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NATIVE AMERICANS IN BRITISH MUSEUMS

Living Histories

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Abstract: The accumulated collections of Native American material culture in museums in Britain are vast and of critical cultural importance. Drawing on interviews with Indigenous American visitors to UK museum displays and collections between 2017 and 2019, this Element highlights the most significant inadequacies of contemporary engagement with Native American visitors and communities, identifying fundamental problems rooted in the ethos of collection management and display. It then explores why two critical crises, one of representation and one of expertise, are together exacerbating these problems, and the damage to relationships and reputation which can result when these crises collide with Indigenous demands for greater agency in museum processes. The final section applies these lessons directly, developing an adaptable policy document to assist museum staff in effectively and respectfully managing their relationships with Indigenous communities and collections.

Keywords: museums, indigenous, heritage, Native American, policy

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