

## Do you think that forcing institutions to apologize for past measures is an efficient solution to reach more equality?

Make reparations? What does it mean? Ex.: for slavery, for confiscation of works of art in former colonies.

On Wednesday June 11, 2008, the Prime Minister of Canada, the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, made a Statement of Apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools, on behalf of the Government of Canada.

### us United States

#### 1. U.S. Government to Japanese Americans (1988)

**Who apologized:** U.S. Congress & President Ronald Reagan

**For:** Internment of ~120,000 Japanese Americans during WWII

- The **Civil Liberties Act of 1988** formally acknowledged the internment was driven by *“racial prejudice, wartime hysteria, and a failure of political leadership.”*
- Survivors received a written apology and financial reparations.

👉 Often cited as a benchmark for combining **apology + material redress**.

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#### 2. U.S. Government to African Americans (2009, symbolic)

**Who apologized:** U.S. House of Representatives

**For:** Slavery and Jim Crow segregation

- The resolution apologized for *“the enslavement and racial segregation of African-Americans.”*
- It explicitly **did not include reparations**, which sparked criticism.

👉 Important symbolically, but controversial for its limits.

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### CA Canada

#### 3. Canadian Government to Indigenous Peoples (2008)

**Who apologized:** Prime Minister Stephen Harper

**For:** Residential schools system

- Indigenous children were forcibly removed from families and abused in state- and church-run schools.
- Harper acknowledged the policy aimed to *“kill the Indian in the child.”*

👉 Widely seen as a landmark apology, though many argue reconciliation remains incomplete.

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#### 4. Canadian Government to LGBTQ+ Communities (2017)

**Who apologized:** Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

**For:** Purges of LGBTQ+ people from public service and military

- Trudeau called the discrimination “*wrong, unjust, and cruel.*”
- Included compensation and law reform.

👉 Notable for its **explicit emotional language** and accountability.

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#### AU Australia

#### 5. Australian Government to the Stolen Generations (2008)

**Who apologized:** Prime Minister Kevin Rudd

**For:** Forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

- Rudd repeatedly said: “*We say sorry.*”
- Acknowledged long-term trauma inflicted on families and cultures.

👉 Highly emotional moment; widely supported across party lines.

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#### GB United Kingdom

#### 6. British Government to Victims of Bloody Sunday (2010)

**Who apologized:** Prime Minister David Cameron

**For:** Killing of 14 unarmed civilians by British soldiers in Northern Ireland (1972)

- After the Saville Inquiry, Cameron stated the killings were “*unjustified and unjustifiable.*”

👉 Rare example of a UK apology clearly assigning **state fault**.

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#### 7. Church of England to Survivors of Abuse (various statements, ongoing)

**Who apologized:** Archbishops and senior clergy

**For:** Failure to protect children from abuse

- Apologies acknowledged institutional cover-ups and harm caused.
- Often criticized for being **reactive rather than proactive**.

👉 Shows how apologies can lose credibility if not paired with reform.

International & national history: domination / persecutions / repressive policies... = historical pattern creating & perpetuating current inequalities (poverty / discriminations / racial tensions...) between former oppressors and historical victims

- ***Why is the image of repentance so important?***
- Apologies & recognition of victims
  - National or institutional apologies (from head of state, government) = image / exposition of guilt and past actions → concrete modern condemnation of past abuse → moral / ethical dimension (cf former empires apologizing to colonized populations to prove culture has changed)
  - Growing demand for excuses & repentance → necessity of symbolic reparation → social need in 21<sup>st</sup>-century world? (cf destruction of statues & calls to remove monuments to historical figures associated with slave trade: UK, US, & Colbert monuments in France)
- Apologies VS actions
  - Official declaration of guilt = forced apology = question of sincerity → brings moral dimension to political / economic context → country apologizing has other priorities (communication / political strategy...)
  - Reparation may not match promises made in apology speeches: cf Australia & official apologies from PM to Aboriginal population in 2008 VS recent discriminatory measures (Nov. 2023: rejection of creation of special Aboriginal representation in Parliament)
- What next?
  - Image of repentance = public relations VS true social evolution? → cf US: Black History Month & rehabilitation projects VS ongoing racial discrimination & racism / police brutality + Australia's example
  - Conflict & tensions continue despite institutional apologies: cf France and apologies to former colonies VS 2023 immigration law primarily targeting immigrants from these countries

- Apologies from governments / institutions / countries for past oppressive measures have a strong symbolic value, but the true challenge is evolving from the past and building a shared path towards a constructive future.

### 1. The Benin Bronzes (Nigeria)

**Held by:** British Museum and many Western institutions

**Origin:** Kingdom of Benin (present-day Nigeria)

- Looted by British forces during the **1897 punitive expedition**.
- Thousands of bronzes, ivories, and sculptures were taken.
- **Since 2021**, several museums in the UK, Germany, and the U.S. have **returned or committed to returning** pieces to Nigeria.

👉 Often seen as *the* flagship case of colonial-era restitution.

### 3. The Magdala (Maḡdalā) Treasures (Ethiopia)

**Held by:** British Museum, V&A, private collections

**Origin:** Ethiopia

- Taken after the **1868 British expedition to Magdala**, following the defeat of Emperor Tewodros II.
- Includes crowns, manuscripts, crosses, and regalia.
- Some items have been **returned or loaned long-term**, though many remain in the UK.

👉 A strong example where religious and cultural significance intensifies restitution claims.