Burch-Brown, J. (2017). Is it wrong to topple statues and rename schools? *Journal of Political Theory and Philosophy*, *1*, 59-88. http://jptp.online/is-it-wrong-to-topple-statues-and-rename-schools/

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IS IT WRONG TO TOPPLE STATUES & RENAME SCHOOLS?

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, campaigns across the globe have called for the removal of objects symbolic of white supremacy. This paper examines the ethics of altering or removing such objects. Do these strategies sanitize history, destroy heritage and suppress freedom of speech? Or are they important steps towards justice? Does removing monuments and renaming schools reflect a lack of parity and unfairly erase local identities? Or can it sometimes be morally required, as an expression of respect for the memories of people who endured past injustices; a recognition of this history's ongoing legacies; and a repudiation of unjust social hierarchies?

I. INTRODUCTION

Social philosophers working in the black freedom traditions, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Stuart Hall and Sally Haslanger, have long held that if we are to bring about a more just society, we must transform culture.[1] Specifically, we must transform problematic ideologies, which often function as deeply entrenched barriers to social change. They also argue that social movements and contentious politics can potentially play a role in generating cultural change, at least in part by destabilizing accepted ideologies.[2]

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[1] See e.g. Patrisse Cullors, Robert Ross and Krista Tippett, *The spiritual work of Black Lives Matter*, ON BEING WITH KRISTA TIPPETT (May 25,2017) https://onbeing.org/programs/patrisse-cullors-and-robert-ross-the-spiritual-work-of-black-lives-matter-may2017; WEB DU BOIS, THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK (Penguin, New York, 1903); PAUL GILROY, THE BLACK ATLANTIC (Harvard University Press, 1995); PAUL GILORY, DARKER THAN BLUE: ON THE MORAL ECONOMIES OF THE BLACK ATLANTIC (Belknap Press, 2010); STUART HALL, RESISTANCE THROUGH RITUALS (Routledge, London, 1976); Sally Haslanger, *Culture and Critique*, 91(1) THE ARISTOTELIAN SOCIETY SUPPLEMENTARY VOLUME 149-173(2017); ANN KILKELLY & ROBERT H LEONARD, PERFORMING COMMUNITIES: GRASSROOTS ENSEMBLE THEATERS DEEPLY ROOTED IN EIGHT US COMMUNITIES, (New Village Press, 2006); PAUL TAYLOR, BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL: A PHILOSOPHY OF BLACK AESTHETICS**,** (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016); CORNEL WEST, RACE MATTERS (Beacon Press, 1993).

[2] Haslanger, *Id.*

Social justice workers are often acutely aware, however, of the need for wisdom, judgment and luck as they develop their strategies. This is because social justice campaigns can easily be ineffective, and can reinforce injustices in unintended ways. For instance, they can lead to political backlash, and can inadvertently enact injustices, themselves. Contemporary social justice campaigns across Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe have employed a number of controversial tactics in common. In many places, campaigns have called for removing statues; renaming places; withdrawing or modifying participation in local rituals or ceremonies (as when NFL players have refused to stand, kneeling or linking arms during the national anthem); and protesting under memorable slogans aimed at revealing and challenging people's tacit acceptance of social hierarchies, such as 'Black lives matter' and 'Rhodes must fall'. These tactics have sought to change culture by disrupting accepted social practices and social meanings. Like the strategies of the 1960's US Civil Rights movement, they have also been highly contentious, generating social tension, feelings of distress, protest and political mobilization from people who disagree with the actions being taken.

In this paper, I examine the ethics of removing putative symbols of white supremacy, such as confederate statues. Are these campaigns well justified today? Should campaigns of this kind be pursued in the future? These questions should be of immediate and practical relevance for many readers. For instance, many readers will be positioned within universities or other institutions that historically benefited from African enslavement or colonial subjugation.[3] As Daniel Butt emphasizes, the majority of countries today either were colonial powers or were subject to colonial rule.[4] In many locations, this history will be reflected in institutional architecture, place-names, statuary or other symbolic features. Is there a duty to alter features that historically honoured individuals who participated in practices of colonial exploitation or enslavement? The following paper makes an important contribution by articulating some of the strongest arguments for and against such actions. The paper also makes a valuable contribution by modelling a way to think constructively and critically about the tactics adopted by social movements. The set of arguments, tools and frameworks employed here are general enough that they could be adapted to think through the strengths and weaknesses of other social justice campaigns.

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[3] *See* Universities Studying, (Dec, 10, 2017), http://slavery.virginia.edu/universities-studying-slavery/

[4] Daniel Butt, *Colonialism and Post-colonialism*, in HUGH LAFOLLETTE **(ed.),** THE INTERNATIONAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ETHICS, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013); Daniel Butt, *Repairing historical wrongs and the end of empire*, 21(2) SOCIAL AND LEGAL STUDIES, 227-242(2012).

