In 2000, the Archaeology and the Native Peoples of Tennessee exhibition was opened to highlight archaeological items recovered by the University of Tennessee (UT) since 1933. Several items that were on display were removed from view after consultation with Tribal partners. They have been determined to be subject to Repatriation under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).

NAGPRA was passed in 1990 after many years of Tribal activism in the United States. This federal law requires that UT provides federally recognized Tribes with a list of all Native American Ancestral Remains, as well as burial, sacred, and patrimonial items connected to Tribal identity housed at the university for possible Repatriation. Many of the cultural items once on display in this gallery are now in the process of being Repatriated, or returned, to the affiliated Tribes.

We recognize the need to be transparent and responsive as an institution. Openly showing the Repatriation process allows our museum to acknowledge past injustices and act with intention. Throughout this exhibition you will find panels explaining NAGPRA, changing museum practices, and how the law is an important expression of sovereignty and human rights for Native Americans in the United States.

#### What Does NAGPRA Mandate?

All museums and institutions that receive federal funds must comply with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). As required by law, the University of Tennessee must:

- Inventory and summarize Native Ancestral Remains, funerary, and cultural items used in sacred ceremonies or connected to Tribal identity (patrimony).
- Communicate and consult with lineal descendants and Tribal communities.
- Evaluate requests from descendent communities to Repatriate, or return, cultural items and Ancestral Human Remains.
- Give public notice prior to Repatriating or transferring.

Learn about NAGPRA



## What is Repatriation?

- The act or process of returning someone or something to their country of origin, cultural group, or descendant community.

The cultural items displayed in this gallery came from archaeological excavations carried out by UT prior to the destruction of Native American cultural sites from dam construction and reservoir inundation by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) starting in the 1930s.

Unfortunately, minimal effort was made to involve living and related Native Tribes in this archaeological work. Several southeastern Tribes have submitted claims through NAGPRA to the McClung Museum and TVA for the Repatriation of burial items once on display in this gallery. These burial items have now been respectfully removed at the request of Tribal communities and to comply with the law.

Returning Ancestors and their associated burial items home is the most important part of the NAGPRA process. As the museum develops respectful relationships with the Tribes, the door is opened to collaborative efforts with Native communities in research, programming, cultural and environmental preservation, and exhibitions.

#### Why Is This Case Empty?

The cultural item in this case has been removed because the museum is Repatriating, or returning, it.

By calling attention to its absence, we acknowledge that many of the cultural items once on display in our museum were taken, collected, studied, or displayed without Tribal consultation or approval.

## Let's Question and Reflect

#### Who Is Telling This Story?

This exhibition was installed in the year 2000 as a chronological narrative of Native heritage focused on archaeological evidence. While some Native communities were consulted about the content, many were not. As was the tradition, archaeologists and academics provided museum interpretation and Tribal voices were secondary or omitted from telling their stories.

Cultural items have been removed, and content is covered when it involves sensitive subjects at the request of Native Tribes. Our museum's work now is to bring Native perspectives and voices into our exhibitions and policies.

#### Why Can't I See This Case?

Sensitive content once displayed in this case has been removed out of respect following Tribal consultation.

"I believe that there is no greater honor than having the responsibility of returning our Ancestors back to where they belong, in Mother Earth and not on a shelf."

Johi Griffin Jr. Historical Sites Keeper, Tribal Historic Preservation Office, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

"The NAGPRA process helps to heal the past by forging a path forward for the return of our Ancestors and the items placed with them upon burial."

Deanna Byrd
NAGPRA Liaison, The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

#### How Has NAGPRA Changed Archaeological and Museum Practices?

For centuries, individuals and institutions removed Native Ancestral Remains and cultural items from the ground, keeping them in storage, or using them for research or display, without consideration for cultural and religious beliefs of their source communities.

The McClung is Repatriating Ancestral Remains and cultural items and working with Tribal communities to improve and inform exhibitions. Research and photography involving Ancestral Remains and cultural items subject to NAGPRA must be approved by Tribes.

"Our Chickasaw culture, like many ancient cultures, buried our loved ones with their personal items of sentimental value or with objects of honor that would be beneficial to them on their journey to the afterlife. This concept can be compared with a burial of a loved one with a wedding ring or items of sentimental value placed into the casket. Repatriation allows for burial objects to be returned to where they were intended to be: with the individual in their grave."

Amber Hood Director of Historic Preservation & Repatriation, Department of Culture and Humanities, The Chickasaw Nation

#### What Happens to Repatriated Cultural Items?

Once a cultural item has been Repatriated, it is up to the Tribal community to determine what will happen to that item.

In many instances, cultural items are restricted by rituals and only certain Tribe members have the right to share information about a particular item.

"In our Cherokee culture, no part of the life cycle goes unrecognized. In death, our loved ones return to the earth on a spiritual path with the utmost care, dignity, and respect. We continue to participate in these practices today, regardless of the generations removed or miles walked from our homelands during forced removal. Disconnection from these sacred places and journeys was never intended. It inflicts a wound on our cultural history and negatively impacts future generations yet to come. Today, repatriation is our sacred responsibility to protect and return our ancestors to the land where we have always belonged."

