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Institutionalizing Identity: Examining the Louvre in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France

Emma Balda
ebalda@lion.lmu.edu

Amy Woodson-Boulton
Loyola Marymount University

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Loyola Marymount University
University Honors
Program

Institutionalizing Identity:
Examining the Louvre in Revolutionary and
Napoleonic France

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements of the University Honors Program
of Loyola Marymount University

by

Emma Balda

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Abstract

With the collapse of the French monarchy in 1789, France sought to solidify their sense of national identity in the wake of revolution. Since the late eighteenth century, museums have long been used to foster nationalism and belonging through the institutionalization of historical narratives-- the opening of the Louvre in 1793, and its transition from a royal palace to a palace of the people, served as a physical metaphor of the complete political transformation that occurred during the French Revolution. Existing literature examines the revolutionary nationalization of the Louvre as it relates to the concept of the modern museum and the field of public history, especially in the eighteenth century and leading into the Napoleonic era. This paper will extend on the nationalization of the Louvre in relation to France's search for national identity and the artifacts they needed in order to do so, in addition to considering the ways in which this need to find a new identity often came at the cost of marginalized communities through the looting and reframing of artifacts from places like Egypt, Asia, and Africa. These questions will be examined through the use of artifact analysis, government documents, and newspaper articles. Additionally, this will be framed through Edward Said's Theory of Orientalism, examining the Louvre's influence in feeding into French Orientalism through the presentation and collection of 'exotic' artifacts during Napoleon's conquests.

Introduction

Museums are particularly important at this intersection of identity formation and nationalism, as they have the ability to frame artifacts and narratives so that it may guide the visitor in interpreting history in a way that bolsters national identity. However, this use of a public narrative becomes complicated, and even problematic, when taking into account that the

histories often exhibited in museums reinforce the dominant, white hegemonic narratives that best serve the country and perpetuate the erasure of difficult and marginalized narratives. Conversely, museums do have the potential to exist as sites of conversation surrounding the national identity. Historical institutions possess the power to question the dominant narrative and give platform to non-Western artifacts, stories, and voices. As museums assist in creating nationalism and crafting a common identity for the public, they are tasked with the choice of either showcasing marginalized histories or continuing to perpetuate their absence.

The French Revolution changed virtually every aspect of French civilization and culture, as the Republic sought to “revolutionize every aspect of life.”¹ The Louvre, in particular, existed as a physical metaphor of the transformation France endured under the revolution into the Napoleonic era. France already had a centralized art system under absolutism; however, this art system was only available to the elite. The nationalization of the Louvre and its masterpieces was a revolutionary act in and of itself, as it broke down a significant barrier of culture between the warring classes. Collection and preservation of art and culture by the state is inherently tied up in nationalist politics-- it exists as a way to institutionalize and popularize historical narratives, all while bolstering a sense of nationalism and identity.² However, this need to build a sense of national identity, especially in the wake of a revolution, came at the cost of marginalized communities. Artifacts and art from Egyptian, Asian, and Greek civilizations were stolen by French imperialists, exhibited in the Louvre, and appropriated to reinforce French identity, at the expense of the cultures from which they were taken.³ These artifacts were often trapped as

¹Andrew McClellan, “The Musee du Louvre as Revolutionary Metaphor during the Terror,” In *The Art Bulletin* (1988): 304.

² James Clifford, “On Collecting Art and Culture,” In *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 218.

³ Farah Nayeri, “Napoleon’s Stolen Masterpieces: The Plunder that Stole the Louvre,” Last modified 15 June 2021.

‘cultural’ productions, rarely ever associated with their European artistic counterparts. The othering and valuation, or lack thereof, given to non-Western artifacts fed into orientalism, or the exaggeration of differences in the context of the presumption of Western superiority as written about by Edward Said.⁴ In an environment meant specifically to create and foster a national narrative in the wake of a complete restructuring of society and its values, the othering of non-Western culture and art had dire implications for the way European civilization formed perspectives around their ‘exotic’ counterparts. It was in this way that the Louvre of the eighteenth century existed simultaneously as a revolutionary and oppressive institution-- illustrating the power historical institutions hold at critical, and vulnerable, times in terms of both highlighting and erasing narratives. The creation of national French identity at the expense of cultural objects begs the question: What collection of art or artifacts become necessary to these collections? What does it say if this vision of France is dependent on looted objects?

Museums and the Formation of Identity

Throughout history, museums and other historical institutions have served as sites of identity construction, communicating to the public an overarching narrative of their own history. These historical sites, including places like museums and commemorative sites, rely on personal memory in order to construct a collective memory, which often leads to a glorification and romanticization of the past. In doing so, historical institutions are able to create a sense of nationalism amongst the public by providing a space and means for the public to connect their own narrative to their country’s. The power museums hold becomes evident in their ability to play a role in what it means to belong to a nation, fostering and outlining a sense of national

⁴ Edward Said, “Orientalism,” In *The Selected Works of Edward Said, 1966-2006*, edited by Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin, 65.

identity through their exhibitions. National collections have sought to glorify both real and mythic histories, mainly through “glories procured by looting gifts, and acquisitions-- all testaments to the military prowess, cultural taste, and financial resources” of the nation represented in the exhibit.⁵ At its very core, a national collection serves as a tool to glorify the past in order to justify the actions of the present and bolster a sense of pride in one’s nation. They provide a space for the nation to outline how they wish to be remembered, institutionalizing their desired characteristics and legacy in the process. Every detail-- architecture, artifacts, location, layout-- is meant to define who the nation was and how that translates into the present time period. In her book *Formation of National Collections of Art and Archaeology*, Gwendolyn Wright discusses the concept of the national museum as a “pure temple of the arts” where art within the building, which often takes the form of a classical temple, asserts the country’s origins among classical traditions like Graeco-Roman classicism.⁶ In relating themselves to what is often considered the foundations of culture and society through national collections, countries are not only able to establish themselves on the same level as the Romans, Greeks, or Mesopotamians, but are also able to declare themselves as culturally influential as those who preceded them. The nation is able to create a public culture, asserting an identity for themselves and promoting this idea of the country as an organic whole that shares common values and a heritage-- heritage which is then utilized as a mode of understanding and utilizing the past.⁷

National collections and the art exhibited in them are meant to evoke emotions from the visitor: belonging, pride, support, loyalty, devotion.⁸ Identity presupposes a collection, as a

⁵ Gwendolyn Wright, *The Formation of National Collections of Art and Archaeology* (Washington: Trustees of the National Gallery of Art, 1996), 9.

⁶ Wright, *The Formation of National Collections of Art and Archaeology*, 9.

⁷ Sharon Macdonald, *A Companion to Museum Studies* (John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2010), 443.

⁸ Wright, *The Formation of National Collections of Art and Archaeology*, 9.

nation-state must have a sense of how they not only wish to be perceived, but also remembered, while they are in the act of collecting and forming public museums. This subtle difference between perception, how the contemporary public receives the nation-state and collection in the present, and remembrance, how the same public understands their own country's past, both feed into the formation of identity. As a result, collections are inherently tied up in nationalist politics.⁹ Public museums and history are vital to how a society looks at and interprets the events of the past, as their interaction with the past shapes how the present understands and places themselves as an individual a part of the whole. The nation must assert their identity and public culture as a concept which supersedes regional, class, and ethnic differences. Cultural institutions are meant to serve as a centralizing force, a place of relation for citizens of a country to identify with no matter where they live or their personal identity. National collections impose and institutionalize national identity onto the country as a whole, acting as an extended arm of the nation-state's authority and reaffirming their power in the process. This is most often seen in the location of the national collections, as they appear in the capital cities of the country they are seeking to represent such as The Louvre in Paris-- these museums are meant to be seen as what it means *to be* French and belong to the country. In a way, the heritage of these cities cast a shadow upon the national collections, adding another dimension to the identity of the country through the relation of the history of the city to the history of the entire country.¹⁰ National collections can then be seen as physical amalgamations of nostalgic memories and histories that were, in the case of the Louvre, brought into the revolutionary present in the hopes of romanticizing a past that supports feelings of nationalism.

