to their family's descendants. The article raised a question: "What role did cultural restitution play in the construction of post-war memory politics, and, vice versa, how did the memory and legacy of fascism impact restitution debates during and after the Cold War?". The restitution of looted works not only helps Jewish families but also helps countries rebuild a sense of national cohesion to overcome their fascist past. According to this source, cultural restitution is one of the most important ways to help rebuild and escape the fascist era. Still today, we are fighting the war against fascism, trying to bring laws to protect cultural integrity; this is one of the most important ways to fight this.

Art Trafficking and the Black Market

Art theft is often associated with other illegal practices like the Black Market. This source provides information on the topic of illicit trafficking in cultural property, like arms and drug trade, which is a global problem. Stolen artworks often need proper documentation, hindering recovery. Organizations such as Interpol and UNESCO focus on prevention through surveillance and inventories. The Getty Information Institute's Object ID project simplifies art descriptions, and Interpol uses electronic systems for quick identification. The International Council of Museums' "Red List" identifies endangered African art. Illicit trafficking causes substantial economic and cultural losses globally. Efforts to combat trafficking include publishing details of stolen art, developing international standards like Object ID, and proposing a recovery fund. Ethical remedies, like UNESCO's Code of Ethics for Dealers, complement legal instruments such as the 1970 UNESCO Convention and the UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen Cultural Objects (1995). Ongoing efforts like drafting a Convention on underwater heritage address issues like looting historic shipwrecks worldwide. The following source goes into detail by indicating that:

Another question that arises for professionals is what to do when a stolen work of art reappears in an auction or in the back room of a none too scrupulous trader. For Valerie Jullien, there is no easy answer: "Buying it would be unethical, since it would signify encouraging this type of trafficking." Apart from the costs of the purchase itself, there could be other related expenses, such as the legal costs incurred by governments or individuals for court actions to recover their property, or the considerable costs of paying for the transfer of art

works between places as far apart as Italy and Ethiopia. In some cases, lawyers' offices may provide free services or private companies may sponsor returns in exchange for publicity, but such contributions are marginal and certainly not enough to cover all the expenses. (Iglesias Kuntz, 1999)

The importance of this source regarding the investigation is to provide information on the current situation of looting and trafficking artworks. The article mentions the many organizations trying to restore looted artworks and drive them out of the art trafficking scheme. These companies, including UNESCO and Interpol, have been working on cases of illicit trade in cultural property. It is essential to see how organizations and laws are trying to protect the artistic integrity of the victims of these looted works. The rules provided have helped defend countries' rights in cases of illicit trade in cultural property. UNESCO Conventions prohibit and prevent the import, export, and transfer of cultural property. These laws are essential to protect and retrieve these looted pieces from the art trafficking scheme. The article discusses the ethical and legal remedies available to defend countries' rights in these cases.

The Mystery of Kingsland's Art Collection

Kingsland is an auction house that sells art without knowing its illegal origins. The purpose of this source regarding the investigation is to provide information on how the FBI trains and prepares its agents to retrieve stolen artworks, as well as the various legal issues that make it difficult to return these pieces because of unknown ownership backgrounds. This article focuses on an art auction of William Kingsland's art collection. Christie's auction house was hired to sell this art collection, and according to this source, there were not any indications of illegal activity. Later, it was discovered that this collection was made of dozens of stolen artworks from museums and galleries. Christie's called the FBI on this case to find the original owners of these pieces. This source indicates the difficulties of returning stolen paintings to their rightful owners—especially the legalities behind it and how the FBI deals with it. The cited source can state the following:

Federal art crime investigators are not new. The FBI has long had individual agents in New York and Los Angeles focused on museum robberies and art fraud. But after the massive looting of Iraq's National Museum in 2003 in which some 14,000 works were stolen, the bureau decided for the first time to form an art theft team, which now has more than a dozen agents assigned to regions in the United States. The unit aims to recover any illegal cultural property and often works with foreign law enforcement agencies. The squad has posted some major successes, recovering works by Matisse and Goya and one of the original copies of the Bill of Rights. "Art easily moves across state and international boundaries," says Bonnie Magness-Gardiner, manager of the art theft program. "Having this network of agents has been very effective." (Boser, 2009)

