

Beyond Iconoclasm



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Rationale for my talk

- Iconoclasm, reparations & restitution all raise similar ethical & philosophical questions
- The public debate is gathering momentum as several large institutions are re-evaluating their links with the past, initially transatlantic slavery and more recently colonialism
- The topic is contentious, but needs to be addressed, as is unlikely to go away
- My talk is in two parts (1) describe current state of iconoclasm, restitution & reparations (2) consider the questions raised & current responses
- Focus is on UK due to constraints of time

Some definitions

- **Iconoclasm**
 - Any removal, destruction, defacement of statues, memorials, artworks
- **Restitution**
 - Making good past wrongs, specifically returning culturally important objects to their places of origin
- **Reparations** (aka ,”restorative justice”)
 - Compensation for past injustices

There's nothing new about iconoclasm

Ancient world

Spanish churches built on Inca temples

French & Russian Revolutions

Nazi Germany

Spanish Civil War

Cultural Revolution

ISIS in Syria and Afghanistan

US in Iraq



Reasons for iconoclasm



Bamiyan budha
Afghanistan 2001

Assertion of power

Religious

Rewriting history

Political protest

Symbols of authority



Catherine the
Great
Odesa 2022

Local example - Ely Cathedral

Lady Chapel desecrated by Cromwell's puritan troops in 1660s



Reasons for removing statues

Re-evaluating history



Duke of Cumberland
Aka *Butcher of Culloden*
London 1868



Edward Colston
Bristol June 2020



Cecil Rhodes
Oriental College, Oxford

2020 the year iconoclasm went viral

Following the death of George Floyd in May 2020
resurgence in defacement of Confederate statues under BLM banner

Damaged, defaced, daubed with paint
or removed

Not always targeted, some just
vandalism against any authority figures

Became a movement concerned with
racial inequality & social justice





Parthenon Marbles



Koh-i-Noh diamond

Restitution

Clearer cut issue than reparations

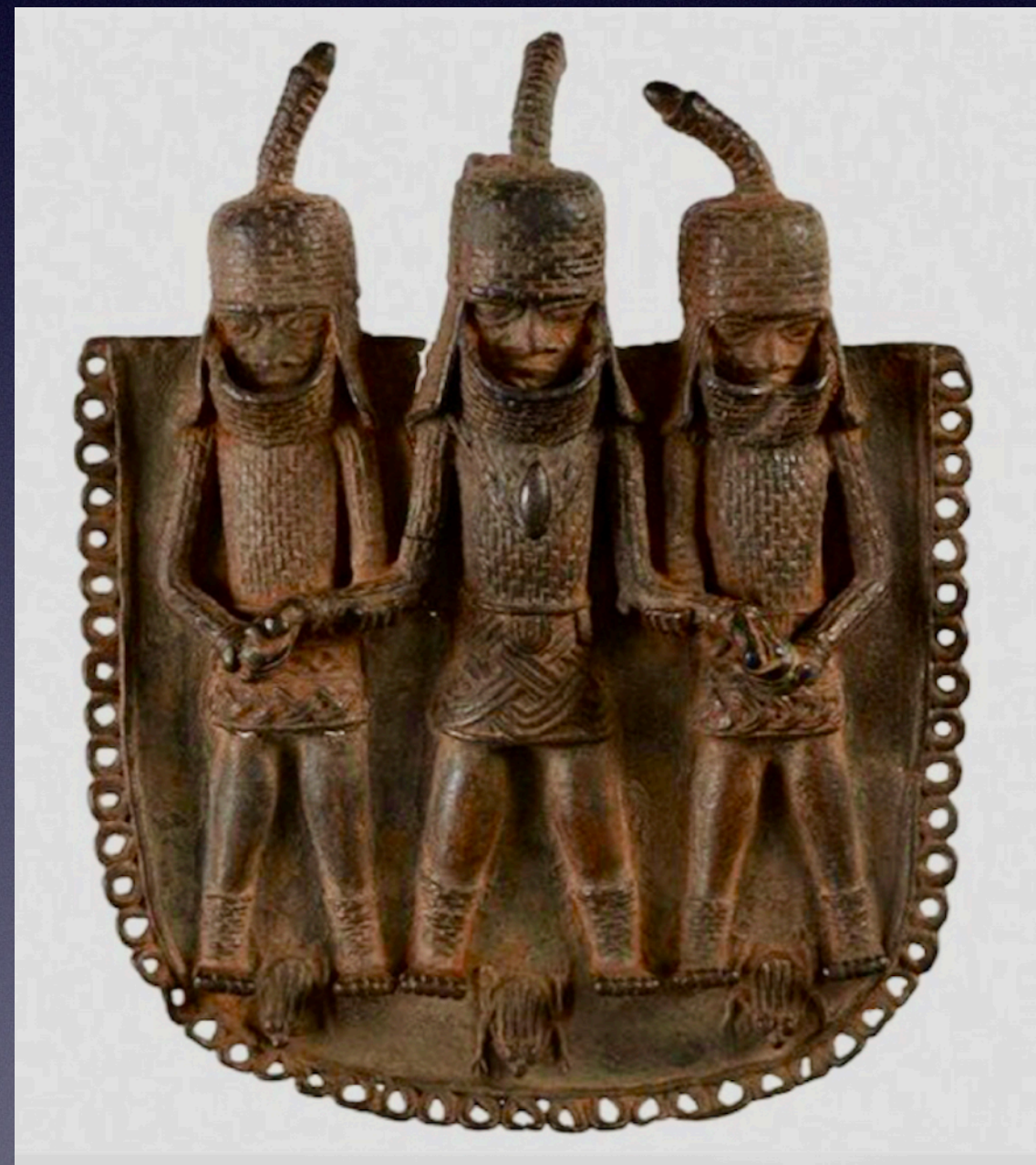
Questions of provenance - bought v looted items

