Statues of empire: questions of race and power

Milly Williamson

Instead of asking why people want to remove statues of slavers, we should ask who wanted them erected in the first place – and why

In recent years, many column inches have been devoted to scrutinising - and often condemning - the motivations of activists and campaigners who call for the downfall of statues that honour slavers, empire builders and colonisers. This reached new heights following the murder of George Floyd in 2020, which reignited wide-scale movements of international resistance to racism; statues became rallying points for anti-racist struggles across the globe, and many statues were graffitied, damaged or, in some cases, toppled - often after longstanding anti-racist campaigns on statues had been ignored by public and government bodies.[1]

In the UK, politicians and pundits were quick to condemn such protests. In 2020, when the plinth of the statue of Churchill in London's Parliament Square was graffitied with the words 'was a racist' (for which there is considerable historical evidence, not least his role in the Bengal Famine in 1943), the then prime minister Boris Johnson called the action 'shameful'.[2] In an evident attempt to fix the meanings of what are clearly contested histories, tweets from Johnson declared 'we cannot edit our past' and 'we cannot pretend we have a different history'. And when protesters pulled down the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol the same weekend, political

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leaders from across the parliamentary divide in the UK condemned the action - the then Conservative Home Secretary Priti Patel called it 'utterly disgraceful', while Keir Starmer, at that time Labour Leader of the Opposition, said it was 'completely wrong' to pull it down.[3] Across news media, statue protestors have been labelled as 'woke vandals' who want to 'erase the past'. In reality, statue protests, far from trying to tear down history, have shone a critical light on the scurrilous histories of so many of the individuals commemorated by statues - histories that had previously been hidden. As Enzo Traverso argues, statues of the powerful 'celebrate the past and its actors', while anti-racist protest 'provocatively aims to liberate the past' from the control of the powerful.[4]

While there has been considerable public talk about why statues are toppled, little public and media attention has been paid to the issue of why these statues were put up in the first place. Almost no effort has been devoted to asking questions about the people and institutions who chose to commission, pay for and erect these statues of slavers and colonialists, or to investigate the reasons they did so, and the power and influence they brought to bear in these endeavours. Commentators and politicians have largely ignored such questions (with one or two honourable exceptions such as David Olusoga and Gary Younge).[5] Nor has much interest been shown in the processes through which wealthy slavers and colonisers were rebranded as caring philanthropists and duly commemorated. The mainstream narrative about statues of empire is that they are part of an unalienable tradition that cannot be questioned.

This largely overlooked history of statues is significant for at least two reasons. First, it reveals how powerful interest groups shaped and promoted specific versions of history while suppressing others during a critical time at the end of the nineteenth century, when narratives of national pride and greatness were being revised for modern capitalist imperialist nation states. This was the period when most imperial statues were erected; many thousands were put up in the space of seventy years. Why was there an international mass production of statues of empire during this period? Second, it highlights the connections between the campaigns to erect the statues and the elites who were competing to have their preferred figures celebrated on the coveted plinths (for many statues *were* the result of campaigns - it isn't only anti-racists who campaign on this question). The commemoration by these elites of their forebears

who had profited from the violence of slavery and empire contributed to the strengthening of their own power and the legitimation of their own authority. These connections continue today, as modern elites defend the monuments of empire and slavery, as we shall see.

This article focuses on that 'other' hidden history. My argument is that, rather than asking why it is that people want to take down imperial statues, we should instead be asking who first wanted them to be erected and what are the motivations of those invested in keeping them in place. Very little scrutiny has been given to what drives *those* groups and individuals: their perspectives are presented as self-evident and universal rather than political and particular. But such motivations *are* political, and are steeped in vested interests.[6] This article investigates the groups of campaigners and political activists of the era of 'statue mania' - the campaigners *for* imperial statues. It explores their motivations, and the forms of power they brought to bear to achieve their aims. It then considers the connections and common interests between the imperial statue campaigners of yesteryear and the statue defenders of today.