⁹ Clifford, "On Collecting Art and Culture," 218.

¹⁰ Wright, *The Formation of National Collections of Art and Archaeology*, 9-10.

However, this preservation and glorification of national history does not come without its qualms. By outlining a national identity, certain characteristics, groups, and experiences are excluded as a result. Suddenly, individuals and cultures who live and associate themselves with the country are told they no longer belong because they do not fit the criteria of the nation-state. This becomes particularly problematic when looking at the national collections of Western colonial powers, who also include the narratives of those who do not wish to be associated with Western national collections through the display of stolen artifacts. As a result, Western national collections are exclusionary forces that simultaneously reinforce colonial narratives; oftentimes, these historical institutions reinforce the dominant narrative and aid in the oppression of the historically marginalized. In the case of France following the Revolution, in order to glorify their own past, Revolutionary and Imperialist France's national collection were cornered into uplifting histories of Western dominance and white male hegemony, which tells the public that those who do not fit into those narratives do not belong to their country. This national collection is meant to foster nationalism, which can often be synonymous with and result in fostering feelings of racism, elitism, regionalism, and other forms of prejudice. Additionally, by asserting themselves among cultural giants, such as the Greeks and Romans, national collections and cultural institutions serve as a tool of justification for the harm caused to minority groups. Ultimately, the concept of national identity becomes more complicated in this sense, as there becomes a need to portray a balance between a multitude of racial, class, gender, and regional differences.¹¹ The question of representation as a singular identity, in addition to multiplicity within the romantic conceptualization of the nation-state as an organic whole, falters when asked to consider the narratives and perspectives of various cultural and regional groups, as it becomes nearly impossible to create an entirely inclusive identity without washing over or erasing the narratives

¹¹ Wright, *The Formation of National Collections of Art and Archaeology*, 11.

and traditions of some. Moreover, museums like the Louvre are tasked with this representation without verging on appropriation or exploitation of the culturally and historically marginalized. National collections, by defining what constitutes belonging and identity, reinforce a hierarchy of value, degrading the work and history of other cultures and traditions for the sake of glorifying their own. Consequently, national collections exist as a simultaneous force of identity building that bolsters pride and support while reinforcing Eurocentric values that erase the narratives of those that are often being exploited for the sake of a cultured facade.

The Revolutionary Louvre

Examining the storytelling abilities of public museums and national collections, the Louvre serves as an example of the ways in which historical institutions lend themselves to defining a national identity that bolsters feelings of pride and belonging to one's nation. The French Revolution radically shifted the social makeup and perspectives of eighteenth and nineteenth century French society. The destruction of the traditional monarchy and the rise of the Republic meant that the entirety of French society were tasked with redefining, both on an individual and collective basis, what it meant to be and belong to France. The French Revolution ushered in a new phase of the revolution away from Constitutional Monarchy and into the first French Republic, which pursued war abroad and both cultural and social revolution at home. As a result, there was a shift in the makeup of French society, presenting a question regarding the future of leadership and citizenship-- the king was dead and the traditional structure of authority had been eliminated, creating a symbolic void in society in the way of leadership. When the Republic emerged as a source of authority during this time, they needed to prove to France that, in addition to the revolution being worth their efforts and sacrifices, the new authority was

superior to the old monarchy. Essentially, they needed to create an identity that affirmed their superiority over the old regime, while also maintaining the sense of nationalism that had upheld revolutionary actions and values. The Republic recognized the vital role of the Louvre in doing so, and urgently set out to claim the palace as the people's and open its treasures to the public. In this sense, the Louvre serves as a 'revolutionary metaphor' for France's political journey, illustrating the way public museums and national collections simultaneously mirror the public's attitudes while also telling them what and who to follow and believe.

The first publicized appeal for a public art gallery in France came in 1747 from La Font de Saint Yenne's *Réflexions sur quelques causes de l'état présent de la peinture en France*. In this text, La Font criticized the accessibility of artwork from the public and foreigners in Versailles and called for the public display of the king's pictures for both artistic and public benefit.¹² Thirty years later, Louis XVI's minister of the arts and director general of royal buildings, Comte d'Angiviller, set out to transform the Grand Gallery of the Louvre palace into the grandest museum in all of Europe. This ambitious plan was a promise to the French public, yet it still served as a way to glorify the royalty of the time and their great collection. The director general believed that the museum would revitalize French art and demonstrate to Europe the superiority of the French school and the magnificence of Louis XVI.¹³ However, when the monarchy collapsed in 1789, d'Angiviller's ambitious project to create the "most splendid museum in all of Europe" collapsed with it.¹⁴

¹² La Font de Saint-Yenne, *Réflexions sur quelques causes de l'état présent de la peinture en France avec un examen des principaux ouvrages exposés au Louvre le mois d'aoust 1746*, The Hague, 1747.

¹³ Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre* (University of California Press: 1999), 49.

¹⁴ McClellan, "The Musee du Louvre as Revolutionary Metaphor during the Terror," 300.

Nevertheless, the Republic realized the potential of the Louvre as a way to institutionalize the revolution and set out, with urgency, to open it to the public.¹⁵ Recognizing the power that was held in the repurposing of the royal collection, the Republic realized that a political meaning could be imposed on the national museum and made to serve revolutionary ideology; in a way, the Republic mirrored the goals of d'Angiviller's Louvre project, but instead projected them onto the nation-state as a whole, rather than for the benefit of the monarchy. The royal palace, and the royal collection that was in it, was declared national property, once again reflecting the intent of d'Angiviller's original project which had been described by him as "a truly national project."¹⁶ Both parties viewed the Louvre as a means of supporting the nation as a whole, but transformed the meaning of the objects, exhibits, and overall space in order to reinforce the authority and their mission at that time. Although the artwork on display in the Revolutionary Louvre came from their pre-Revolutionary settings, the framing of these objects, in a museological context, had changed, as they were now tied to the conquest of the French Revolution, the triumph of the people over the monarchy and the "returning [of the objects] to their 'rightful' owners-- the people."¹⁷ It is in this way that the history of the Louvre, especially in the revolutionary period, followed the ebbs and flows of French history, as they attempted to solidify a national identity in the face of historical revolution and reconstruction.

Following the French Revolution, a wave of nationalism ensued in the wake of the people's victory. As a result, the Louvre, as a public museum, played a crucial role in maintaining and reinforcing this sense of nationalism, which stemmed from a newfound revolutionary French identity. The Republic sought to revolutionize every aspect of life and utilized the museum as an important tool of propaganda-- a way to control the public's memory

¹⁵ McClellan, "The Musee du Louvre as Revolutionary Metaphor during the Terror," 304.

¹⁶ Wright, *The Formation of National Collections of Art and Archaeology*, 33.