The danger of precedent for western public institutions
Different considerations for public and private institutions

There are recent examples of return of historic artefacts

Recent restitution examples

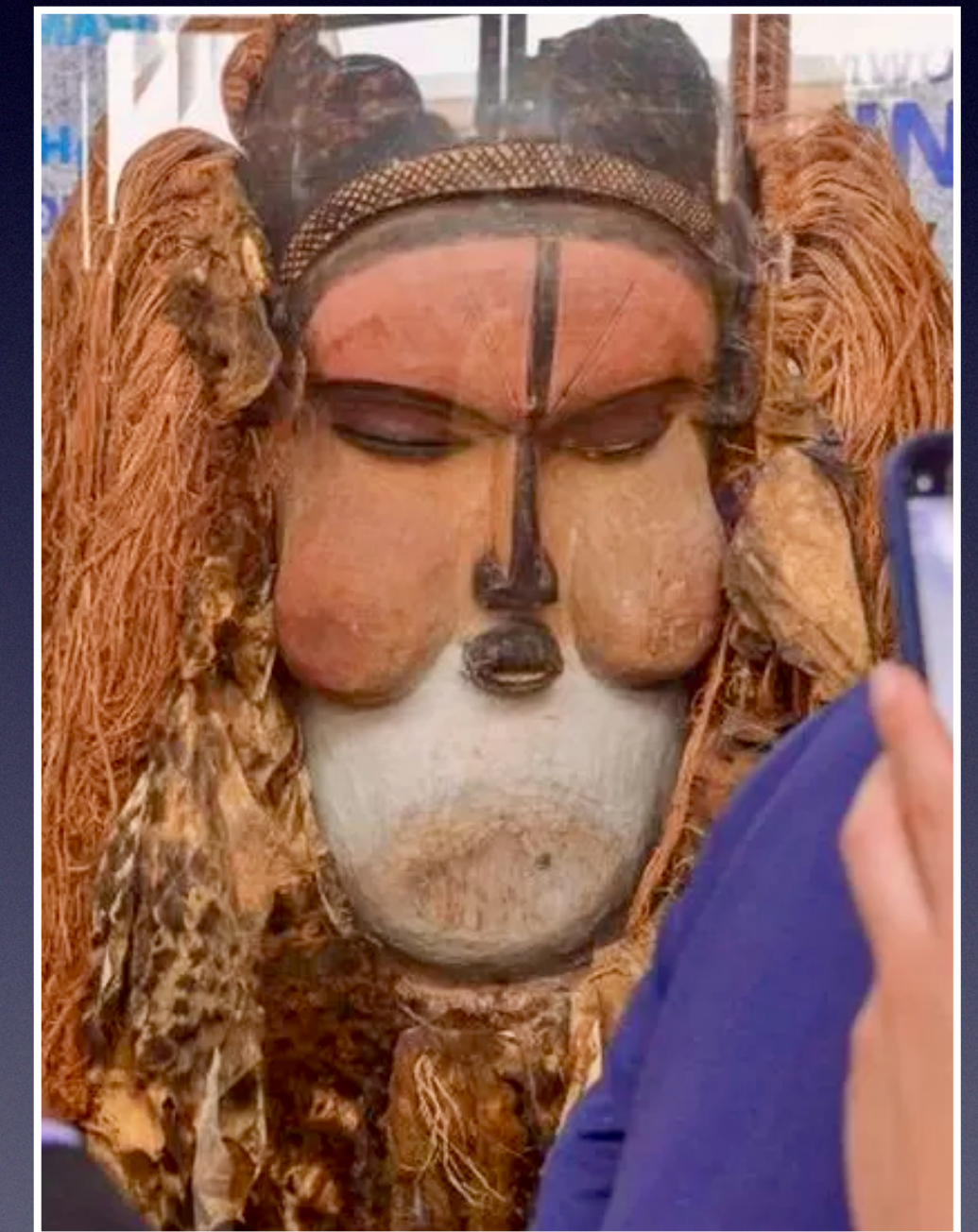
Benin bronzes returned to Nigeria



Horniman Museum, London



Jesus College, Cambridge
2021



Kakuunguto mask
returned to Congo 2021

Reparations & Restorative Justice

Much more difficult due to breadth of subject

UK debate has been on transatlantic slavery

More recently colonialism in Africa and India

2022 British slave owning family apologised to people of Grenada and set-up
£100,000 development fund

BREAKING
NEWS

California Taskforce on Reparations

30th June 2023 Taskforce issued its final report

Two year investigation

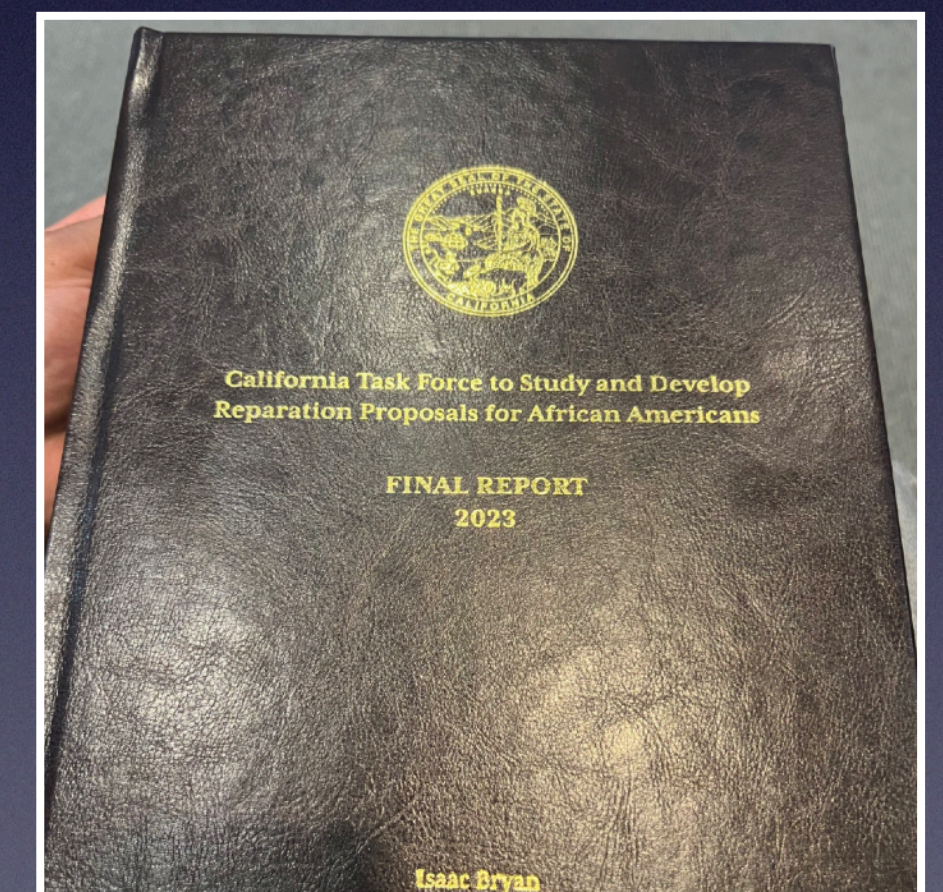
100+ suggested means of reparations

Beneficiaries limited to direct descendants of slaves

Elsewhere in US Federal initiatives have little traction

A few districts have begun:

Rhode Island & suburb of Chicago



Recent national example

Netherlands

July 2022 the Dutch Prime Minister, Mark Rutte apologised for country's involvement in slavery

Pledge \$200m to education and development programme

1 July 2023 Dutch king King Willem-Alexander formally apologised and acknowledged "crime against humanity"

Investigating direct royal involvement



Historic reparations examples

In 2021 Germany agreed to pay Namibia £940m for C19th Herero-Nama genocide

France committed to paying compensation to *Harkis* after end of Algerian war of independence 1962

