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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Museum Announces the Repatriation of the Morton Cranial Collection

PHILADELPHIA — The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology has announced its action plan regarding the repatriation or reburial of ancestors, including the remains of Black Philadelphians within the [Samuel G. Morton Cranial collection](#). This plan is based on an April 8, 2021 [report](#) outlining recommendations from the Morton Collection Committee, which was formed in August 2020; the Committee's report is being publicly released on April 12, 2021.

Collected in the first half of the 19th century by Samuel G. Morton whose research was used to justify white supremacist views, the collection was moved from the Drexel Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia to the Penn Museum in 1966. It is currently housed in storage in the Museum's Physical Anthropology Section.

"The Penn Museum and the University of Pennsylvania apologize for the unethical possession of human remains in the Morton Collection." Dr. Christopher Woods, the Penn Museum Williams Director, said. "It is time for these individuals to be returned to their ancestral communities, wherever possible, as a step toward atonement and repair for the racist and colonial practices that were integral to the formation of these collections. We will also reassess our practices of collecting, stewarding, displaying, and researching human remains."

The Morton Collection Committee was composed of museum leadership, staff, anthropologists, and students who have been comprehensively evaluating next steps for repatriation and reburial since last summer. The Committee's report documents an action plan as well as fundamental community involvement and resources required for implementation.

"An initial phase of rigorous evaluation was critical for ensuring an ethical and respectful process around repair. As we move into implementation, the Museum will immediately begin the process of working with local communities to understand their wishes for repatriation." Dr. Woods explained.

In addressing the remains of Black Philadelphians, the Museum will now charge a new committee that includes members from Penn's offices of Social Equity and Community, Government and Community Affairs, the University Chaplain, General Counsel, and others to explore options for reburial in a historically Black Philadelphia cemetery.

A new infrastructure for assessing repatriation and reburial requests, which will include community consultation at every stage is also being established. The process will be modeled after the Museum's NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, 1990) program, which has a 30-year track record of proactively informing and consulting Native peoples and returning relevant materials.

The Museum will also work with Penn's School of Arts and Sciences to create a new full-time faculty position for a BIPOC bioanthropologist. This person will have expertise in the analysis of human remains with a record of advocacy for Black and Indigenous matters in repatriation requests and hold a dual position as Museum curator and faculty member in the Department of Anthropology.

"There is no 'one size fits all' approach to handling repatriation and reburial in any circumstance." Dr. Woods clarified. "Each case is unique and deserves its own consideration. This is incredibly sensitive work. And while we all desire to see the remains of these individuals reunited with their ancestral communities as quickly as possible, it is essential not to rush but to proceed with the utmost care and diligence. As we confront a legacy of racism and colonialism, it is our moral imperative to do so."

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About the Penn Museum

Since 1887, the Museum has been transforming our understanding of the human experience. Dedicated to building connections between cultures, the Museum welcomes everyone to uncover the past, gain an understanding of our shared humanity, and find one's own place in the arc of human history.

The Penn Museum is open Tuesday–Sunday, 10:00 AM–5:00 PM with safety guidelines. For more information, visit www.penn.museum, call 215.898.4000 or follow **@PennMuseum** on social media.