¹⁷ McClellan, "The Musee du Louvre as Revolutionary Metaphor during the Terror," 306.

of the pre-revolutionary past and their path into the revolutionary future.¹⁸ In order to maintain nationalism, the Republic required a solid foundation, “a conjunction of political and ethnocultural allegiances” that binds the individual to the state.¹⁹ In a way, the Republic was tasked with creating a community where the people could relate to in order to foster this sense of nationalism and revolutionary effort. The museum serves as a way to articulate and refine this identity and build on this idea of an imagined community.²⁰ The Republic needed to capitalize on the feeling of belonging and support following the triumphs of the Revolution. When the Louvre opened in 1793, it came with the onset of events that pushed the Revolution to the left, such as counterrevolutions, military setbacks, and the assassination of Marat, that reinforced the Republic’s desire to use the museum as a source of “public instruction” that strengthens the revolution’s foundations.²¹ As a result, the Republic relied on the tenets of a national collection to evoke feelings of nostalgia, pride, and devotion, as the public’s understanding of their own past and their country’s past determined how they placed themselves within their current society. The Louvre served as a centralizing force of nationalism, a physical space for the nation to turn to in times of domestic trouble as the museum sought to influence public opinion.

The very presence of the museum, and the message of its contents, was meant to assure the people that calm and order reigned over the capital.²² Thus, the physical museum itself stood as a national monument, as stated by Armand Kersaint in his *Discours sur les monuments publics*. A politician during the French Revolution, Kersaint detailed how the Louvre would affirm “at one and the same time the 'will of the nation' and 'the superiority of the new regime

¹⁸ McClellan, “The Musee du Louvre as Revolutionary Metaphor during the Terror,” 304.

¹⁹ Wright, *The Formation of National Collections of Art and Archaeology*, 29.

²⁰ Benedict R. O’G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. and extended ed. London; New York: Verso, 1991.

²¹ McClellan, “The Musee du Louvre as Revolutionary Metaphor during the Terror,” 304.

²² McClellan, “The Musee du Louvre as Revolutionary Metaphor during the Terror,” 304.

over the regime of the old.”²³ As a national monument, the space becomes a site of commemoration and glorification, romanticizing the Louvre and inciting feelings of pride in the visitor who is able to witness the grandeur of the museum. Looking at the Louvre as a national monument through the eyes of the French Republic means taking the institution as a whole as a symbol of France, rather than looking at it as a part of a space that holds artifacts that embody France. The Louvre itself becomes an artifact in this sense and becomes an object in the living museum that is the city of Paris. Consequently, the Louvre, as an artifact and as an institution, becomes a concept that invokes feelings of nationalism in and of itself, while simultaneously exhibiting artifacts that do the same thing-- the feelings of nationalism reinforce themselves both in the physical institution and the artifacts within it.

At their core, public museums are “shaped by the preserving of objects to address societal needs.”²⁴ At the time of the French Revolution, the societal needs were a new identity-- one that glorified the sacrifices of the people during the revolution. The French people needed something to identify with in order to believe that the Revolution had been worth it and that they could put their trust in the authority of the Republic. Following the Revolution, there was a loss of identity, as the core of what it meant to be a French citizen had been dramatically altered as the Estates were stripped away in favor of a more egalitarian society. Historical institutions, and their role in creating and reinforcing national identity, became all the more important, as a result. The Louvre, thus, was used to create a new national identity and communicate to the people what the new Revolutionary France would look like.

²³ Armand-Guy Kersaint, *Discours sur les monuments publics*, Paris, 1792.

²⁴ Jeffrey Abt, “The Origins of Public Art Museums.” *A Companion to Museum Studies* (2006): 132.

The use of national collections to assert an emerging nation's identity reiterates the country's role in determining a "public culture" that reinforces this identity.²⁵ It was for this reason that, in his call for a public museum, La Font himself stated that "the state should become involved once again in dictating taste," clearly demonstrating the power museums held in determining the taste, culture, and characteristics of a nation-state.²⁶ Moreover, by designing and displaying museums in specific ways, museums become a way to "identify the nation-states that sponsor them as heirs to Western civilization and adherents of the modern tradition."²⁷ At the intersection of these two concepts, the Louvre stood as a tool used by the Republic to not only dictate the new culture of France, but also as a way to assert their new identity amidst the likes of what we are taught to consider the roots of modern society, such as the Greeks or Romans. Returning to Wright's concept of the "pure temple of the arts," the Louvre embodies this idea, especially when examining the way the museum is quite literally a palace. Inside of this palatial museum, the Louvre exhibits the works of the Greeks, Romans, Mesopotamians, Italians, and other giants of Western civilization. The star, however, is French history and artwork. As the visitor to the Revolutionary Louvre moves through the space, they move through French history and recognize its significance against the backdrop of a larger, global narrative. The art within the temple that is the Louvre asserts the country's origins amidst the likes of other great Western colonial powers.

At the same time, the art within the Louvre and the movement through French history serves as a way to perpetuate the superiority of the new regime over the failures of the old. The National Assembly saw the Louvre as a place to demonstrate the nation's great riches, which is

²⁵ Wright, *The Formation of National Collections of Art and Archaeology*, 9.

²⁶ La Font de Saint-Yenne, *Réflexions sur quelques causes de l'état présent de la peinture en France avec un examen des principaux ouvrages exposés au Louvre le mois d'août 1746*.

²⁷ Wright, *The Formation of National Collections of Art and Archaeology*, 29.

why they declared opening of the Louvre as an act of urgency, “recognizing the importance of bringing together at the museum the paintings and other works of arts that are at present to be found in many locations.”²⁸ The movement through the Revolutionary Louvre was meant to be “a continuous and uninterrupted sequence revealing the progress of the arts and the degrees of the perfection attained by various nations that have cultivated them.”²⁹ By utilizing a progressive and chronological narrative as their method of exhibition, the Louvre is prompting the visitor to walk through the history of France and end up in the revolutionary present, suggesting that the visitor ends in the most advanced society that has achieved the highest degree of perfection thus far. Accordingly, the Revolutionary Louvre served as a physical amalgamation of all that France was meant to be in the eyes of the Republic-- a metaphor for France’s absolutist past, Revolutionary present, and an eventual imperialist future.

In terms of the artifacts in the Revolutionary Louvre, the Republic sought to exhibit French history and a movement towards perfection. As a result, the Louvre of the French Revolution focused on European painting, especially French painting and historical painting. Jacques Louis-David, a painter known for his significant work during the Revolution, sought to dramatize the grandeur



Figure 1

of French history being illustrated.³⁰ His picture, the *Oath of the Horatii* (Figure 1), was intended to be placed in the Grand Gallery of the Louvre and is 329.8 cm × 424.8 cm in dimension.

Although the painting does not exhibit French history specifically, David was acutely aware of

²⁸ J.-B.-P. Lebrun, *Observations sur le muséum national*, Paris, 1793, 15.

²⁹ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 113.

³⁰ Jacques-Louis David, *Oath of Horatii*, Oil on Canvas, 1785, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

his place in history as a painter and worked with the future of his reputation in mind.³¹ Moreover, the painting exhibits a Roman legend, once again seeking to connect French society to Roman history. The Revolutionary Louvre relied on the work of David and other painters of the time who followed suit in the “iconoclastic” style of historical painting, as the progression of French history to the ideal that the Republic saw themselves and, ultimately, a means to label the new Revolutionary France as a grand cultural center

Musée Napoleon

As the French Revolution wore on, it became increasingly more radical in nature, peaking with the beheadings of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette during Maximilian Robespierre’s Reign of Terror. Under his authority, Robespierre and his Committee of Public Safety, who were a part of the radical group the Jacobins, sought to kill any and all opponents to the Revolution, including supporters of the Revolution who were critiquing the abusive and strict actions under the leadership of the Jacobins. As Robespierre saw his power increase as he performed more massacres, he began to almost mirror a monarch himself, likening himself to a god and ultimately resulting in his eventual death at the hands of his own group. Following this radical phase, moderates resumed control during the Thermidorian Reaction, which was the last phase of the Revolution. During this phase, the urban poor class lost interest in the Revolution, as it seemed to no longer advocate nor represent their interests and well-being. Consequently, the moderate and final phase of the French Revolution was momentarily replaced by a five-man executive branch called The Directory. The Directory’s reign was brief, as they were quickly overthrown by Napoleon Bonaparte in a coup in 1799 who crowned himself Emperor of France in 1804. Napoleon sought to bring stability to post-revolution France, instituting the Napoleonic

³¹ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 76-77.