The presented information is paramount for advancing this investigation because it provides more details of cases in which the FBI successfully solved an art theft mystery. The case of William Kingsland's art collection was one of the few art theft cases solved with the work of the FBI. His collection of pieces included paintings by Pablo Picasso and John Singleton Copley and an Alberto Giacometti sculpture. There are over 50,000 art heists yearly, providing the art black market with over 6 billion USD annually. Art theft is one of the most significant issues in the art market, with many valuable pieces of art either stolen or destroyed. This source mentions the Iraq Museum looting, which is discussed further in this research, in which priceless artifacts were looted and killed by a terrorist organization. This looting was why the first art theft team, which includes a dozen assigned agents worldwide, trained to recover stolen artworks.

Privatization of Museums

Museums are commonly known as public institutions, but that has been changing. The purpose of this article is to review the studies on the controversial rise of private art museums. It discusses the historical roots of private museums and revises the nonexistent definition of the same. The article provides an insight into Museum

Privatization and how it originated. In the 2000s, over three hundred museums were privatized, and private collections were made public. The article also points out that many critics dispute that private museums are neo-aristocratic institutions contributing to cultural inequality. The existing studies on this topic are scattered in different subjects like sociology and economics, making it hard to understand the bigger picture. One of the problems with these studies is that there is no clear definition for "private museum," and even big museum groups cannot agree. The source shows:

While private museums thus present sites of urgent debates around global wealth distribution, social inequality and cultural policy, little empirical research on their rise exists to back up these strong normative positions. Key aspects of their emergence, institutionalization and impact are underexplored, and existing studies frequently disagree on these impacts. Moreover, what has been published is scattered across different disciplines like sociology, museum studies, economics, and anthropology, making a systematic engagement with theoretical and methodological issues difficult. While we approach the study of private museums primarily from a sociological perspective ourselves, in this article, we compile and review existent studies from various disciplinary realms, and identify key themes, controversies as well as areas of consensus amongst them. (Kolbe, 2022)

The importance of this source regarding this investigation is that the article discusses private museums and how they spark arguments about money, fairness, and cultural rules. Surprisingly, there needs to be more real research on why these museums are becoming popular. The existing studies are scattered in different subjects like sociology and economics, making it hard to understand the bigger picture. The authors look at private museums sociologically and gather and review studies from other areas. They focus on eight main points, including what a private museum is, its history, where it is, how it grows, its connection to public museums, government involvement, its role in the art world, and how it affects social fairness. One problem they find is that there is no clear definition for "private museum," and even big museum groups cannot agree. The article ends by saying there is much we need to learn and more research to understand private museums better.

The Reality of the British Museum

The British Museum has been a prominent institution for years but houses many questionably obtained objects. The purpose is to elucidate how the British Museum stands out as an imperial institution in a post-imperialist world, specifically with the examples of the Benin Bronzes and the Elgin Marbles. It discusses how the British Museum showcases its power through its stolen artworks. The museum was open to more than British things because the audience was interested in the other, and it showed the imperial feats of the country. The Benin Bronzes were seized with force from the royal palace of the Kingdom of Benin, modern-day Nigeria, and were shipped to the museum. Thomas Bruce came to Greece to sketch but took large parts of the Parthenon and sent them to England. Currently, both countries demand the return of their items. It discusses the museum's hypocrisy; it refuses to return stolen items but will not accept artworks that were not legally required. The source shows:

Museums have a long history rooted in colonialism, but none come close to the lasting colonial legacy of the British Museum. Over the last several decades, governments and museums of former colonial powers have made efforts to repatriate cultural items which were taken from their colonies. Many museums around the world have all repatriated items and eliminated imperial images from their exhibits, but the British Museum has refused to do the same.¹ Although the British Empire is long gone, cultural imperialism is still alive and well in many institutions, and the British Museum is the perfect example of this. By looking at various case studies of stolen artifacts and describing the recent repatriation controversies and issues, it is clear that the British Museum is still an imperialist institution that uses their vast collections from the former colonies to

maintain their power and continue the legacy of the British Empire. Founded in 1753, the British Museum became one of the first national and public museums in the world.² (Roony, 2014)

The importance of this source concerning the investigation is that it proved helpful because it provided two classical examples of art theft: the Benin Bronzes and the Elgin Marbles. It clearly showed the effects of when cultural heritage is stolen. It allows the institution to perpetuate outdated beliefs like imperialism and colonialism. It also showed that the countries Nigeria and Greece desperately want their artifacts back and have been making an effort to retain them. They state that part of their culture has been stolen and want them to return to their rightful homes. However, the British Museum still needs to return the items. These instances are also reasonably popular, so readers can quickly understand this example of art theft.

