

# Museum Responsibility: Challenging Weaponised Heritage and Reactionary Responses to Anti-Colonial Approaches

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‘In order to comprehend the depth of challenge the BLM movement posed for museums, it must be noted that many museums appear to adhere to the idea that their purpose lies in the enrichment and education of the public.’

### **A message from Director Hartwig Fischer**

The death of George Floyd in Minneapolis is shocking. The subsequent protests, the explosion of pain, indignation and rage in America and across the world, have brought home how deep the experience of racism is for so many in our societies.

The British Museum stands in solidarity with the British Black community, with the African American community, with the Black community throughout the world. We are aligned with the spirit and soul of Black Lives Matter everywhere.

‘Such concepts may be difficult to process for individuals whose understanding of their place in the world has been shaped by privilege and nationalism. Thus, narratives which celebrated the sovereignty, supremacy and white, cultural authority of European countries such as the United Kingdom have become hegemonic in the minds of the populace. In addition to white fragility, the societal construction of predominantly white ‘normalcy’ and ‘deviant other’ leads society to close ranks against anything which challenges or subverts that which is associated with counter-hegemony or advocacy for change (Cammaerts 2022: 719-846).’

*For these dangerous and divisive elements the legislation proposed in the Race Relations Bill is the very pabulum they need to flourish. Here is the means of showing that the immigrant communities can organise to consolidate their members, to agitate and campaign against their fellow citizens, and to overawe and dominate the rest with the legal weapons which the ignorant and the ill-informed have provided. As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding; like the Roman, I seem to see "the River Tiber foaming with much blood."*

‘What more will the museums sector do in order to transcend reactionary calls for a static and imperialist approach to heritage, and to what extent is it their responsibility? In addition, it is important to consider whether the museums sector can resist efforts to embrace anti-colonialism becoming a ‘modish’ marker of a specific time in global politics. It appears right-wing focus on triumphalist and nationalistic narratives will not be countered quickly or easily, and given the centuries of control such ideologies have wielded over conceptions of cultural heritage, there remains much work to be done if museums are to become truly inclusive.’

**Museums contain infinite opportunities for healing, reparation and inclusion. It is the duty of cultural institutions to uphold ethical, anti-colonial values in the face of reactionary backlash.**

Thank you