Codes which promoted order and authority over individual rights and marked a dramatic shift in values following the Revolution. Napoleon gained popularity through his military conquests during the wars beginning in 1792 and his victories cemented his authority over the destabilized France. During these conquests, Napoleon often looted places, such as Italy and Egypt, for their treasures and art, which he would later use to fill the Louvre. Throughout all of these events, the Louvre remained as a symbol of what France hoped to project to the public as their national image-- its narrative and artwork moving with the evolution of the Revolution and the events thereafter. In the Napoleonic era, the Louvre stood as a way to communicate to the public who Napoleon was and what his empire would stand for, essentially becoming a way to reinforce and exhibit the power of Napoleon and his conquests.

Napoleon saw himself as a stabilizing force for France, bringing the country out of a period of complete chaos and revolutionary disruption.³² Based on this sentiment, the idea of a public museum was reeled in and was now seen as a way to legitimize the empire. The new national identity of France was no longer malleable or based on the public's thoughts, instead it was enforced onto the public via historical institutions like the Louvre as the "potential for public debate in response decreased because the Napoleonic state curbed freedom of expression."³³ Napoleon saw France as a magnifying glass for his power and, thus, saw the Louvre as a way to exhibit that. By exhibiting France's greatness, he was inherently exhibiting, what he saw as, his own greatness. In 1803, Napoleon renamed the Louvre to Musée Napoleon, illustrating this perceived tie between the French image and Napoleon's image.³⁴ Napoleon was on the quest to

³² Nayeri, "Napoleon's Stolen Masterpieces: The Plunder that Stole the Louvre."

³³ David Gilks, "Attitudes to the Displacement of Cultural Property in the Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon," In *The Historical Journal* (2013): 130.

³⁴ Gilks, "Attitudes to the Displacement of Cultural Property in the Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon," 130.

create a “universal museum of knowledge” in Paris, with himself as the collector and discoverer of all of it.³⁵

At the core of his quest, Napoleon wanted to prove that France was once again a great nation. However, this nationalism came at the expense of others due to the fact that it required the looting of other culture’s objects. By claiming these cultural artifacts as his own to exhibit, Napoleon was proving his superiority over the country’s past, as well as his own global power. At this time, there was a shift in both the political and museological context of France’s historical institutions, as they now served as a means to legitimize looting and expropriation.³⁶ The stolen artwork and cultural objects were considered ‘trophy of conquest’ by Napoleon, a concept whose origins lie in the Roman Empire’s history. This was intentional on Napoleon’s behalf, as he sought to make Paris the cultural powerhouse that Rome was at the time. A parade showcasing stolen goods from Italy records the crowd chanting “Rome is no more in Rome. It is all in Paris,” with the aim to “bring together, in a nation freed from despotism, all the products of human genius.”³⁷ The goal of bringing together all of “human genius” in Paris insinuates that Paris, by being the most suited to house these products, is the center of human genius. Napoleon was well aware of the power dynamics evident in his looting and conquering, even going so far as to incorporate the looting of art into the peace treaties of the places he conquered.³⁸ In doing so, he demonstrates his awareness of the symbolic power in taking, appropriating, and exhibiting other culture's art. To Napoleon, the Louvre transforms into a mirror which is meant to reflect himself as the new identity of France. The Napoleonic era witnessed a distinct shift in the

³⁵ Nayeri, “Napoleon’s Stolen Masterpieces: The Plunder that Stole the Louvre.”

³⁶ Gilks, “Attitudes to the Displacement of Cultural Property in the Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon,” 114.

³⁷ Nayeri, “Napoleon’s Stolen Masterpieces: The Plunder that Stole the Louvre.”

³⁸ Cynthia Saltzman, Napoleon the Art Thief, *History Extra*, May 20 2021, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/napoleon-the-art-thief/id256580326?i=1000522583210>.

Louvre's purpose in creating identity and building nationalism in that, unlike the royal palace and revolutionary Louvre, the museum became a tool to bolster Napoleon's own identity and power with very little thought for the broader public of France, save their own perception of the emperor-- even d'Angiviller wanted the Louvre to be a "truly national project." Napoleon not only appropriated the objects he stole, but also the Louvre itself, as it went from the Louvre, a public museum, to the Musée Napoleon, a tool to highlight and reinforce the power of Napoleon.

Napoleon took great influence from the Roman empire, operating off of and reviving the "Roman right of conquest."³⁹ The role of art played a significant role in defining the new identity of the French empire, but in a purely possessive and dominating way. Napoleon desired to create a 'great center' by transferring all the finest art to Paris, as he believed it the "only way to make them useful to the world."⁴⁰ The museological context and framing of those objects in the Louvre gave the stolen artifacts importance in the way another museum or context could not, reinforcing Napoleon's own perceived superiority over other cultures and countries. Napoleon sought to 'link himself to these works of genius' and justify their plunder by invoking 'the aims of the Enlightenment.'⁴¹ In doing so, he was essentially taking over and linking himself to France's past while simultaneously becoming France's present. Napoleon, in this way, continued the pattern of taking over and subverting the goals of the Louvre from those who came before him:

d'Angiviller to the Republic to Napoleon. However, Napoleon differs in that he subverts it so much that it becomes a representation of him, rather than a representation of public French identity. Nevertheless, the Louvre effortlessly adopted the imperial facade that Napoleon imposed upon the museum, suggesting "continuity between centuries of monarchy and the

³⁹ Gilks, "Attitudes to the Displacement of Cultural Property in the Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon," 117.

⁴⁰ Gilks, "Attitudes to the Displacement of Cultural Property in the Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon," 133.

⁴¹ Nayeri, "Napoleon's Stolen Masterpieces: The Plunder that Stole the Louvre."

empire in the sequence of rooms struck a favorable chord" with Napoleon.⁴² He wished to assert himself besides the absolutist past of France in order to maintain that same sense of power; yet, in a way that was distinctly different from the kings and royalty that came before him as a result of the French Revolution, resulting in the title of emperor rather than king despite his absolutist behavior. This was most evident in his conquests and looting, as "appropriating foreign cultural property was often a symbolic means by which sovereigns expressed their rank both in their own country and in relation to other monarchs."⁴³ Thus, by using the Louvre, or Musée Napoleon, to exhibit the trophies of his conquests, Napoleon was able to utilize the museum as a way to reinforce his own power over the past of French authority in addition to French supremacy over other cultural powers around the world.

Napoleon's Louvre represented a shift in France's identity towards an imperial identity. He saw the looting of artifacts as "gathering resources to study" or helping "restore lands to ancient greatness."⁴⁴ This view is rooted in white European hegemony, as it relies on white saviorism and supremacist rhetoric that states that non-Western cultures are either too helpless or irresponsible to have authority over their own cultural artifacts. In doing so, Napoleon disregarded that the places he was stealing from were in fact fully formed cultures and societies, instead seeing them as places that had expired from their former greatness-- going so far as to state that "it is by the right of virtue, not by the right of conquest."⁴⁵ Despite this, Napoleon unquestionably founded the Louvre as we know it today, with all the richness and variety of its

⁴² McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 196.

⁴³ Gilks, "Attitudes to the Displacement of Cultural Property in the Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon," 115-116.