To explore these connections, I focus on the case of the statue of Edward Colston, whose journey highlights many of the wider issues raised by imperial statue campaigns. The statue has been at the centre of a variety of campaigns - initially from several groups of activists who vied with campaigners for an Edmund Burke statue as to which one should be situated in central Bristol.[7] This was followed by several campaigns, over many decades, to have the statue of Colston removed - campaigns that were continually thwarted by a powerful association of business elites. With assistance from the local city council, these local elites for a very long time resisted campaigns to have Colston's statues removed from the city, seeking to suppress the slave trade histories that they had brought to light. I explore the historical links between contemporary city elites, and the groups that represent them, and those who initially campaigned for the erection of a statue of Colston, and examine the role played by this continual blocking of official routes in the toppling of Colston's statue in June 2020. But I first discuss the reasons for the erection of so many thousands of imperial statues in that relatively short period of time between the last few decades of the nineteenth century and the first few of the twentieth. What was the wider national and international context in which these statue erection campaigns were operating?

Statues and the invention of tradition

The statue of Colston was erected in 1895 - at the height of 'statue mania', a time when thousands of statues of imperial monarchs, military and naval figures, politicians, slavers, invaders and colonisers were erected in Africa, Europe, the Americas and the Indian subcontinent.[8] It is notable that the vast majority of these statues were not of contemporary public figures, but of historical men (and very occasionally of imperial woman).[9] Edward Colston had died in 1721 - 174 years prior to the commissioning of his statue. Why, in the Victorian period, was there this mass production of statues of historical figures, and why were figures chosen who were so closely connected to the slave trade, imperialism and colonisation? What stories were nations, regions and cities telling about themselves through such commemorative statuary? Colston's enrichment through slavery is now widely known, thanks to organisations like the Bristol Radical History Group, campaign groups such as Countering Colston, and protest movements around BLM - in fact, Colston's statue and his personal history are more famous now, since the toppling of the statue, than they have been at any time in its history.[10]

Colston was a member of British slaving organisation the Royal African Company (RAC) for twelve years, and was its leader between 1689 and 1691. In this capacity he helped to manage the shipping of 84,000 enslaved Africans to the Americas, on voyages during which 19,300 people died - very many of them children.[11] After 1692 Colston discontinued his association with the RAC - possibly because he was aware that the organisation was about to lose its monopoly status. And at around this time he strengthened his ties with the Bristol Society of Merchant Venturers (SMV), so as to be able to take better advantage of the opening up of the trade in Bristol. In the fifteen years following the withdrawal of the RAC's monopoly, the trade in enslaved Africans in Britain increased by 300 per cent.[12] Bristol overtook Liverpool and London in the slave trade in this period: its African Fleet grew to 60 ships, while the market share of the RAC declined from 100 per cent to 4 per cent. Colston played a significant leadership role in the growth of this trade in Bristol, through his membership of the SMV, but also of clandestine groups of elites which organised the trade and profited from it enormously. As a Tory MP (1710-1713), Colston petitioned the government to increase its involvement in the slave trade.

So why was such a figure chosen for celebration in statuary?

One answer can be found in Eric Hobsbawm's discussion of 'the invention of tradition' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[13] Hobsbawm argues that during this era, modern nations were involved in the mass generation of new legitimating traditions; producing new flags, pageants, national anthems and public holidays - 'traditions' that hearkened back to an imaginary bygone age to create bonds of loyalty to a new social order. The new modes of belonging that these traditions produced were part of the process of installing new elites and breaking with older hierarchies; they represented the consolidation of the power of new political hierarchies and social elites by drawing on an 'imagined' and imaginary past.[14] Statues of empire can be seen as an important part of this modern 'invention of tradition'.

Despite their apparent status as eternal and enduring, statues from this period are distinctly modern, part of a modern story told about nation, empire and belonging. Indeed, statue mania's mass production depended on modern technology: it was facilitated by innovations in bronze-casting techniques and increased efficiency arising from the industrialisation of the process of turning copper alloy into bronze. Further, transporting heavy objects on a large scale was facilitated by the growth of new rail networks and craning machinery. The copper from which bronze is made played an important role in the slave trade; it was used to make sugar boiling pans for the sugar plantations, and Bristol merchants produced items made of copper and bronze to exchange for slaves. Copper was also used to line the hulls of ships, which protected them from woodworm and decreased the transatlantic journey time by reducing drag. Bristol merchants invested heavily in this industry, a major centre of which was the west country due to the ready supply of coal from the Welsh coalfields. As Helen Paul points out, it was apt that the statue of Colston was made from bronze, given that it was so closely associated with slavery.[15] Statue mania and its celebration of historical 'heroes' of empire was a truly a project of modern industrial capitalism, dependent on the wealth of slavery and empire and casting its material culture from products like copper and bronze that had facilitated the Transatlantic Trade.