I begin by looking towards history, introducing one example of how protest can generate social change (the 1960's sit-ins). Looking towards history is important because it can help us understand more clearly where we are today, and provide insight into how social dynamics can sometimes play out in practice.[5] Next, I introduce Sally Haslanger's model of why and how social movements can lead to major cultural change. This model is valuable because it gives clear conceptual tools through which to frame and evaluate the rationales behind many social justice campaigns. Equipped with these conceptual tools, I then turn to contemporary arguments for removing or re-contextualizing cultural objects seen as symbols of white supremacy. Sections V and VI focus on the potential polarizing effects of these campaigns -- a particularly strong concern from a progressive perspective. I present several rationales for these campaigns, and then examine the most important objections to them. I defend the view that taking down symbols of white supremacy – while creating new arts and culture that communicate and memorialize history 'in the round' – can be an important step towards healing and reparation for the harms of colonialism and African enslavement.[6]

This paper is an example of practice-based philosophy, written following two years in activism as part of the Countering Colston campaign in Bristol, England. The campaign has sought to change the way in which Bristol memorializes Edward Colston (1636-1721), and by extension to open a wider conversation about what responsibilities the city has as a result of its role in Atlantic world enslavement. I am indebted and influenced by the thought of colleagues from Countering Colston, particularly Cleo Lake, Christine Townsend, Roger Ball, Ros Martin, Katie Finnegan-Clarke, Marti Burgess and Mark Steeds. I am also grateful to William Baker, Zoe Backhouse, Swagat Baruah, Chris Bertram, Robert Bevan, Megan Blomfield,

Matthew Brown, Carol Burch-Brown, Frank Burch-Brown, Edson Burton, Tim Cole, Nathaniel Adam Tobias Coleman, James Dawkins, Madge Dresser, Hannah Dualeh, Anthony Everett, Adam Ferner, Josie Gill, Laura Ho, David Hoyle, Chia-Hung Huang, Sauda Kylambuka Ann Kilkelly, Kofi Mawali Klu, Madhu Krishnan, Ji-Young Lee, Andrea Livesey, Noha Abu El Magd, Jessica Moody, Ben Pritchett, Femi Omotoyinbo, Olivette Otele, Christabelle Peters, Richard Pettigrew, Pauline Powell, Julia O'Connell-Davis, Lizzie Robles, Richard Stone, Carlson Turner, Denise Vargiu, Lataya Wilson, Vanessa Wilson, Elise Witt, artists and activists from Alternate ROOTS, and many other colleagues and students from Faculty of Arts and in the Centre for Black Humanities at University of Bristol.

II. SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH PROTEST

One task for social justice movements is to identify which elements of a community's social practice are playing important roles in upholding unjust ideologies, and how.[7] Another task is to discern which of these practices a campaign can most successfully engage with, or put pressure on, in order to shift problematic social ideas and bring about wider cultural change.

In the US Civil Rights movement, for instance, campaigners challenged the social practices of segregation by staging 'sit-ins' at lunch counters. This strategy targeted a specific social practice – the practice of maintaining racially segregated public spaces. The practice of racial segregation depended on, and in turn reinforced, an understanding of some people as inferior on the basis of their perceived race. Refusing to abide by segregation laws was a way of changing social ideas by asserting and enacting one's humanity both to oneself and to others. In a powerful collection of filmed interviews from the time, one demonstrator states[8]:

> *You do not request that the person who is sitting next to you get up and leave. You merely come in and sit down beside him, and any human being would do. You cause no violence. You have no angry words. You're friendly, and it sort of helps to project the idea that here sits beside me another human being.*

Another emphasizes that by refusing to follow segregation laws, he communicated an important message to himself.

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[7] Sally Haslanger, *Culture and Critique*, *supra* note 1.
[8] Whitecreatedit, Civil Rights Movement: The sit-in, (Aug. 16, 2011) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OT9gILdTzWo&list=PL91099A308DD66179.

> *Altogether it was a feeling moving within me, that I was sitting here demanding a God-given right. And my soul became satisfied that I was right in what I was doing. At the same time there was something deep down within me, moving me, that I could no longer be satisfied to go along with an evil system that I had to be maladjusted to. And in spite of all of this, I had to keep loving the people who denied me service, who stared at me.[9]*

The sit-in movement led people to reconsider social ideas that they had previously accepted uncritically, such as the understanding that people of some races were inferior to others, and that people of different 'races' should not mingle.