⁴⁴ Gilks, "Attitudes to the Displacement of Cultural Property in the Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon," 124.

⁴⁵ Gilks, "Attitudes to the Displacement of Cultural Property in the Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon," 124.

collections.⁴⁶ Napoleon expanded the Louvre greatly between 1804 and 1814 due to military conquests.⁴⁷ This means that the way we view the Louvre is one based in looting, appropriation, and power dynamics, which becomes even more complicated when examining the fact that the Louvre was meant to serve as a grand display of French identity and exceptionalism.

Thus, while the Louvre remained a symbol of power throughout its existence, it was under Napoleon and his conquests that the museum truly transformed into an institution of power, recognizing and affirming certain identities while erasing and exploiting others. At this time, the Louvre became "the most visible cultural symbol of France's hegemony of Western and central Europe."⁴⁸ By collecting these symbolic trophies and reinforcing the idea that there are conditions in which looting is 'valid,' Napoleon effectively granted the Louvre and himself the power to determine not only who should be displayed, but how they should be displayed. Moreover, Napoleon would often use looting to supplement already imbalanced power dynamics, using what he would call the "doctrine of revenge" to justify the looting of artwork from conquered or enemy countries.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, most of Napoleon's looted artifacts were returned after his defeat in the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, cementing the symbolic fall of his empire with the changing of the name back to the Louvre. In this way, the museum and its national collection has continuously followed the ebbs and flows of French authority over time, in addition to showcasing the implications that this has in terms of nationalism and the maintenance of a national identity throughout these changes.

⁴⁶ Nayeri, "Napoleon's Stolen Masterpieces: The Plunder that Stole the Louvre."

⁴⁷ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 198.

⁴⁸ Gilks, "Attitudes to the Displacement of Cultural Property in the Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon," 114.

⁴⁹ Gilks, "Attitudes to the Displacement of Cultural Property in the Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon," 131.

The artifacts of the Louvre in the Napoleonic era, unlike its Revolutionary predecessor, needed looted objects in order to communicate its spot as a cultural center. Similar to the Louvre in the Revolutionary period, Napoleon's Louvre used European paintings, like the ones seized in Italy, in addition to Oriental objects. The painting *The Wedding Feast at Cana* (Figure 2) was seized by Napoleon's forces in Venice and is one of the few paintings that the French resisted



Figure 2

returning after Napoleon's defeat.⁵⁰ Another object that wasn't returned, the Rosetta Stone from Egypt, only left France due to its capture from Britain.⁵¹ Art and objects like these two were necessary to creating a new French imperialist identity, as their context as stolen objects become symbols that exhibit the supremacy of France over other cultures-- non-Western and Western alike.

The Oriental Louvre

Edward Said's Theory of Orientalism discusses the exaggeration of differences in the context of the presumption of Western superiority, looking specifically at inaccurate cultural representations.⁵² Cultures are reduced in the process of colonization and imperialism in order to become more palatable to their Western audiences. This reduction plays into the monolithic narrative in that it heavily relies on stereotyping and 'othering' foreign cultures to the point that the 'dominant' culture does not see the other as equals, merely as stepping-stones to reinforce their own superiority. In a museological context, the exhibition, location, framing, and

⁵⁰ Paolo Veronese, *The Wedding Feast at Cana*, Oil on Canvas, 1563, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

⁵¹ Nayeri, "Napoleon's Stolen Masterpieces: The Plunder that Stole the Louvre."

⁵² Said, "Orientalism," 65.

acquisition of artifacts all have the potential to feed into Orientalism, especially museums who rely heavily on national collections and feelings of collective belonging to articulate their narratives. Museum exhibits can either grant dimension and nuance to historically marginalized narratives and their interactions with colonizing forces or they can reduce these interactions to a shallow depiction of the dominant history that only serves to reinforce the power of the European forces. The Louvre, in particular, must grapple with its own Orientalism-ridden exhibits, as they adapt the imperialist identity they inhabited from the Napoleonic era. Historically, France had very limited contact with the East, except through trade and intermittent military campaigns. However, Napoleon changed this in 1798 when he led an invasion into Egypt, occupying the country until 1801.⁵³ Napoleon effectively transformed the Louvre into a spectacle of power and possession, looting other countries and taking their artifacts to display, both literally and metaphorically, his own power over both Western and non-Western cultures alike. The Louvre we see today is a direct result of the imperialism practiced by Napoleon, leaving France to reckon with their imperialist identity and the way their institution has reinforced oppression--both at home and abroad.

Just as collection and preservation are tied up with nationalist politics, it is also tied up with the historical context of the period and object. The Louvre, and the objects inside, served as a way to reinforce the imperialist identity that came about in the Napoleonic era. Imperialism and Western supremacy are forces that are created and, thus, they must be maintained, which is often done through institutions with social and political power. As a result, exhibitions and empires are connected, as exhibitions become a way to strengthen empires. This has already been seen and examined following the French Revolution, with the Louvre changing and transforming to fit the

⁵³ Jennifer Meagher, "Orientalism in Nineteenth-Century Art," Last modified October 2004. https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/euor/hd_euor.htm.

changes in power: d'Angiviller and the Royal Louvre, the Republic and the Revolutionary Louvre, and Napoleon and the Musée Napoleon. Museums are not static institutions, which is where their power lies. The grand collection, which stood at the center of all of these variations of the Louvre, was and is based largely in looting; when the Louvre is praised for their collection with no regard for the origin of the artifacts, we praise and legitimize imperialism as a direct result. At the root of this, lies what James Clifford calls “possessive individualism,” a concept which is strictly Western.⁵⁴ This possessive individualism stems from the idea of making the world one’s own, a bourgeois desire for inner experience in an increasingly modernized world.⁵⁵ Since identity presupposes collection, the act of collecting becomes a way for the West to collect and possess different identities and cultures, like trinkets in a glass case. This behavior of possession is evident in Napoleon’s own attitudes towards collecting and looting, especially in his collecting of “trophy of conquest.” By viewing the conquest and stealing of objects from cultures as mere trophies, Napoleon engages in Orientalism by reducing the cultures to stolen objects as a means to perpetuate French national power in addition to his own. This is further reinforced by the installing of these objects into the Louvre, which communicates to the people of France their own perceived superiority over the conquered non-Western territories. All cultural origins are overlooked and the imbalanced power dynamics are immortalized in the narrative of the museum.

In this way, the Louvre exemplifies the tendency of European museums to “appropriate the exotic” in order to promote nationalism.⁵⁶ There is an illusion of representation, but it is not authentic or nuanced, merely there to make the museums and the history they exhibit diverse.

For the Louvre, it becomes a way for them to exhibit their power over other cultures and

⁵⁴ Clifford, “On Collecting Art and Culture,” 217.

⁵⁵ Clifford, “On Collecting Art and Culture,” 216.

⁵⁶ Clifford, “On Collecting Art and Culture,” 220.

countries, instilling a sense of pride in the French people. In addition to the exhibition of power, it also creates the facade of a ‘public taste’ by cultivating a wide array of art and other cultural objects under the name of France. However, this ‘public taste’ comes at the expense of communities of color, such as Egypt and Asia, whose objects were plundered and then exhibited, often without this context, in order to demonstrate the ‘worldliness’ of French culture. As a result, these ‘exotic’ cultures are trapped under this label, and are rarely able to rise above it. The artifacts are assigned value based on relative European ideals. While European objects are often able to ‘rise above’ their categorization of cultural objects, their non-Western counterparts’ objects become one-dimensional representations of their entire cultures, trapped as a ‘cultural production’-- a part meant to stand in for an “abstract whole.”⁵⁷ These are not, as Said would say, “natural” depictions of the Orient; rather, they are representations that disregard narrative devices, political treatises, and social and historical circumstances.⁵⁸ It is not enough to simply have representation-- there must be a *re-presence*.