What Can Museums Do?

Museums now need to know how to deal with accusations of art theft. This article discussed how museums deal with provenance and title risks in their institutions and wanted to inform museum professionals about the importance of carefully deciding what to write in the place next to an artwork. It explained key concepts like a legal title, which differs from owning an artwork. As well as provenance, which is where the work comes from. Some ways museums can mitigate the danger of obtaining illegal artwork is to do proper research before obtaining the work and do background checks for the seller and the previous owners. Museums should also place special care on the titles. The article demonstrates:

Few would doubt that the art industry has changed in recent years and that it continues to do so at an ever-increasing rate. Once viewed as a patchwork of regionally focused art markets, the art world has become an integrated global system. Issues concerning artworks and art transactional integrity now span insider trading, conflicts-of-interest and money laundering to other systemic issues illustrated by the now infamous Panama Papers. This means that museums and their management will increasingly face what is today's perhaps most vexing and seminal art industry issue: the risk surrounding legal title or ownership of highly portable, high value art objects which physically move and actively trade throughout a globalized marketplace and, like magnets, attract title risk. Museums are not alone in this face-off; the risk of transacting an art object that does not have valid legal title affects all art industry stakeholders. As stewards of the world's cultural history, museums and their executive, curatorial and trustee management must simultaneously consider the financial, cultural, fiduciary-responsibility and reputational consequences of the art industry's legal title risk. (Shindell, 2016)

This source helped the investigation because it shows how museums deal with problems of artwork being legitimate. It discussed what provenance and legal titles were. It also provided solutions for museums. Like self-ensuring the legitimacy of the work they obtain. Museums need to ensure that they are obtaining the art they showcase legally. If a museum does not comply with this, it can be seen as negligence on their part. Practices that ensure legitimacy are best implemented slowly over time; they are not the perfect solution but mitigate these risks.

Methods

This investigation used a computer with an internet connection and a Google Chrome browser. The Google search engine was instrumental in locating relevant sources and articles to answer the research question. Despite some occasional instability in the internet connection, it was sufficient to accomplish all the necessary aspects

of the investigation. Most sources used were peer-reviewed or approved by the investigation mentor, or their authenticity was verified. Combining all these factors provided the ideal conditions for completing the project.

Results

The utilized search engines EbscoHost, Google Scholar, and Google Chrome proved most beneficial for the selected sources of this investigation. The sources were published on a variety of different dates. Sources five, seven, and ten were very recent since they were published in 2024, 2021, and 2022 respectively. Source five discussed art theft in Puerto Rico, source seven discussed playing with morality and legality in the art market, and source ten discussed the privatization of museums and its implications on cultural heritage. Sources two and eleven were recent. Source two was published in 2018, and source eleven was published in 2019. Source two discussed Napoleon's conquest of art, and source eleven discussed the reality of the British Museum and the stolen artifacts in its possession. Sources one, three, four, six, eight, nine, and twelve were not recent since they were published in 2013, 2003, 1999, 1998, 1999, 2009, and 2016, respectively. They elaborated on how Mona Lisa's popularity was sparked by its theft, the stolen treasures of Iraq's National Museum, Indigenous art theft in Australia, controversial ownership of artworks, art trafficking, the black market, the mystery of Kingsland's Art Collection, and finally, what museums can do to mitigate the dangers of stolen art.

For the investigation to come to fruition, the scope of the research question had to be more encompassing to find more information on the subject, which permitted the optimal conditions to answer the research question. If the original research question had not been changed, the essay would not have been written as well, given that the research question would have been challenging to complete. A common issue in various sources is the need for more specificity when discussing the countries or events related to cultural property restitution. This problem poses a challenge to the external validity of the sources since they need to identify explicitly the three countries involved or the specific incidents, which makes it difficult for readers to apply the findings to broader contexts. For instance, while talking about the theft of the Mona Lisa, the source mentions mistreatment by the French; however, it needs to provide specific instances or historical context, contributing to the lack of external validity.

