

# The Fight against Statues Is a Fight against Civilization

Left-wing extremists have hijacked the Floyd protests to wage war against American achievement.

by Conrad Black



**The movement to tear down statues** or even just to deface them was misconceived in its earliest stages and has now, like most aspects of the self-flagellating fever over “systemic racism,” evolved from just concerns about offending African-American sensibilities into an assault on the entire body of achievement of Western civilization. This movement really began with the debate over whether to remove the statue of General Robert E. Lee from a main square of Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017. Serious civic discussion on a legitimate question quickly deteriorated into mob violence between Klansmen and neo-Nazis on one side and Antifa and the belligerent faction of the now lionized Black Lives Matter (BLM) on the other.

The legitimate protest over a white police officer's killing of African-American Minneapolis resident George Floyd on May 25 quickly descended into widespread rioting, arson, and pillage, and demands for the removal of statues of eminent Caucasians from Christopher Columbus to Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Winston Churchill. Some statues probably should be removed, but what we have now has degenerated with the astonishing speed that reasonable advocacy groups were transformed by domestic terrorists. The underlying argument is that society is "systemically racist," and therefore that its leaders are also racist, are venerated for false reasons, and the entire notion of Western civilization represented politically by traditionally revered figures is an affront to and "disrespectful" of blacks. BLM is admirably inclusive in matters of gender, sexuality, age, and religion, but it excludes non-blacks – those of Asian extraction, from Israel and Arabia to India and China and Japan, are in the same purgatory as whites, except that they have not supposedly been as oppressive of blacks. There is no movement to tear down statues of Gandhi or Mao Tse-tung, or vocal resentment of Arab slave-trafficking in blacks, which continues still. In an astonishing public-relations triumph, BLM suddenly ceased to be remembered for its identification with the murder of white policemen (including eight in Dallas and Baton Rouge in July 2016). It has seized the mantle of African-American self-respect and pursuit of justice.

A statue of Washington or Jefferson is seen as a provocative gesture, as both were slaveholders. It is more of a stretch to attack Lincoln, since he declared in his second inaugural that the Union would eliminate slavery no matter how many Union soldiers died achieving that goal. He famously declared: "If God wills that every drop of blood drawn by the lash shall be repaid by a drop of blood drawn by the sword, then as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said that the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." Lincoln abominated slavery all of his conscient life and

eventually came to agree with the concept of the equality of intelligence and ability of all races, partly because of his conversations with the great African-American leader Frederick Douglass. Even the emancipator of the African-Americans cannot escape the wrath of the hate-fueled leaders of Antifa and the militant elements of BLM, who wish to burn down America and society generally. Perhaps the most extreme formulation of this view is from Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam, (as if Islam has been well-disposed to blacks), who proclaims that Jews are "termites" and Hitler was "a very great man" (referring to his moral qualities as much as his talents).

This is the difficulty with the entire effort to reason with extremists: They don't really want to reach an agreement. They skulked forward hiding behind the skirts of respectable reform organizations who wish equality and brotherhood in America. They seize on horrible incidents and even minor controversies about a statue and magnify them into assaults on public order and private property, dragging behind them the useful liberal idiots who would have us believe that Antifa is a legitimate reform organization. This resembles the trajectory of the anti-Trump Resistance itself. It started with those who claimed Trump was a Russian agent, a misogynist, a crook, and a racist. He is none of these, though he has his faults. Yet instead of treating him as a political opponent and seeking to defeat him electorally, they have assaulted him relentlessly with completely unfounded allegations of treason, high constitutional crimes, of bringing down upon the country a pandemic, and of dodging his inescapable moral duty to fight the pandemic by shutting down the economy and inciting an economic depression so dire that he has no chance of reelection. It was in this context that his comments that the initial disputants in Charlottesville were good people arguing both sides of an authentic debate were widely represented in the Democratic media as apologia for the Klan and the Nazis. In such a venomous atmosphere of implacable animosity to

America and to civilization, conciliation and compromise will give way to the assertion of constitutional legitimacy and the ability of all citizens to exercise their constitutional liberties. That time has come.

On the statue question itself, many statues or memorials to Confederate soldiers or politicians could probably be replaced by statues of more deserving people, including in Statuary Hall in the United States Capitol. (Removing them to museums, as some suggest, would create airplane hangars full of derelict statues of forgotten people.) General Lee himself opposed the secession of Virginia, but as was not uncommon in the South, placed the desires of his state above those of the Union, even when he had been offered the command of the Union armies by Lincoln. (Had he accepted, the war would've ended in 1862 with much more generous terms for the South than it ultimately received, and 500,000 fewer dead Americans.)

There is only a weak argument for removing the statues of great generals such as Lee and Stonewall Jackson. There is no argument whatever for removing from the front of the Museum of Natural History in New York the splendid statue of Theodore Roosevelt, which is being done preemptively, according to the director, because statues now attract controversy. (That one is accompanied by a Native American and an African American beside a mounted TR – he was a supporter of both communities). They should retain TR's statue and get rid of the director. She represents precisely the sort of cowardice that feeds and is exploited by the extremism that quickly gets to the head of these apparently well intended movements. There is no earthly excuse for taking down the statue of General (and President) U. S. Grant in San Francisco, or for defacing the statue of Winston Churchill in Parliament Square in London. Compare Confederate leader Jefferson Davis's views of black people to those of Farrakhan's hero and Churchill's arch-foe, Hitler, on the same subject. The first person who advocates the removal of General Sherman's statue in New York's Grand Army Plaza by

St. Gaudens, should be pitilessly mocked and chastised.

The Democratic Party has left the back door open to these anti-democratic extremists and has been infiltrated. It has morally atrophied and is ambiguous between mob rule and sensible law enforcement. The Democrats have a phantom presidential candidate who is clearly unequal to the office which he seeks and have left their campaign to the biased and unprofessional national political media, since the candidate can't make the race. The Democrats are trying to avoid the issues, profit from the coronavirus, and hope for a referendum on Trump stacked by the Trump-hating media. Jefferson, Madison, FDR, Truman, and LBJ were Democratic presidents who importantly strengthened the foundations of American liberty. Those who would remove a statue of Robert E. Lee because he led the Army of Virginia, no more realize that they are facilitating the work of those who would tear down statues of Lincoln and Churchill than those who peacefully protested the criminal death of George Floyd realized their efforts would be hijacked by those who burned and pillaged the businesses of thousands of decent Americans.

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