In 2013 UK government paid approx £20m to sufferers during MauMau Uprising in 1950s Kenya

£20m (£17b today) paid to UK slave owners in 1835
Under the Abolition of Slavery Act 1833

These three issues raise number of questions

The recurring questions

	Iconoclasm	Restitution	Reparations
Who decides?	✓	✓	✓
How far back in time?	✓	✓	✓
What is the mechanism?	✓	✓	✓
By whom & to whom?		✓	✓
What to do with removed items?	✓		
Which objects?		✓	
What form of reparations?			✓

Who decides?

Different considerations for public & private spaces

- Public monuments
 - Local authority or government appointed body
- Private owner/custodian
 - Individual objects taken down or returned
 - e.g. Tobias Rusat in Jesus College chapel
 - Consistory Court, Diocese of Ely over-ruled college



How far back?

Slavery

Transatlantic slave trade

Muslims in Morocco for enslaving Europeans

Indian Ocean slave trade - Arabs & Indians enslaving Africans

Vikings across Europe

Romans in much of Europe & Middle East

Colonialism

Internees during Boer War

The Hunger in Ireland

King Leopold brutal rubber economy in Congo

First Nations in US, Canada & Australia

Spanish treatment of indigenous peoples of Central & South America

Is there a time horizon of limitation?

What is the mechanism of resolution?

2021 legislative change requires removal of any historic monuments to have government approval

Policy of “retain & explain”



Parthenon Marbles

Restitution is by case-by-case negotiation



Koh-i-nor

What is the mechanism of resolution?

The difference between an apology & a statement of regret

