Removing the statues of white supremacists : a polarizing, but necessary debate in many countries

“Statues honour the values and of the times in which they were erected“, as *The Economist* put it in 2020. Nevertheless, values evolve, and with time, statues can become inappropriate when they put problematic personalities on a pedestal. That is what this dossier deals with : composed of previously mentioned article from *The Economist* (doc 2) and two editorials from *The Washington Post* dated from 2017 (doc 3) and 2020 (doc 4), it presses the case for removing, or at least dealing with, the statues of white supremacists. A cartoon from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* from 2020 (doc 1), showing a black activist adding very concrete context to those statues, completes the picture and begs the question : to what extent should white supremacists’ statues be removed in order to obtain social reconciliation and build a brighter future ?

All three articles relate cases of problematic statues in various places : from Colston, a famous slave-trader, in Bristol, to general Lee’s statues in New Orleans and Richmond, there are many examples of monuments that put forward divisive values. Confederate general statues, for instance, were erected after the Civil War, as propaganda to promote the values of the Confederacy and therefore white supremacy (doc 4). In a city like New Orleans, which prides itself from its diversity of cultures according to its mayor (doc 3), these values do not have a place. This is illustrated by the picture, in which an activist proposes to add context to the statues of Columbus and Lee, in the shape of the dead bodies of the people they contributed to killing – therefore expliciting how inacceptable it is to promote these personalities.

The documents thus agree that these statues need to be dealt with, but the way to do it is unclear. Indeed, we learn that militants have thrown Colston’s statue into the sea (doc 2), while in Richmond, protesters have covered Lee’s statue in graffitis (doc 4). New Orleans’ mayor has taken a more open approach, choosing to officially remove problematic statues to put them in museums, where they can be clearly explained. Other places have created parks or put statues of slave-traders in zoos, as is mentioned in document 2.

However, some worry that removing the statues would mean erasing history, and all documents agree that the past should not be forgotten. Yet, remembering the past does not mean glorifying its most terrible moments, as New Orleans’ mayor points out. There is a need to listen to people’s voice and create some social consensus : statues should not be removed arbitrarily (doc 2), but following a collective wish as documents 3 and 4 explain. If communities feel excluded by some monuments, it will be impossible to bring everyone together and ensure a common future. Instead, everybody should feel that they have a right to belong, like the author of document 4, who bought a house next to Richmond’s statues in spite of her family being victim of segregation in the past : there has to be a form of collective reconciliation.

So eventually, the dossier states that white supremacist statues need to be tackled in order for everybody to feel part of the same society.