

RESTITUTION STUDY GROUP: SMITHSONIAN BENIN BRONZE TRANSFERS ARE ILLEGAL

Open Letter to Vice President Kamala Harris, Chief Justice John Roberts and other Smithsonian Board of Regents Members in Opposition to Benin Bronze Transfer

WASHINGTON, DC, USA, October 21, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Restitution Study Group announces they sent the following letter regarding the Benin bronzes:



I ... descend from persons enslaved by the Kingdom of Benin in exchange for the metal manillas they melted and cast into the Benin bronzes.... vote "No" on the deaccession of the 20 Benin bronzes...."

Deadria Farmer-Paellmann

I represent the Restitution Study Group, a New York-metro organization concerned with slavery justice. I am also one of millions of American people who descend from persons enslaved by the Kingdom of Benin in exchange for the metal manillas they melted and cast into the Benin bronzes.

It is our understanding that a Board of Regents meeting is scheduled for next week Monday, October 24, 2022. We

are reaching out to you in reference to the Benin bronzes that may be on the agenda for deaccession for transfer to Nigeria.

We want you to vote "No" on the deaccession of the 20 Benin bronzes the Smithsonian announced you would be voting on soon. If you can reverse the previous vote to deaccession 39, we ask that you do that too.

We believe you voted under misleading circumstances -- deliberately made unaware of the fact that most of the bronzes were cast with metal manillas the Benin kingdom was paid for people they sold into the transatlantic slave trade from the 16th to the 19th century.

The Director of the National Museum of African Art has been misleading us about the slave history of the bronzes. We think they deliberately misled you too. The slave trade origin is certain, she says it is not. But the Kingdom admits to the truth in their 2018 book *The Benin Monarchy* on pages 205 and 103. Top scholars agree on this too. Two of the foremost scholars submitted verification letters included in a request for injunction we filed in the United States District Court in Washington, D.C. A third scholar with a specialty in Black Studies agrees on this

too. All this proof is in the [injunction exhibits](#).

The Benin Kingdom enslaved us for 300 years looting our villages, kidnapping our people, selling us into slavery, and using us for human sacrifice. They suffered one punitive Expedition and get the sympathy of the world. If they told the full narrative they would get less support on the return of the Benin bronzes. Would anyone sympathize with Germany trying to repatriate soap and lampshades made with Holocaust victims skin and bones to a Nazi museum?

Today, Benin City, the home of the kingdom of Benin, is still a slave trafficking capital of the world. Our US State department warns of travel to Nigeria because of the risk of kidnap for sex slavery, organ harvesting and human sacrifice in money rituals. The kingdom's centuries of slave trading has left a profound and tragic imprint on the culture of their homeland. We should not reward this legacy with the fruit of ill-gotten gains.

There is a lawsuit pending against the Smithsonian because the transfers are illegal according to United States law. The law does not allow transfer outside of the Smithsonian system unless there is payment. This transfer is a gift to the heirs of slave traders, they are not paying for them as the law requires. The cost would be an estimated \$200 million for these and about that much for the next set you will vote on soon. We can succeed in this case on the merits, but if you transfer these bronzes before the case is heard, then it will be too late.

There is no rush to deaccession and transfer. The Edo State museum the Smithsonian thinks they are going to won't be built until 2025. Right now, it is just a huge hole in the ground being excavated by the State of Edo.

I have been avidly studying the bronzes since 1999 when I did a law school paper on them. My child has grown up visiting them at museums, studying them along with me, and drawing them. Like us, other descendants of enslaved people linked by ancestry to the bronzes will flock to museums once they learn the truth. We ask you to ensure that we continue our enjoyment of our cultural relics, and allow all descendants of enslaved people and others this unique experience, by voting "No" on deaccession of the bronzes to Nigerian slave trader heirs.



Benin Bronze sculpture photo by Kamm Howard

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

DEADRIA FARMER-PAELLMANN :
15 West 12th Street, 6G :
New York, NY 10011, :
and :
RESTITUTION STUDY GROUP, INC. :
15 West 12th Street, 6G :
New York, NY 10011, :
on behalf of themselves and all others : Civil Case No. 1:22-cv-3048
similarly situated, :
Plaintiffs, :
v. :
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION :
Office of General Counsel :
1000 Jefferson Drive, Room 302 :
Washington, DC 20560 :
Defendant. :

COMPLAINT

For their Complaint, by and through counsel, Plaintiffs allege as follows:

I. SUMMARY OF ACTION

1. This is a class action complaint alleging an anticipatory breach of trust, seek exclusively equitable relief that includes, among other things, a preliminary and p injunction to prevent Defendant Smithsonian Institution from effecting its gifting to the Republic of Nigeria's National Commission for Museums and Monuments ("NCMM") 39 Benin Bronzes, which have an approximate value in excess of \$200 million, that the Smithsonian Institution owns and possesses as trustee for the People of the United Stat

Thank you,
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Executive Director

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