UK & several other western governments did not apologise for slavery, issued “statement of regret” at 2001 UN conference on racism

Payment of reparations is not policy of either UK major party



Jamaica's National Council for Reparations are considering seeking compensation from UK family with historic links to slavery

To whom & by whom should reparations be paid?

To whom?

Direct descendants of those who suffered
Responsible agencies
Governments of affected countries

By Whom?

Descendants of those who benefitted
Governments of beneficiary countries
Institutions that benefitted directly

What form of reparations?

CARICOM's Ten point plan

- Full public apology
- Repatriation to country of origin
- Indigenous people's development
 - Cultural institutions
 - Public health crisis
 - Illiteracy eradication
- African knowledge programme
 - Psychological rehabilitation
 - Technology transfer
 - Debt cancellation

UK institutions currently investigating historic links to slavery

Church of England

King Charles investigation

National Trust

Cambridge University

Owners of The Guardian newspaper (April 2023)

The debate is gathering momentum

Here's where I think all this leading

Iconoclasm will be ongoing, sporadically but on modest scale

Restitution will proceed on case-by-case basis

Consequences of colonialism & slavery will have to be addressed

Individual institutions will lead, as governments will want to downplay their role & responsibility, mainly for financial reasons

There is and will be significant pushback on this “WOKE nonsense”

Discuss.....