



## Legislation Text

**File #:** Res 1311-2000, **Version:** \*

Res. No. 1311

Resolution calling on the British government to arrange for the return of the sculptures known as the "Elgin Marbles" from the British Museum to its rightful place in Athens, Greece.

By the Speaker (Council Member Vallone) and Council Members Dear, Freed, Marshall, Nelson, Provenzano, White, Fiala and Stabile; also Council Members Cruz, Eisland, Koslowitz, McCaffrey, Michels, O'Donovan and Ognibene

Whereas, Beginning in 1802 and continuing through 1812, Thomas Bruce, 7th Lord Elgin and then-British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire removed several marble sculptures from the Parthenon, one of the world's most important ancient ruins, and had them shipped from Athens to England, where they were eventually sold to the British government in 1816; and

Whereas, Lord Elgin was granted the authority to select treasures for shipment to England by the Ottoman Empire, the occupying force in Greece at the time, and for nearly two centuries since that time, the nation of Greece has gone without these great cultural treasures and symbols of Greece's ancient past; and

Whereas, After the transport of the shipments from Athens to England, in which several sculptures were damaged, there was outcry from Greeks and many in England, who questioned the tactics used by Lord Elgin to acquire the sculptures, which are currently housed at the British Museum in London; and

Whereas, The debate and controversy has continued to this day, with the Greek government and prominent members of the British government calling for the return of what are known as the "Elgin Marbles" back to Greece where they will be safely displayed at a new museum planned at the Acropolis in Athens; and

Whereas, The British Museum has refused to arrange for the return of the marbles claiming that the sculptures were obtained legally and belong in the British Museum, where it is a highlight of the Museum's collection; it also refuses to entertain the possibility of replacing its exhibit with replications of the Elgin Marbles; and

Whereas, The British Museum cites a British law that prohibits the Museum from permanently disposing of any objects, other than duplicates or objects of no value, and it argues that since the British Museum has preserved the sculptures and is a "universal museum," that it is in part, justified in continuing to house the Elgin Marbles; and

Whereas, Despite the concession of many British and world officials that Greece has greatly improved the standards of its museums, has reduced atmospheric pollution in Athens and has issued plans for a suitable home for the marbles at the Acropolis, the British government has chosen not to introduce legislation that would permit the return of the Elgin Marbles to Athens; and

Whereas, Unfortunately, the British government chooses to honor the disputable legality of Lord Elgin's acquirement of the marbles and the legitimacy of an authorization made two hundred years ago by the Ottoman Empire, a foreign, occupying force that decided to allow the dismemberment of a Greek national treasure; and

Whereas, In today's world, where it is not uncommon for modern governments to acknowledge the mistakes of their predecessors, offer apologies and make reparations in the name of all that is right and just, the British government should carefully review the conditions in which the removal and transfer of the Parthenon sculptures took place and arrange for the reunion of these sculptures with the people of Greece; and

Whereas, Furthermore, with Athens hosting the 2004 Olympics, what a grand and historic gesture it would be if Great Britain gave back the Elgin Marbles to Greece in time for all the nations of the world to see; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls on the British government to arrange for the return of the sculptures known as the "Elgin Marbles" from the British Museum to its rightful place in Athens, Greece.

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- 3 -