At the time of these demonstrations in the 1960s, opposition to them was intense. One critic of the protests states that the sit-ins are a violation of cherished or even sacred social norms:

> *Breaking bread is essentially a family custom. Almost a sacrament. Now when you claim that you have been denied equal rights in participating in something that is regarded as a family custom or sacrament, and insist on being recognized, you're getting into dangerous ground. And ground that can be misconstrued. And in which you can be wrong. Now the people in the South have always fed people who came and knocked at the back door, and asked for something to eat. But they have always reserved the right to eat only with invited guests.[10]*

Another interviewee urges that sit-in campaigners are themselves violating people's rights. 'I think that it is in violation to my civil rights, if someone can say "You must serve me"'. She also argues that although the demonstrators claim to be non-violent, in fact they are 'most violent'. In this she seems to agree with Fanon, who asserts that decolonialization is always violent, because it violates the system of right that has previously been the foundation of a social order.[11] For a subordinate group to refuse to follow the

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[9] *Id.*

[10] *Id.*

[11] Lewis R. Gordon, *Fanon and Violence*, HISTORIES OF VIOLENCE (May, 29, 2012) https://vimeo.com/43036768; LEWIS R. GORDON, WHAT FANON SAID: A PHILOSOPHICAL INTRODUCTION TO HIS LIFE AND THOUGHT (Fordham University Press, 2015).

established norms can be perceived as aggressive, even if all other aspects of their action are designed to communicate respect. For this reason, many warned that white people would be alienated by the protests, instead of persuaded.

> *I would say that they should examine the white person very closely first to see whether or not they are going about it in the right way. Now if I am a businessman, and people that I don't want in my business insist on either coming in, or boycotting, which is their perfect right to do ... it is not going to make me love them.*[12]

Others asserted that they had no intention of going along with changes.

> *Well it's just not a thing we're used to down here. I mean they come in, and they sit down, and we're not use to them sitting down beside us. Cause I wasn't raised with 'em, I never have lived with 'em, and I'm not gonna start now.*[13]

The opposition to Civil Rights protests was deeply felt, and often violently enacted. Nevertheless, following in the wake of Brown v. Board of Education (1954) and precipitating the Civil Rights Act a decade later, these nation-wide demonstrations led to profound re-shaping of culture, generating significant changes in racial attitudes in America and beyond. The 1960s sit-ins illustrate the insight that *challenging a social practice can function to shift large constellations of social meanings and culture.*

Sally Haslanger builds on this insight.[14] She argues that overcoming injustice requires changing ideologies, and that this in turn requires changing the social practices through which ideologies are learned. Haslanger defines culture as sets of social meanings and practices that 'shape and filter how we think and act'.[15] Ideology, she proposes, is a subset of culture. Specifically, she proposes that ideology refers to sets of social meanings which a) function to stabilize problematic social hierarchies, and which b) do so through masking

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[12] *Supra* note 8.

[13] *Id.*

[14] Sally Haslanger, *Racism, Ideology and Social Movements*, 94(1) RES PHILOSOPHICA 1-22(2017); Haslanger, *supra* note 1.

[15] Haslanger, *supra* note 1 at 149. Sociologists have offered many competing accounts of culture. For valuable discussions of divergent accounts, see Michele Lamont & Mario Luis Small, *How Culture Matters: Enriching Our Understanding of Poverty*, in ANN CHIH LIN & DAVID R HARRIS (ed.) IN THE COLORS OF POVERTY: WHY RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES PERSIST, 76-102 (Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 2008).
See also Orlando Patterson, *Making sense of culture*, 40(1) ANNUAL REVIEW OF SOCIOLOGY, 1–30(2014); and Stephen Vaisey, *From contradiction to coherence: Theory-building in the sociology of culture*, Presentation for the Annual Meetings of the American Sociological Association, Atlanta, (Dec, 02, 2017) http://stephenvaisey.com/documents/asacontradictiontocoherence.pdf

or illusions which make unjust social arrangements appear as if they are just.[16] By making problematic social hierarchies appear just, ideologies lead people to willingly accept these social arrangements, believing that in doing so they are acting in ways that are moral and fair.[17]

Haslanger argues that we absorb ideologies and other aspects of culture through social practices. Participation in social practices instils tacit understandings of 'the way things are done', and these social meanings shape how individuals perceive and interpret the world around them. To illustrate the idea of a practice, Haslanger gives the example of giving and listening to a public lecture.[18] She points out that members of the audience seamlessly come into the room and sit down in the audience seats, without needing to think about it. They become quiet when the talk begins, and none of them spontaneously come to the lectern to speak. Everybody present understands how things are done, and this knowledge of how things are done smoothly facilitates social action and interaction. Social practices help us acquire a framework of meanings and perspectives on the world. They equip us with social schema, the toolkits or repertoires that we use to negotiate our social interactions.[19] Being socialized is a matter of absorbing these social schema so that we can move relatively effortlessly through the world and coordinate with one another. We become fluent in social practices as we grow up, much as we become fluent in language. Unjust social hierarchies, Haslanger thinks, are reproduced through problematic social practices that