It is crucial that this period represents the height of *national* European empire building, and the growth and spread of the racial ideologies which underpinned and legitimised the practices of imperialism and colonialism.[16] This was a time when new national elites in Europe and America (and elsewhere) were enacting their

vision of the modern nation state and national identity 'at home' and expanding and consolidating their empires 'abroad': the two were inextricably linked. Modern forms of nationalism and national identity were largely formed and consolidated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Benedict Anderson points out, the dynastic empires of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century did not depend on a notion of nationalism, nor were these empires tied to particular nation states: 'their measures were dictated by the … universalism of their empire', each of which encompassed a variety of identities.[17] In Europe, for example, the Hapsburgs ruled over the Magyars, Croats, Slovaks, Italians, Ukrainians and Austro-Germans; while the Hanoverians ruled Bengalis, Quebecois, Scots, Irish, English and Welsh. By the late nineteenth century, however, imperialism had become tied to unified (and unifying) nation states, which had an emphasis on national belonging. Even where enfeebled dynasties persisted, they became 'German', 'British' or 'Russian', and by 1918 the age of dynastic rule was over (despite the continued existence of royal families).[18] New elites ruled, new national lines were drawn, new borders were established, and colonial territories were haggled over and fought for. The consolidation of capitalist economic and social relations during this period was dependent upon the twin production of nation and empire. Early modern dynastic wealth creation and trade, founded on the abduction and enslavement of humans from Africa and colonial plantation economies, was followed by an era of capital accumulation tied to the expanding empires of nation states: the ongoing settlement and plundering of resources in colonised territories proceeded alongside the industrialisation of plantation slavery.[19]

Statue mania is an important part of the invention of tradition because of its emphasis on honouring *national* architects of empire; its commemoration of historical (and sometimes current) politicians, monarchs, merchants and military figures invited a highly racialised and *modern* sense of national belonging and 'greatness', which erased the violence upon which it had been founded - and indeed asserted its continuity. The rituals and symbols of belonging that were produced in this context were inevitably racially charged, embedded as they were in notions of superiority and exceptionalism, and intertwining conceptions of nation and empire. Western capitalist nation states depended on imperial expansion for capital accumulation and growth, and on the racialised social and economic divisions that justify war, colonisation and colonial wealth extraction. The rituals of national belonging established in Europe at the time thus depended on creating an imperial

'imaginary', and statues of imperial 'heroes' were an integral part of the symbolic and tangible material landscape of that invention. Such practices also indicated who 'belonged' and who did not in this new imaginary - the ramifications of which are still felt today.

That such statues were also erected on the territories of the colonised indicates that they were also part of colonial rule - providing symbols of domination and 'superiority', and exporting adherence to European 'values' and 'culture' across the globe. Statue construction played an important part in attempting to establish both deference in the colonised world and loyalty and cooperation 'at home', while also reinforcing ruling elites' own sense of legitimacy.[20]

One of the reasons this new form of statecraft had to be so vigorously conducted was that the domination of the values of imperial nations was not a foregone conclusion. New rulers had to assert their authority against national liberation struggles and revolutionary movements, rising class consciousness and struggles for civil rights, suffrage and equality. These alternative forms of identification and belonging were not fully repressed by the invention of tradition or its new national rituals - as the ongoing struggle for memory and the removal of statues demonstrates. Furthermore, the conquerors from the 'centre' were mostly regarded as oppressors by people in the colonised territories, who not only resisted colonisation but also inspired anti-imperial struggle back in the 'centre'.[21] Indeed, the recent wave of statue protests in Europe, much to the consternation of some, was inspired by protests in Africa and African America.[22] Most notably, statue protests against Cecil Rhodes in South Africa spread to Oxford and elsewhere, while the statue protests across the UK and Europe were directly inspired by African American protest movements such as Black Lives Matter. Meanwhile, it was not only national politicians and elites who sought to undermine and discredit protests to have statues removed, but also their local counterparts, who often situated their local concerns in the context of 'official nationalism'.[23] The Colston case is just one instance of the kinds of actions taken by local elites in many other places. It exemplifies the connections between local 'leaders' and national conceptions of nation and power.

