

Scenario #1 Hawaii

According to the Native American Grave Repatriation Act, museums are required to return human remains and funerary items to community groups that claim them. In Hawaii, the native people do not have tribal organizations as they do on the mainland. One native group laid claim to items that had been removed from sacred burial caves and were now held by a regional museum. Once received, they sealed the items back into the cave. Another native group claims that not all the items were funerary. Some were works of art intended to be displayed, but that had been hidden in the caves to protect them during a time when native people were converting to Christianity and destroying what they now thought of as idols.

What would you do to resolve this situation? What are some potential problems you might run into?

Scenario #2 Return of Artwork

A work of art was taken from its country of origin many years ago and has since been on display in another country. The country that currently has possession of the artwork has been able to preserve it using the latest technologies and to securely display it. The country of origin wants the item back, but does not have safe and secure facilities or appropriate technology to preserve the artwork.

Should the artwork be returned or not? Why? What are some potential problems of either decision?

Scenario #3: Picture of Native American Ceremony

An anthropologist took pictures many years ago of a sacred Native American Ceremony that was not intended to be seen by outsiders. The photographs were later given to an archive. If the photos are not preserved, this ceremony may be lost to written history. Now someone wants to publish the pictures in a book.

What should the archives do? Should the photos be published? Should the photos be destroyed or returned to the tribe depicted? Why or why not? What are some problems that might arise from any of these decisions?

Scenario #4: Love Letters

A researcher finds steamy lover letters in the unrestricted collection of a prominent person and publishes excerpts in an article with permission from the repository. The donor complains and asks that access to the letters be restricted. There was nothing in the original agreement addressing this.

What should you do? Why? What are some problems that might arise from this decision?