The repatriation of ancestral remains

Centre for Cross-Cultural Research
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The Meanings and Values of Repatriation
a Multidisciplinary Conference

The past fifteen years have witnessed a revolution in relations between Indigenous peoples and Australian museums, characterized by recognition of and respect for Indigenous rights and obligations in respect of cultural property. Acknowledgement of Indigenous obligations and customary law in respect of the dead has resulted in various initiatives by museums and state agencies to resolve the fate of Indigenous human remains and grave goods acquired during the colonial era. However, these initiatives have had the effect of throwing into sharp relief challenges that Indigenous peoples and museums face in seeking to work together to resolve the fate of remains.

This WAC Inter-Congress has the following aims:

- To examine critically the successes and failures of efforts to resolve the fate of Indigenous ancestral remains acquired from Australian and overseas museums and scientific institutions.
- To assess repatriation policies and practices in the light of Indigenous community experiences of repatriation.
- To address the problems of identifying and repatriating ancestral remains located in

European and other overseas collections, especially in the light of scientific reluctance and resistance to recognize the rights and obligations of Indigenous people in respect of the dead and their possessions.

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