Importance
Many museums in the United States and throughout the art-rich world have been involved in the illegal antiquities trade. In order to secure objects that draw crowds into their institutions, museums sometimes take historical objects from their origin countries and manipulate laws to their advantage to keep objects within their possessions. The issue of ownership vs. heritage comes into questions when museum-rich countries attempt to gain exclusive control over these traded objects. There is no international law to bound the museum-rich countries to the legal exchange of antiquities

Thesis
Many art-rich countries cannot protect historical remnants found on their lands because there is no globally recognized international law to protect art or historic objects that is followed by all art-rich and museum-rich countries. Although the policies in place attempt to internationally gain control over the illegal art and antiquity black market trade, it doesn’t fully prevent the trade and loss of heritage from the origin countries from occurring and flourishing throughout the international collector and museum market.

Some Well-Known Players
Metropolitan Museum of Art: Accused of illegal buying and excavation of multiple objects in recent years.
American Museum of Natural History: Uncompleted catalogs of and unknown chains of possession of Native American artifacts which led to the return of a beaver ornament to the Tlingit village of Angoon in 1999.
National Museum of the American Indian George Gustave Hayes Center: In 1999 the Tlingit tribe from Alaska regained possession of their ceremonial bear hat which they originally gained the possession from a private collector. The Bear Hat was returned under NAGPRA.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art: Raided and received warrants for artifacts within their exhibits.
Private Collectors/ Smugglers: People such as Jonathan and Cari Markell obtained and bought the smuggled artifacts from Thailand in 2003 when an undercover art agent from the National Parks Service contacted them with the artifacts in his possession.

How Is Art Destroyed?
De-Heritage: Occurs when groups or nations attempt to destroy art and culture to change the narrative of the past.
Ethnicide: Changing, destroying or manipulating the past
- Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan in 2001: The Taliban destroyed two Buddha statues which takes away the history in Afghanistan for the pre-Islamic world.
Illegal Looting/ Digging: The removal of art by illegal excavators from a site which usually occurs during times of political upheaval
Smuggling: occurs when objects are secretly taken out of their origin country.
- Silk Road Gallery was accused of smuggling items within their gallery from Thailand, China and Myanmar. The objects in this case were very valuable not just in monetary value, but cultural value as well. They originated in Thailand from the Ban Chiang culture. This culture dates back from 1,000 B.C. to about 200 A.D. The area that these artifacts originated from is now a UNESCO site and protected by the United Nations.

What Research Is Occurring?
Geospatial Information Systems (GIS): Experts are trained in this field to track developments of sights and to look for signs of looting. This would allow for archeologists and historians trained with this technology to watch sights of interest. For example, a main program working under this system is the Spatial History Project lead by Richard White and Stanford University.
Public Land Survey System (PLSS): Landscapes can be observed in this system allows for areas to be observed such as religious buildings and important archeological sites.

Institutions Holding Authority Over The International Art Trade
International Council of Museums (ICOM): Represents 3,000 globally found museums
The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO): Work to maintain transparent reports of institutional exchange of antiquities and also reports of trafficked items across borders across the United States and Europe.

Policies In Place That Attempt To Control The Black Market Trade
National Stolen Property Act (NSPA): attempted to control property sold in the United States under the understanding that it has been stolen from another nation prior to the establishment of the current United States.
- Weakness: Cases are very difficult to prosecute when the vendor did not have apparent prior knowledge to the object being stolen. This occurs in United States v. McClain as the defendants argued that vague Mexican laws of ownership was the fault in this situation because the time period of ownership of the Mexican government over Pre-Columbian artifacts was up to debate.
The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA): Federally funded museums must reveal information about Native American artifacts in their collections
- Weakness: The catalogues given and revealed to the native tribes are not always completely fully complete or accurate. Such was the case for Tlingit village of Angoon and the American Museum of Natural History