

REFLECTION ON VINCE COLLISON'S LECTURE
"HAIDAS AND THE REPATRIATION OF HAIDA ANCESTORS & TREASURES"

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Summary

In his lecture, Vince Collison heavily focused on *why* repatriation is necessary for Haidas and other Indigenous nations. As a co-founder of the Haida Heritage and Repatriation Committee, Collison has interacted with museums in North America and Europe that were and may still be in possession of Haida ancestors and treasures. In relation to this, Collison iterated that Haida treasures and ancestors are “out of context” in museums. Treasures, or what anthropologists call artifacts, are just as important to Haidas as ancestors. In Collison’s words, treasures such as animals “gave something of themselves” to Haidas, and keeping their remains anywhere but the original places Haidas came from has “never made sense, and never will.” Lastly, Collison left us with the overarching message of his talk:

The colonialism has to stop. We’ve shared enough of our world. You don’t need any more of it. We need it more than you do.

Reflection

Vince Collison’s lecture provided unique insight on the emotional aspects of the repatriation process for the Haida. Not only does Collison have valuable knowledge on the topic of Indigenous repatriation due to his expertise from various groups such as the repatriation committee, but also has an emotional perspective on this topic. As someone who has spent years facing the obstacles in the repatriation process, Collison’s motive is to contribute to the goal of repatriating Haida treasures and ancestors and holding museums and institutions accountable for keeping such treasures behind walls. He describes the process of working towards this goal as consisting of “peaks and valleys”. In his talk, his emotional resilience is evident:

You’re going to run into peaks and valleys, and you have to be ready. When you do get ready, you’re going to battle, because you’re representing your ancestors.

Further, a particular strength of Collison’s perspective is that even though he has endured lots of emotional distress as a residential school survivor, he has continued to navigate in a colonial setting in order to protect his heritage. Specifically, his unscripted talk helped me gaze into the concept of Indigenous repatriation through an emotional, more personal lens to understand why repatriation is so important to Indigenous Peoples:

I couldn't do a slideshow today, because I needed to talk to all of you. We're at a stage where we need to figure this (repatriation, colonialism) out. Being from Haida Gwaii is very special to me. This world is very special, and they will never take that away from us.

Additionally, an example of new knowledge I have gained from Collison's talk is that the Haida view nature as a part of their community. Specifically, Collison explained that trees, mammals, and other surrounding animals are a part of Haida families. This helped me better contextualize a quote that stood out to me:

There is no such a thing as artifacts; that word does not exist in our world.

The Haida see natural remains as *treasures*. Therefore, the emotional implications of keeping such treasures in colonial institutions can only be understood through the Haida's cultural perspective.

Lastly, Collison repeatedly mentioned the role of education, especially anthropological education, as a potential avenue where the Haida can find reconciliation. He believes that education has the ability to expose "deep, dark places" and "uncover the *truth* and figure out what to do with it." Although anthropology has been, and may still be in some cases, harmful in its representations of Indigenous peoples, Collison's faith in anthropological education hints at a possible improvement of the relationship between anthropologists and Indigenous peoples. Through their research, and the ways they do research, anthropologists have the power in colonial society to help the reconciliation process. A further question I have in relation to this is: since most of the details of the "truth" are only accessible to university students and scholars, how can anthropologists make such information more accessible to the general public?