Similarly, when discussing the looting of Iraq's National Museum, the global academic reaction is presented in a generalized manner without naming specific scholars or providing concrete examples, further reducing the external validity. In the cultural property restitution debate, the need for precise identification of the three countries and the oversimplification of motives hinders external validity by preventing a nuanced understanding of restitution practices in different contexts. Therefore, the standard limitation of lacking specificity impairs the external validity of these sources. Future research should provide explicit details and examples to enhance external validity, ensuring a more accurate application of findings to diverse historical and cultural scenarios.

During the early stages of the investigation, the main question was:

1. How has the act of looting effect culture heritage?
 - The section titled "Napoleon's Conquest of Art" answers this question as one of the many instances where looting can affect cultural heritage. Napoleon Bonaparte's conquest of Venice and the subsequent looting of artworks and historical texts profoundly impacted cultural heritage. The looting caused significant loss and damage to Venice's cultural heritage. The aftermath of this plundering prompted the development of laws to protect cultural heritage, reflecting the need to safeguard against similar acts of destruction. The consequences of Napoleon's actions are still evident today.
2. How has the FBI solved cases of art looting and art trafficking?
 - The section labeled "The Mystery of Kingsland's Art Collection" provides information and emphasizes the challenges posed by the legal complexities of art ownership backgrounds and

highlights the importance of the FBI's network of agents in addressing the movement of stolen art across state and international boundaries. The case of William Kingsland's art collection serves as a pertinent example of the FBI's successful resolution of an art theft mystery, showcasing the significance of the art theft team in combating the multibillion-dollar black market for stolen art.

3. How does getting back stolen cultural stuff help a community feel more connected to its history?
 - The "Controversial Ownership of Artworks" section provides vital information on reclaiming stolen cultural artifacts, which hold immense significance for a community, fostering a profound sense of connection to its history. The source emphasizes the FBI's efforts in recovering stolen artworks, including cases like the looting of Iraq's National Museum in 2003. When stolen pieces are returned, it reaffirms the community's identity and heritage, reinforcing that their history is valued and respected. This repatriation process becomes a form of cultural restitution, healing the wounds inflicted by theft and contributing to a collective sense of pride and ownership.

Discussion & Conclusion

The presented sources elucidated the looting in Iraq's National Museum, which housed some of the world's oldest art pieces, and the historical context of the effects of the French Empire taking over Venice and plundering many artworks and historical texts. Moreover, this investigation delineated provided information on various cases of paintings that has controversial ownership history, tracing them back to the looted Nazi artworks. Additionally, evidence was provided that restitution helped perform a shift from the early post-war years to help restore and make amends without any deeper political de-fascistisation.

Notwithstanding this, further data supported the investigation by stating that there are ways to help prevent and fight against art trafficking. The process revealed some limitations, which might be resolved by more research. It would have been beneficial if the sources could outline more information on the specific works that were looted and the percentage they have been able to recover in the past decade with these techniques. In a general sense, the sources presented a vignette on stolen art throughout history and how we have developed a system to restore it. For upcoming continuing research and data analysis, recommendations include securing more years of data and requesting more study resources. This investigation aimed to answer how the looting of artworks throughout history has affected cultural heritage and how exactly it is being combated against. Sources converged to provide an answer: Today, multiple laws and organizations have been created to prevent art looting and protect cultural heritage.

Limitations

For the investigation to be successful, it was necessary to broaden the scope of the research question to gather more information on the subject, which provided the ideal circumstances to address the research question. If the original research question had not been modified, the essay would not have been as well written, as the research question would have been difficult to answer.

A common issue in various sources is the need for more specificity when discussing the countries or events related to cultural property restitution. This problem poses a challenge to the external validity of the sources since they need to identify explicitly the three countries involved or the specific incidents, which makes it difficult for readers to apply the findings to broader contexts. For instance, while talking about the theft of the Mona Lisa, the source mentions mistreatment by the French; however, it needs to provide specific instances or historical context, contributing to the lack of external validity.

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