Chuck Hoskin Jr.
Cherokee Nation Principal Chief

#### NAGPRA Is a Starting Point

NAGPRA created a legal framework for returning Ancestral Remains and cultural items back to their rightful homes and communities. However, NAGPRA represents a floor, not a ceiling. Many museums, including the McClung, see it as a starting point.

Our museum is strongly committed to the Repatriation of Native Ancestral Remains and cultural items held within our collections. We are also committed to cultivating deeper partnerships with Native communities and providing a more inclusive platform for storytelling. McClung staff will continue to collaborate with Tribes and our government partners, like the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), on Repatriation, research, cultural preservation, and interpretation.

Cultural items in this case have been removed for Repatriation.

### NAGPRA, Sovereignty, and Civil Rights

Federally recognized Tribes have sovereignty—the right to govern themselves. They have a government-to-government relationship with the United States, and the power to regulate their internal affairs, enact legislation, establish law enforcement, and court systems, and to protect their unique cultures and identities.

After many decades of activism and protest, federal laws were passed to support the sovereignty and rights of Native Tribes, including the Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990.

#### How Is Legal Control Determined?

NAGPRA allows federally recognized Tribes to claim Ancestral Remains, funerary, and cultural items by showing their cultural affiliation, or relationship, through oral history, geography, archaeology, biology, kinship, language, or other evidence. An alternative pathway also allows for Repatriation based on Ancestral land ties.

After in-depth consultation process with an institution and claimant Tribes, a federal Notice is published. If no counter claims are received, legal control of the Ancestral Remains and cultural items is transferred from the institution to the claimant Tribe or Tribes. The institution then works with the Tribes to physically return the Ancestral Remains and cultural items.

Cultural items in this case have been removed for Repatriation.

#### Repatriation and You

NAGPRA only applies to institutions and not individuals. But you may know people who have Native Ancestral Remains, funerary, or sacred cultural items.

If they are interested in returning these Ancestral Remains or items to the related Native Tribes, they are welcome to contact Dr. Ellen Lofaro, UT's Director of Repatriation, for assistance at nagpra@utk.edu.

#### Shedding Light on Misleading Text

The information a visitor understands from an exhibition depends on who tells the story.

Museums, including the McClung, often use texts that may suggest that Natives and their cultures disappeared in the face of colonization.

We have a responsibility to make sure that the information we present is accurate and appropriately reflects the perspectives and voices of the people whose story we are telling.

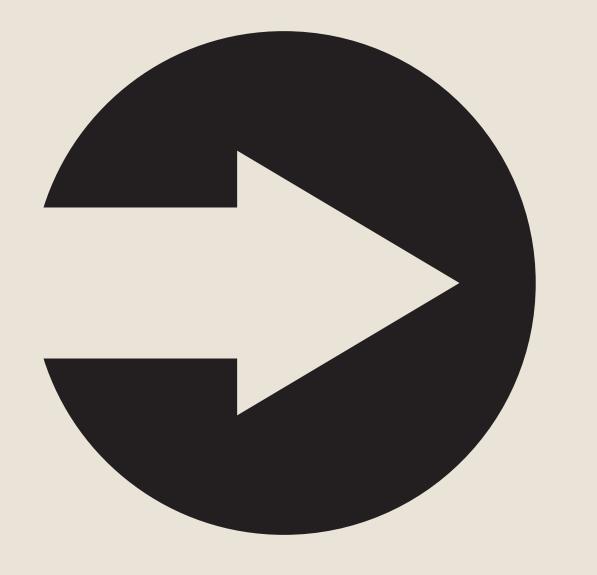
#### Cultural Persistence

Many museums and exhibitions, like this one, have perpetuated the erasure of contemporary Native cultures. Present day Tribal communities have generally thrived despite the generational traumas of genocide, displacement, and forced assimilation. They persist through *survivance*. Native survivance is an active sense of presence over historical absence and eradication.

Today, Tribal citizens continue to honor their cultural identities by incorporating many of their traditional beliefs, practices, and artistry into their everyday lives, and by creating new traditions.

#### What is Repatriation?

The film on view in the theater explores what NAGPRA means to Native Tribes, archeologists, and institutions.



#### Are We Responsible?

#### Are We Responsive?

#### Are We Relevant?

12" x 14" clear acrylic w/1" rounded corners w/white text printed on back and installed with screws

# Press to start video

## Thanks to the following for their work on this exhibition:

**Tribal Collaborators** 

Cherokee Nation
Chickasaw Nation
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma
Delaware Nation
Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians
Muscogee Nation of Oklahoma
Osage Nation
Seminole Nation of Oklahoma

Sponsor

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)

#### Collaborators

Ellen Lofaro, Director of Repatriation, UT Lisa King, Associate Professor, Department of English, UT UT Office of the Provost

Staff of the McClung Museum