Statues: the case of Colston

The story of the statue of Edward Colston is illustrative of a range of issues at play, both historically and in contemporary attempts to obstruct 'fallist' campaigns.

In 1895 the Bristol Corporation - the forerunner of Bristol City Council - decided to participate in the 'mania' of statue erection. The importance of the city had declined by the end of the nineteenth century, and Bristol was competing with Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester to be recognised as Britain's second city. Local politicians and Corporation officials were worried that all these cities had far more statues than Bristol.[24] A commission was established to decide who would be commemorated on a plinth in central Bristol, and a number of suggestions were made - including for a number of prominent Bristolian abolitionists. The statuary that marks Bristol's history could have looked quite different if abolitionists rather than slavers had been chosen for commemoration.

So how was it that Edward Colston was chosen? The answer lies in the links between Bristol Corporation and the powerful organisations and businessmen who campaigned for their man. The first of these organisations was the notorious Society of Merchant Venturers, which had been granted a Royal Charter in 1552, and had been involved in the slave trade from its inception. In the 1800s, in order to protect their interests against the growing movement for abolition, the Society set up an influential committee, The New West India Society, whose main purpose was to delay the abolition of slavery. The Society continues to wield significant influence in Bristol.

Edward Colston was one of many members of the Colston family who over time had been prominent in the SMV. In 1709, after a long association with the organisation, which included periods of leadership, Colston made the Society the trustees of his will, with the intention that they would perpetuate his memory, and look after the schools he owned as well as other endowments. Colston was a staunch Tory and highly opposed to Whig Liberalism, as were the SMV: the SMV were not only the trustees of Colston's estate: they were also in accord with his deeply conservative values. (Colston was also associated with the infamous South Sea Company, which having drawn on insider knowledge to profit from the transfer to British control of the Spanish slave trading monopoly 'the Asiento', was able to help the Tory government pay off war debts.)

But by the time Colston is being put forward as a candidate for statuary the slave trade had been abolished, and the Merchant Venturers had taken the pragmatic decision to move away from, and hide, their previous pro-slavery stance. As part of this process they actively reconstructed Colston as a 'moral

saint' and benevolent philanthropist, and in their campaign for Colston and against other candidates they concealed Colston's enrichment through slavery and their own previous anti-abolitionist stance. Philanthropy, then as now, was mobilised as a means to whitewash history rather than illuminate it. Crucial aspects of Colston's history were deliberately obscured by the organisations who lobbied for his statue. Historian Sally Morgan has challenged the image of Colston's philanthropy, pointing out that his charitable works were small in comparison to that of other Bristolians: they consisted of a small 'spartan and joyless' private boys school (with boys continually running away) and an equally small and joyless alms house for six ex-sailors. Morgan argues that, far from acting philanthropically, Colston's probable intention was to educate a small number of boys whom he intended to go on to work for him, and to be able to hold out the possibility of alms-house accommodation in old age as a carrot to sailors who were often pressed and then absconded.[25]

In the process of building the cult of Colston, the SMV contributed to the establishment of four pro-Colston charitable societies, which were intended to promulgate the image of Colston as a philanthropist, and help rehabilitate him (the Dolphin Society, Anchor Society, Grateful Society and Colston Society).[26] These societies campaigned for Colston to be selected, while the SMV successfully lobbied Bristol Corporation. The accepted narrative is that the statue was erected by and for the people of Bristol (this is even inscribed on the original plaque), but the truth could not be more different. In fact, J.W. Arrowsmith, a prominent society member, was a key driving force behind the Colston statue; and it is also likely that Arrowsmith and the Merchant Venturers paid for at least half of the statue - in part because funds could not be raised from public contributions.[27]

In other words, organisations like the Bristol Society of Merchant Venturers and associated organisations should just as much be seen as statue campaigners - if not more so - as the groups currently lobbying for the removal or recontextualisation of statues. They were activists for the erection of this statue - and the many other commemorative monuments to Colston in Bristol - because of their alignment with his conservative political and cultural world view. They attempted to legitimate that world view by dressing it, and Colston, in philanthropic imagery. They used their economic power and connections to influence the Bristol Corporation's decision-making process, and actively hid

