

Throughout history, monuments, statues, and buildings have been dedicated and erected to those with society-changing ideas and impacts. From ancient Greek statues to the Gods, to current day North American murals of celebrities, politicians, and doctors, people realize the honour and respect the subjects have earned, without much knowledge of the other aspects of the subject's life. But, what happens when societies' standards change, and these subjects do not meet new requirements of virtuous living? What happens when decades of government whitewashing of racism, sexism, homophobia, religious discrimination, bigotry, and general injustice are uncovered? During the Black Lives Matter protests in June 2020, this came to a head, not just in black communities but world-wide. In Canada, we were forced to acknowledge many egregious truths about our history, including that Canada's first Prime Minister, John A. MacDonald (along with many other men we are taught were pinnacles of societal good), was a man full of prejudice with the power to enact policies of racism across a whole country. At least one hundred and fifty thousand First Nations, Inuit, and Metis children and families were destroyed at the decisions of John A. MacDonald. This knowledge, coupled with the reluctance of current governments to act progressively and right the wrongs of the past, resulted in people taking change into their own hands. Vandalism done was not justice, but a dramatic exhibition to incite changes to begin reconciliation.

Many people might think vandalism and destruction of monuments is an overreaction. Which it might be from an ignorant, outside view. Too many people do not have the option to hold that opinion. To one individual, the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol, England might be informative on influential merchant traders of the 17th century. But to many others, that statue commemorates the loss of their family lineages through the slave trade – a beautiful, metal sculpture of the ever-prevalent legacy of injustice. To destroy these monuments does not fix what was done, or guarantee progress in the future, but other avenues: peaceful protesting, lobbying, voting, social media awareness, have been ignored. Removing statues does not right the wrongs of history, but maybe it will start the process of healing.

It can be easy to assume the destruction of monuments was done impulsively without consideration of historical consequences. I want to argue that there is no less critical thinking at that moment than there was when the statues were conceptualized, created, erected, and maintained. It was, and still is, a known fact that powerful historical people were involved and even influential in the most traumatic moments of human history, from the slave trade, to residential schools, to the systemic racism we experience today. Someone decided the good the individual did outweighed the bad. Someone approved the statue, the dedication, the monuments in honour of people such as John A. MacDonald, confederate soldiers, Christopher Columbus, Ku Klux Klan members, and many more. Today, most of society is deciding that it is an inaccurate evaluation, and in truth, the bad aspects of these individuals far overpower their good deeds. Canadian children read about historical icons in their social textbooks. These figures cannot be whitewashed into historical heroes any longer. That is the message the destruction of monuments is sending.

For those who did benefit, and are benefiting, from the transgressions committed by people of historical power, it is hard to accept the truth. The truth that they still are pushed upward in society by decisions of a few men hundreds of years ago. Living in ignorance is easier. Even with all the knowledge available in the modern world, many claim that because they were unaware of the consequences of historical figures' decisions they must not be *that bad*. This thinking halts the progress of society, leaving communities and even countries stuck in old ways, breeding conflict between the ignorant and those seeking betterment.

For the ones treated as lesser beings because of the societal structures set by forefathers, visible change needs to happen. Not just fancy charades and behind-the-scenes talk. To victims, these statues are daily reminders of racism, sexism, violence, homophobia. Overall, injustices are still prevalent monsters of society, and need to be demolished. The destruction of monuments is symbolic of this movement.

Violence is not the answer anyone seeks. Violence only incites more violence in reaction, the destruction of June 2020 was the reaction to centuries of racism. It is a preventable violence, a path taken only when all other avenues are exhausted and drastic action is needed to get any worthy attention. Across the world, people felt the desperation when statues were destroyed (Christopher Columbus statue in Boston, Massachusetts), rolled into harbours (Edward Colston statue in Bristol, England), spray painted (Egerton Ryerson statue at Ryerson University, Toronto), or removed by vote (Athens Confederate Monument in Georgia, United States). Over one year later, we are still talking about the effects of the protests of June 2020, which means it was ultimately necessary. The targeting of statues achieved the goal. Governments and institutions are reevaluating the message these dedications send to communities. The silenced are being heard, and listened to. But unless action is taken by the unrepressed, their screaming (metaphorical and literal) will be in vain.

There is no instant fix for the historical wrongdoings of society, but education may eradicate it for our future. There is a need to teach that historically influential people are not faultless, and that one important good deed, such as building an education system, does not erase the fact it was achieved at the expense of many innocent lives. When we can acknowledge the entire path taken to change history, the good and the bad, then we can decide if any one person is worthy of a monument. Until we reach a point of unity through education, the most important responsibility is to listen to the voices of the historically suppressed, and to use our privilege to further uplift their cause. Until education can be used to seek truth and reconciliation for the underprivileged, empathy and unity are the strongest forces we have.