The Louvre stands as the “greatest symbol of high white culture.”⁵⁹ In their efforts to place themselves beside the likes of the Romans by creating a “temple of the arts,” the Louvre inherently promotes Eurocentric ideals as the cradle of society.⁶⁰ This has implications regarding France’s own outlook on non-Westerners, as the stolen cultural artifacts displayed in the Louvre were often nineteenth century France’s first interactions with ‘foreign’ cultures. The way these artifacts are exhibited and framed teaches the public of France how non-Westerners are and how they should be perceived and treated. By promoting Western, specifically French, hegemony and imperialism, the Louvre inexplicably justifies the harm done at their own hands while also

⁵⁷ Clifford, “On Collecting Art and Culture,” 223-225.

⁵⁸ Said, “Orientalism,” 21.

⁵⁹ Ana Lucia Araujo, “Blackening the Louvre,” Last modified 18 June 2018.

<https://www.historianviews.com/?p=300>.

⁶⁰ Wright, *The Formation of National Collections of Art and Archaeology*, 9.

supporting racist ideals that view the East as backwards and the West as rational. In this way, the Louvre stands as a grand example of the power museums hold-- both in articulating their own identity and the identity of the 'others.' The national museum becomes a "spectacle of possession."⁶¹ Viewing the museum as a curation of collective memory, this possession becomes a part of the nation's identity; thus, integrating French Orientalism into the identity of France following Napoleon. Furthermore, there is a great want for the "original aura" of an object that a reproduction cannot capture as a result of a lacking of the essence that historical duration brings about, a belief that is uniquely Western and rooted in the Renaissance.⁶² This attitude of possession and desire for authenticity becomes a way to justify Europe's desire to loot and steal cultural treasures for the sake of obtaining and displaying *the* original.

The relationship between the Louvre and the city of Paris itself adds to the Orientalism evident both within the museum and French identity. Returning to the idea that the museum itself was a national monument within the living museums that is the city of Paris, the Louvre became an artifact itself: an artifact of France's power. The non-Western artifacts inside of the museum served as a testament to this, as the stories and origins of these artifacts were never exhibited. Instead, European stories were forced upon these cultural objects, as they stood as symbols for military victories and France's global conquest within the narrative of the Louvre. Additionally, the physical layout of the museum tells a story itself when viewing the Louvre as an artifact. Generally, the organization of a museum and its exhibits serves as a way to define social, political, and physical criteria for classification. The layout and organization of the Louvre was intentional, a way to walk through French history and see its progression towards perfection.

⁶¹ Wright, *The Formation of National Collections of Art and Archaeology*, 12.

⁶²Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn, 1-26 (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 6.

When looking at the layout of the Louvre, many of the looted antiquities, such as Egyptian, Islamic, Greek, and Eastern, are located on the basement floor of the museum.⁶³ If the movement through the Louvre was meant to be a movement through French history, what does it mean that the stolen cultural objects and their history are physically below that of the French? The layout and organization of the museum itself perpetuates Orientalism and French hegemony. In doing so, the French are able to maintain their revolutionary desire to represent the movement through the Louvre as movement through varying degrees of perfection, implying that the Orient is the furthest away from perfection while they remain in their place as the culmination of culture and taste.

At the core of all of this, is the belief that the East is not intellectual enough to exhibit their own work, that if the Orient could represent itself, it would, and since they cannot, the West will bravely take it on for them: *faute de mieux*, the poor Orient.⁶⁴ The exploitation of non-Western objects, in addition to this general attitude of pity, was evident in the collection, display, and depiction of other cultures. Proponents of the Romantic movement, such as Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), avidly took up themes of violence and cruelty in Oriental subjects, meant to depict the East as a place of backwardness, lawlessness, or barbarism enlightened and tamed by French rule.⁶⁵ These portrayals of the East as too irresponsible or backwards-- the belief of *faute de mieux*-- to care for and properly display their own objects reinforced imperialist thought. At a larger level, it took agency away from these cultures, never providing them with the chance, nor platform, to share their own histories, traditions, and cultures. Consequently, the exhibition of 'exotic' artifacts is not really an exhibition of other cultures' art and artifacts— it

⁶³ “Maps, Entrances, & Directions,” accessed 20 November 2021, <https://www.louvre.fr/en/visit/map-entrances-directions#museum-map>.

⁶⁴ Said, “Orientalism,” 21.

⁶⁵ Meagher, “Orientalism in Nineteenth-Century Art.”

was a display of power. It reinforced French imperialist identity, at the expense of non-western communities, and the display of art and cultures became an artificial creation.⁶⁶

After Napoleon, the Orient was seen as a place of pilgrimage for the Europeans, a place that contains a past of ancient greatness.⁶⁷ At the same time, however, the present of those places was seen as morally perverse and strange. The Orient was ‘awaiting restoration,’ further reinforcing this idea that the East was in need of the French to ‘tame’ and bring civilization to them.⁶⁸ Once again, the illusion of representation is created and maintained; when in reality, the object was not being exhibited to showcase the actual object. As a result, the stolen cultural objects became, as Nina Simon defines them, “social objects”: the content around which conversation happens.⁶⁹ Within social objects, there are provocative objects-- objects that are spectacles within their own right. The French turned the stolen objects into provocative social objects, ridding them of all their cultural depth in the process. A nineteenth century engraving by Honore Daumier titled “The Egyptians weren’t good looking!” exhibited the tendency of the French to orientalize non-Western objects (Figure 3), rather than using their presence as a way to learn about another culture.⁷⁰ By forcing these artifacts to become social objects, it only fed more into Orientalism, as the objects were taken out of original context and put into

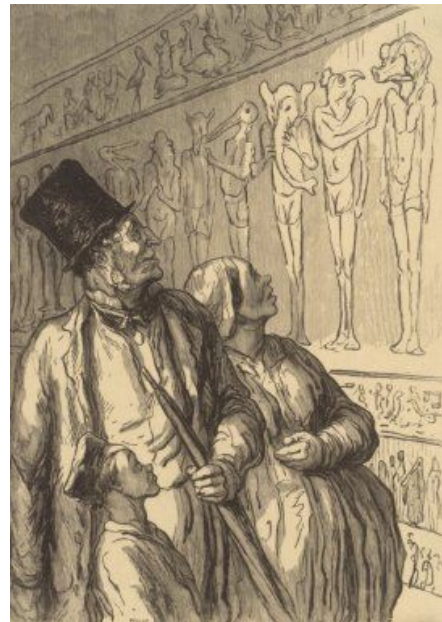


Figure 3

⁶⁶ Wright, *The Formation of National Collections of Art and Archaeology*, 127.

⁶⁷ Said, “Orientalism,” 171.

⁶⁸ Said, “Orientalism,” 171.

⁶⁹ Nina Simon, “Chapter 4: Social Objects,” in *The Participatory Museum*, <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/chapter4/>.

⁷⁰ Honore Daumier, “*The Egyptians weren’t good looking!*” Wood engraving, 1867.

context of imperialism. The meaning behind them was shallow, only an aid meant to garner attention in addition to exhibiting power through the provocative nature of conquests and looting. For example, the European presence in Egypt attracted Western travelers to the Near and Middle East, many of whom captured their impressions in paint or print.⁷¹ The French were able to capitalize on this by displaying the stolen Egyptian artifacts in the Louvre, attracting European tourists and other Western travelers who desired an interaction with ‘otherness.’ The Louvre, while following the trends of French power and authority, created national identity that reinforces and perpetuates the imperialist thought of the Napoleonic era, demonstrating the harm nationalism, and the desire to create it, can have on those who are never given the agency and opportunity to do so for themselves.