Colston's (and their own) support for slavery and enrichment by it - not as an act of contrition after the abolition of slavery (for that would surely have involved a public renouncing of their earlier views) but as an attempt to retain power and influence and to continue to shape Bristol in ways which served their interests. And this power is not only an historical fact but a current reality. The Society of Merchant Venturers continues to be an important force in Bristol city politics and commerce. This unelected society for wealthy elites still controls a proportion of Bristol's schools and universities, and, just like Colston and his fellow members in his own day, they are very influential in shaping the city of Bristol. In 2018, a (not very transparent) plan to place a 'corrective' plaque on the statue of Colston was derailed by SMV member Francis Greenacre, who was successful in his insistence on the removal of reference to the fact that Colston was involved in the slave trade, and had defended the slave trade while a Tory MP. Greenacre also insisted on the removal from the plaque of reference to the numbers of enslaved West African children who had died on RAC slave ships, and Colston's strong links with the SMV at the time, or any mention of his bigoted religious views that had excluded Catholics, Jews, religious dissenters or politically non-Tories from his 'charitable' works. The corrective plaque was thus effectively sabotaged, and was only positioned on the fallen statue, in November 2024. Historian Richard Ball, who was asked to consult on the proposed plaque in 2018, commented that he 'became aware that the proposed drafts were changing from a brief description of the uncomfortable histories of the slave-trader towards a more sanitised, pro-Colston version, cheerleading his philanthropy', in an attempt to protect the Colston brand and the reputation of the SMV.[28] That the plaque was finally attached (albeit six years late) is a testament to the power of the protest that finally toppled the statue. But the wording that had been drafted by Bristolians of African and Caribbean heritage was still altered by city planners before it was voted in by city councillors - by 7 to 1. The opposition vote came from Tory MP Richard Eddy, who claimed that the removal of references to Colston's beneficent philanthropy was an 'utterly historical revision that is worthy of the Nazis'.[29] This slur is one that is familiar to antiracists.

It is important to note that the toppling of the statue did not come out of the blue. There had been campaigns against the Colston statue in Bristol in one form or another since the 1920s: they had been consistently blocked or ignored by the city council for almost 100 years by the time the statue was pulled down. When it was

pulled out of Bristol harbour it went directly to the M Shed, a Museum of Bristol history - an act which itself shapes the way the legacy will be handled.

It was Bristol elites orbiting around the powerful Society of Merchant Venturers - with assistance from Bristol Corporation - that eventually ensured that the statue of Colston was selected for commemoration. He thus became the face of a new Victorian 'tradition', one that celebrated wealth and power, and was in the process of being invented by the forces lobbying for his statue and their allies. The new 'tradition' was based on social and political conservatism, with a dollop of religious intolerance thrown in for good measure. Investigations into other statue campaigns reveal similar interventions on the part of local and national elites: in 2015 student-led protests to remove the statue of Cecil Rhodes on Oriel College, Oxford were also thwarted by college authorities, while in 2022 the former culture secretary Oliver Dowden directly intervened to impede the campaign to have a statue of Robert Geffrye removed from the Museum of the Home.

Viewing the efforts to commemorate Colston in a wider historical context allows us to see that the traditions that shore up the dominant hegemony are always open to contestation. The late nineteenth century was a time of significant working-class upheaval, as demands for the vote and a living wage were repressed by the authorities. In December 1892 - three years before the Colston statue was erected, and while the question of who should adorn the plinth was still being debated - the 'city fathers' deployed Cavalry and Police units to break up a mass demonstration of tens of thousands of strikers and their supporters, resulting in many injuries. The push for commemorative statues was being conducted in a context of open class war, in Bristol and elsewhere. As Richard Ball points out: 'the relations of patronage and authority, which the business and civic elite had enjoyed in part through the rituals of the "cult of Colston", were being seriously challenged'; local working-class leaders were embracing socialism and rejecting the power of the business elites and their politicians.[30] Eric Hobsbawm reminds us that the invention of tradition did not go uncontested; its establishment was not a foregone conclusion. And the ideas it helped to entrench are still being contested today, as the struggle for equality and freedom galvanises each new generation of the dispossessed and marginalised. Indeed, it is precisely this contestation that drove the vigorous pursuit of invented traditions in the late nineteenth century; and it is because of the role of statues and other 'heritage' monuments, that contemporary politicians and other right-wing

interests put so much effort into defending them and 'naturalising' their meanings, while depicting antiracist statue activists as criminals.