The Great Sphinx of Tanis & Reviews of the Louvre

“It was the West that moved upon the East, not vice versa.”⁷² The Western desire to exhibit the Orient stemmed from this fascination with the perceived differences between the East and the West. Orientalism refers to the Orient’s place and perception in the European Western experience, which feeds into the resurgence of imperial expansion seen in the nineteenth century.⁷³ The attention given to the Orient by the West was purely based on the separation the West saw between themselves and the East, which prompted them to learn more about the ‘exotic’ but mostly ended up in the conquest and possession of the Orient instead. The Louvre, which at this point, was a symbol of European power and taste that was fortified by the power symbol Napoleon himself had become in the nineteenth century. Napoleon, and his other Western counterparts, wished to exhibit the Orient in order to perpetuate the belief that they were

⁷¹ Meagher, “Orientalism in Nineteenth-Century Art.”

⁷² Said, “Orientalism,” 73.

⁷³ Said, “Orientalism,” 1.

the center of civilization, intellect, and humanity. Napoleon, specifically, wished for Paris to become the new Rome-- to become the cradle of society. However, in addition to this desire to display their power, the West also wished to exhibit the Orient in order to display and examine the 'strangeness' of the East, never to truly exhibit the narratives and cultures of these foreigners. In this way, the Louvre's exhibition of Oriental objects became a symbol of power-- over both the Western and non-Western counterparts alike. The Louvre, as we know it in modernity, is a direct result of Napoleon's conquests, imperialism, and Orientalism. This section will examine the impacts of this, both at home and abroad, during and immediately after the Napoleonic era, demonstrating the implications of the integration of French Orientalism into the national identity of France through the Louvre and its national collection.

The Great Sphinx of Tanis was acquired in 1826 by Henry Salt, which was also one year before the opening of the Egyptian Department in the Louvre.⁷⁴ The Sphinx is meant to stand guard at the entrance of the Louvre department's Egyptian antiquities, "welcoming visitors" to the museum. In this way, the artifact is not truly exhibited, rather it has turned into a provocative social object. The object is a spectacle in its own right, which is why it has become the 'guard' of the other stolen cultural objects. It has been removed from its historical, social, and cultural context and is, instead, shown for its strangeness in comparison to the other European artifacts. In addition to this, it is the largest Sphinx outside of Egypt, which further lends to the classification as a provocative social object. Moreover, this lack of context that is replaced with the grandeur of the object simply being there demonstrates Orientalism on display. The Louvre is exhibiting the strangeness of other cultures and their symbols of religion, culture, and tradition. Moreover, it is never brought into conversation with other Western objects, illustrating this

⁷⁴ "The Guardian of Egyptian Art," accessed 23 November 2021, <https://www.louvre.fr/en/explore/the-palace/the-guardian-of-egyptian-art>.

perceived difference between the West and the East. Furthermore, the physical location reveals more of this separation, with the Great Sphinx at the entrance of the Sully Room on Level -1 (the basement floor).⁷⁵ The map of the Louvre tells the visitor to start at the bottom floor, beginning with the antiquities of the Orient.⁷⁶ Based on the original notion of the Louvre as “a continuous and uninterrupted sequence revealing the progress of the arts and the degrees of the perfection attained by various nations that have cultivated them,” the movement through the museum beginning with the Orient and then being followed by the Western artwork insinuates and reinforces European Western hegemony.⁷⁷ This also perpetuates the idea that the Orient was at one point great, but no longer maintain the greatness of their prehistoric predecessors-- leaving them stuck in a fixed state that cannot keep up with the advancements of their Western counterparts.

The Egyptian Department was founded with "a view to spreading knowledge of this mysterious civilisation that had long fascinated Europeans."⁷⁸ In this way, Egypt, and other Oriental cultures, became the subject of fascination and mystery, never really seen beyond their 'strangeness' and the exaggerated difference between the East and West. Said called this "Europe's collective day dream of the Orient," which suggests that Europe never truly sees the Orient as what they truly are and instead views them through this dreamy, mystified, and shallow lens.⁷⁹ The West mostly focused on the ancient past of the Orient, which kept the Orient fixed in a prehistoric and faraway time of greatness. Napoleon, however, differed from his Western counterpart when he opened the Institut d'Egypte, which “was the first time much attention was

⁷⁵ “The Guardian of Egyptian Art.”

⁷⁶ “Maps, Entrances, & Directions.”

⁷⁷ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 113.

⁷⁸ “The Guardian of Egyptian Art.”

⁷⁹ Said, “Orientalism,” 52.

given to the academic study of the actual, or modern, Orient.”⁸⁰ However, while Napoleon focused on and studied modern Egypt, he did so in a way that would emphasize the power of France-- their ability to conquer and possess the Orient. It was a promise of conquest to come and a symbol of the cultural authority that France imposed over Egypt and, thus, the Orient in general. Napoleon, himself, mystified Egypt in his own studies, “steeped in the glories of Alexander’s Orient” and feeding into his desire to conquer Egypt as the ‘new Alexander.’⁸¹ He wanted to possess all of the Orient and his invasion of Egypt marked a dramatic shift in the West’s interactions with the Orient, as the relationship of difference was now poisoned with power and domination. The Orient transformed “from being a land of obscurity” to a land that must be conquered.⁸²

As travel between countries became more normalized and tourism picked up, the Louvre garnered reviews from those who wished to witness the grandeur of France’s national collection, marking a shift in the museum as something purely for the French citizens’ national identity towards an institution that reinforced the power of France. One review published in 1809, titled “An Account of the State of the Museum of Napoleon, in the Louvre, in Paris,” goes through the history of the Louvre palace prior to it being a museum in addition to going through the renovations the Louvre had undergone to account for the expansion in its objects.⁸³ The detailed list of renovations harkens back to and emphasizes that the Louvre we see today truly is Napoleon’s Louvre-- that is, a product of imperialist beliefs and stolen artifacts. The review then goes on to state that the Louvre is “the most splendid monument of its kind, that can possibly be presented to the admiration of Europe,” citing “the victories of the French enabled them to bring

⁸⁰ Said, “Orientalism,” 52.

⁸¹ Said, “Orientalism,” 80.

⁸² Said, “Orientalism,” 83.

⁸³ “An Account of the State of the Museum of Napoleon, in the Louvre, in Paris,” *The British Register*, July 1809, British Periodicals, 453.

together the richest collection that now exists."⁸⁴ The Louvre was truly seen as a national monument, not only by the French but also by their European counterparts. Moreover, the idea of the objects being “trophy of conquest” is further perpetuated by this review, as the stolen objects are referred to as ‘victories’ that allow France to possess a rich and varied collection. Another interesting point from this review is the statement that the Louvre opened to the public in 1798, completely disregarding the Revolutionary phase of the Louvre and its original opening in 1793.⁸⁵ This reinforced Napoleon’s desire to be seen as a continuation of the monarchy, bringing stability to France following the incredible chaos of the Revolution. The review ends with a discussion of the Gallery of Antiquities, which contains sculptures and artifacts from Greek, Egyptian, Roman, and Italian origins. In reference to these, the author states that “we are alike ignorant whence it came from, and when and how it found its way to France,” demonstrating the lack of knowledge surrounding the unjust and violent origins behind the stealing of these objects.⁸⁶ France’s European counterparts were fine with supporting the looting of objects as a legitimate acquisition method, reinforcing the imbalance between the East and West and the imperialist era that was to come.