Four people were tried for criminal damage for their role in toppling the Colston statue. After they were acquitted, Suella Braverman, at that time attorney general, tried to use her powers to overturn the decision. Her lack of success is testament to the power of protest and its ability to puncture hegemony. Statue struggles are struggles over memory and history. It is often the toppling of the statues, rather than their retention, that has taught us about the histories they represent. Indeed, the BLM movement finally prompted some heritage institutions to openly express support for racial justice (Victoria and Albert Museum 2020), and for BLM (Tate Britain 2020), and even to support calls for statues to fall (ICA 2020); and in 2020, the National Trust released an *Interim Report on the Connection between colonialism and Properties now in the Care of the National Trust, Including Links with Historic Slavery*.[31] Complaints about these tentative steps forward were made on the basis that institutions had been put under unfair pressure by 'so-called "anti-slavery" protests', Black Lives Matter and Anti-Fascist Action 'chanting their slogans and spraying their messages on monuments and buildings'.[32]

Adams also blames such moves to redress history on a 'managerial elite trained to be sceptical of received British history and absolutely opposed to the British patriotism of their forebears', which he sees as dominating 'the arts, media, politics, the law and education' (p142). In fact, unlike in the US, very few statues of empire have been removed by heritage organisations in the UK. The British Museum repositioned the bust of Sir Hans Sloane (whose collection became the foundation of the British Museum) from a freestanding plinth to a display case, and added explanatory statements about his links to the slave trade (alongside more lengthy plaques dedicated to his accomplishments as a collector and physician). And the National Trust removed a statue of a kneeling black man from the forecourt of Dunham Massey Hall after public complaints. But the vast majority of statues that have been contested remain in place; statues and busts of Winston Churchill, Horatio Nelson, Cecil Rhodes, Robert Geffrye and others, remain in place; and the Rhodes statue on the front of Oriel College Oxford, which was the focus of intense antiracist campaigning, also remains in place, though it now has a brief and dismal 'explanatory' plaque, with a QR code link for further explanation that doesn't work. In Bristol, many monuments to Edward Colston remain intact, and the statue of

Colston finally toppled by protesters has not been melted down or hidden. It is now on permanent display in the M Shed museum where it is part of an exhibition on the BLM protests.

The response of the Conservative government led by Boris Johnson to these small steps towards redress was to introduce new laws to make it almost impossible to remove statues and other heritage monuments. A law introduced by then Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick, the National Planning Policy Framework, insists that all monuments in England should be retained, and that henceforth 'historic statues and plaques and other monuments require planning permission to be removed'; while such permission is to be considered only in exceptional circumstances, with the final decision resting solely with the Secretary of State.[33] (The law does not cover Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.) This was a calculated move to further centralise power in the hands of government, and was the biggest change to heritage law since 1967. It took away the power of heritage institutions, colleges and other organisations to address their own statues and other monuments. As David Olusoga pointed out, further guidance published in 2023 similarly adopted a 'very central government approach, rather than allowing local decision making', and regurgitated the falsehood that statues teach us history. As he comments, statues 'are always silent about the victims and they are put up by members of a tiny male elite to celebrate the lives of other members of that tiny male elite'.[34] Rather than engaging with the concerns of campaigners and affected communities, central government's response was to double-down on an unreconstructed version of history which refuses to face up to the violence of empire, or acknowledge the pain inflicted on the ancestors of British citizens today, and to use legislation to close down avenues of legitimate campaigning. The government also added new offences relating to damaging statues to the Police, Crime and Sentencing Act (2022), which potentially carry a ten-year sentence.

It is not only central governments who respond in this way, as we have seen: politicians, wealthy interest groups, lobbyists and local councils in cities across the UK have used their positions and connections to thwart attempts to find redress on statues of empire and the histories they represent. The indignant language and tone of condemnation used by politicians and commentators in the media is testament to the capacity of these symbols to naturalise power.

Conversely, as Traverso suggests: 'Whether they are toppled, destroyed, painted, or graffitied, these statues epitomize a new dimension of struggle: the connection between rights and memory. They highlight the contrast between the status of blacks and postcolonial subjects as stigmatized and brutalized minorities, and the symbolic place given in the public space to their oppressors - a space which also makes up the urban environment of our everyday lives'.

These protests may wax and wane, but they will not disappear.

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