The second review follows the Duke of Wellington in a call to return the plundered works of art in the Louvre to their original owners. Written a few months after Napoleon’s fall at the Battle of Waterloo in June of 1815, this review highlighted the way in which the Louvre had filled its halls with stolen objects from both the West and East.⁸⁷ Duke Wellington wrote this in September of 1815 on behalf of the King of Netherlands, in the hopes that Denon, the Director of

⁸⁴ “An Account of the State of the Museum of Napoleon, in the Louvre, in Paris,” 454.

⁸⁵ “An Account of the State of the Museum of Napoleon, in the Louvre, in Paris,” 453.

⁸⁶ “An Account of the State of the Museum of Napoleon, in the Louvre, in Paris,” 455.

⁸⁷ “The Duke of Wellington to Lord Castlereagh, Relative to the Seizure of the Plundered Works of Art in the Louvre, By their Legitimate Owners,” *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 23 September 1815, British Periodicals, 620.

the Louvre under Napoleon, would return the stolen artwork. After the Battle of Waterloo, much of the stolen European art was returned; however, many remained in the Louvre on display.

Denon states that he should "suffer none to be taken away but by force," illustrating the conviction in ownership the authorities of France felt they had over the stolen artwork.⁸⁸

Nevertheless, the artwork cannot actually be returned to the Netherlands because it would be in breach of the Treaty of Paris, made in 1814 and made the possession of the artwork on the behalf of France legal.⁸⁹ Even beyond his rule, Napoleon's impact lived on, allowing France to maintain the possession of stolen objects through the use of peace treaties that made the acquisition legal and legitimate. The review ends with the statement that "they would desire to retain those works of Art, not because Paris is the most properest place to for them to be preserved in (for all Artists and Connoisseurs who have written on the subject agree that they must be sent back to the places where they originally were) but because they have been acquired by conquest, of which they are trophies."⁹⁰ This statement, while refuting Napoleon's wish to have Paris seen as the center of civilization, subscribes to the idea that conquest and looting were legitimate methods of acquisition while also supporting the "trophies of conquest" ideology that Napoleon relied on throughout his reign. While the author of this review began his demanding the return of the stolen art, he ultimately seemed to concede to France's imperialist powers by stating that their conquest of these objects justified their possession of them.

Both of these accounts wash over the imperialist notions evident in the Louvre and justify the looting through the "trophies of conquest" notion. Moreover, they both demonstrate the

⁸⁸ "The Duke of Wellington to Lord Castlereagh, Relative to the Seizure of the Plundered Works of Art in the Louvre, By their Legitimate Owners," 620.

⁸⁹ "The Duke of Wellington to Lord Castlereagh, Relative to the Seizure of the Plundered Works of Art in the Louvre, By their Legitimate Owners," 621.

⁹⁰ "The Duke of Wellington to Lord Castlereagh, Relative to the Seizure of the Plundered Works of Art in the Louvre, By their Legitimate Owners," 621.

impact of Napoleon's power throughout and following the Napoleonic era, with the first review choosing to see the beginning of the Louvre as Napoleon's Louvre instead of the Revolutionary Louvre while the second review demonstrated the power of his peace treaties as a way to legitimate the owning of the stolen objects. However, only European voices were truly able to voice their opinions on the Louvre, both as an institution and their practices. Non-Western voices were never given the platform to voice their grievances over stolen objects and the aftermath of conquests, nor would they be taken seriously if they had due to the perpetuation of European hegemony. It also reiterated Said's statement that the West believed the East too irresponsible to represent their own histories, which would explain the returning of some European artifacts that were looted under Napoleon but the returning of no Oriental artifacts-- highlighting the Orientalist belief that the objects would not be adequately exhibited in their own culture and justifying the West's right of conquest. displayed in the East and The reviews demonstrate the different views other European powers had of the Louvre at the time. Some embraced the Louvre and all it stood for-- the nationalism, diverse collection, imperialism: the pinnacle of Western culture and taste. On the other hand, some recognized the faults of the Louvre, as seen in Duke Wellington's demand for the return of the plundered objects; however, the European powers are not able to recognize the same problems evident in the dynamic between West and East, only choosing to see the problem as a problem that excludes the Orient and the appropriation of the East for the benefit of the West.

Conclusions

Museums, at their very core, exist as an institution. As a result, they have the power to influence how the public views and interacts with history; consequently, museums impact how

their viewers also view other cultures, histories, artifacts, and identities. More specifically, the museum is an “institution of recognition,” as the process of acquisition and exhibiting artifacts essentially recognizes and affirms certain identities while omitting and passing over others.⁹¹ Often, the museum tends to be seen as a neutral space, overlooking the influence curators and donors have in choosing to exhibit certain artifacts and histories. The inner workings of historical institutions, like museums, and the variance that exists in historical narratives exhibit the subjective nature of history. When such a subjective space is perceived as objective, it has implications for the interpretation and perception of history by the viewer, which impacts how the broader public understands both the present and past. As an institution, museums wield power-- it becomes critical for both the history worker and visitor to remember this as they either create exhibitions or move through museums that, ultimately, an institution is telling the narrative. The narratives presented to the viewer in a museum are meant to suggest, on some level, how history should be interpreted, which becomes problematic when looking at the issue of representation within museums and exhibitions. James Clifford, in “On Collecting Art and Culture,” discusses the ties between national identity and the art-culture system. Clifford states that the act of collecting is inherently Western and possessive, used as a way to own and assign worth to various material objects. As a result, “all collections embody a hierarchy of value.”⁹² Curators assign value to artifacts and the histories attached to them by deciding, not only, how to exhibit those artifacts, but also whether or not they are even exhibited in the first place. In this way, certain ‘voices’ and stories are excluded from, or marginalized within, the institution of the museum and the broader public sphere.⁹³ The interaction of public audiences in addition to the inclusion of marginalized histories leads to questions of what it means to tell and exhibit history,

⁹¹ Macdonald, *A Companion to Museum Studies*, 49.

⁹² Clifford, “On Collecting Art and Culture,” 218.

⁹³ Macdonald, *A Companion to Museum Studies*, 49.

especially difficult history, to the public without sanctifying or washing over the complicated narratives of the past. In order to engage a broader public, the museum cannot stand as an institution that appeals or is adapted to the palates of white, middle-upper class audiences. To engage a broader public means to make museums a space of dialogue and sharing-- to share the narratives of those who have been spoken over and whose artifacts have been exploited for the sake of Western narratives. Museums must examine the role they play in upholding power structures by looking at the multiple ways they engage in exploitation and oppression, with the exhibits, artists, and audiences they choose to engage with being the strongest factors of this.

The Louvre was used throughout and beyond the French Revolution as a tool to communicate to the public the national identity of France, as the authority and identity of the nation fluctuated throughout the end of the eighteenth and going into the nineteenth century. Public museums and national collections have long been used as a means to foster nationalism, a concept which is embodied in the Louvre. Throughout each phase of the museum, d'Angivillier's Royal Louvre, the Republic's Revolutionary Louvre, and Napoleon's Musée Napoleon, the national collection has been used to reinforce the agenda of each phase and evoke feelings of belonging and support from their citizens. However, the Louvre we see today is a direct product of the imperialism and conquest carried out by Napoleon during his reign, as he hoped to conquer the world and make Paris 'the new Rome.' In this way, the Louvre, in all its phases, upholds European hegemony by standing as what is meant to be the 'height of culture.' The Louvre during and following the Napoleonic era further reinforced European, particularly French, superiority through the plundering and display of Oriental cultural objects as a means to exhibit the power of the French empire. Consequently, French Orientalism was integrated into the French identity-- leaving the country to reckon with the implications of upholding and

identifying with a historical institution which subscribes to Western hegemony and stolen artifacts.

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