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[16] Haslanger, *supra* note 1 at 150. As Stuart Hall puts it, 'ideology has especially to do with the concepts and the languages of practical thought which stabilize a particular form of power and domination, or which reconcile and accommodate the mass of the people to their subordinate place in the social formation.' (Hall 1996/2006, pp. 24-5; quoted in Haslanger 149-50.) However, Stuart Hall follows a school of thought according to which ideologies can also be positive. Thus on his view, ideology 'has also to do with the processes by which new forms of consciousness, new conceptions of the world, arise, which move the masses of the people into historical action against the prevailing system'. Sally Haslanger defines ideology more narrowly. She restricts ideology to a set of problematic social meanings. *See* Stuart Hall, *The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees*, in David Morlay and Kuan-Hsing Chen (eds.), (Un)Settling Accounts: Marxism & Cultural Studies (Routledge, 1996); STUART HALL, CRITICAL DIALOGUES IN CULTURAL STUDIES (Routledge, New York, 2006). *See also* Robin Celikates, *From Critical Social Theory to a Social Theory of Critique: On the Critique of Ideology after the Pragmatic Turn*, 13(1) **CONSTELLATIONS**, 21–40(2006); Tommie Shelby, *Ideology, Racism, and Critical Social Theory*, 34(2) PHILOSOPHICAL FORUM, 153–88(2003).

[17] This idea has, of course, a long history. See e.g. Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, Lawrence Simon (ed) (Hackett Publishing Company; Raymond Geuss *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge University Press, 1981). See also work on the theme of 'white ignorance' and 'strategic ignorance'. See CHARLES MILL, THE RACIAL CONTRACT (Cornell University Press; JOSÉ MEDINA THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF RESISTANCE: GENDER AND RACIAL OPPRESSION, EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE, AND RESISTANT IMAGINATIONS, (Oxford University Press, 2013); SHANNON SULLIVAN AND NANCY TUANA, *EPISTEMOLOGIES OF IGNORANCE*, (SUNY Press, 2007).

[18] Sally Haslanger, *What is a social structure*? (lecture) THE ROYAL INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY 2 (Jan 29, 2017), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9EvFF2B1FHI.

[19] This has been called a 'toolkit-repertoire' account of culture. See Ann Swidler, *Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies*, 51(2) AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW, 273-286(2014); Haslanger also draws on William H. Sewell, Jr, *The Concept(s) of Culture* in GABRIELLE M. SPIEGEL (ed.), PRACTICING HISTORY: NEW DIRECTIONS IN HISTORICAL WRITING AFTER THE LINGUISTIC TURN 76–95 (Routledge, 2005). For valuable discussion of the strengths and limitations of the 'toolkit' account of culture, see Vaisey, *supra* note 15.

generate widely shared unjust 'social schemas' and culture.[20] For instance, racist social meanings inferiorize some groups on the basis of 'colour' (racialized somatic or bodily traits associated with ancestry and geographical origin), just as sexism inferiorizes some groups on the basis of primary and secondary sex characteristics and gender; classism on the basis of 'classed' traits; and ableism on the basis of perceived markers of ability.[21]

Since ideologies are inculcated through social practices, one way to 'loosen the grip' of an ideology is to refuse to go along with the social practices that affirm and uphold it. Challenging problematic social practices is a way of stimulating what has sometimes been called 'ideology critique'. Challenging social practices can reveal the occlusions or misrepresentations which mask injustices. In turn, it can lead people to perceive the unjust effects that are maintained by these illusions, and thus lead people to be unwilling to go along with unjust social arrangements that they previously accepted. In summary, Haslanger's argument can be reconstructed as follows.

> Premise 1) Existing race, class and gender hierarchies are unjust.

> Premise 2) It is important to challenge unjust hierarchies, to create a more just world.

> Premise 3) Social hierarchies are partly produced and upheld by ideologies.

> Premise 4) Ideology refers to social meanings which function to stabilize power, and which do so by making injustices appear just.

> Premise 5) Ideologies are generated and maintained through social practices.

> Conclusion) Progressive social change can therefore come about by challenging the social practices that maintain unjust ideologies.

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[20] *Supra* note 1 at 155.
[21] Sally Haslanger, *Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?* 34(1) NOUS, 31-55 (2000); PAUL TAYLOR, RACE: A PHILOSOPHICAL INTRODUCTION (Polity Press, 2013); ALBERT ATKIN, THE PHILOSOPHY OF RACE (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

III. TOPPLING STATUES AND RENAMING SCHOOLS

Contemporary activists for social justice often advocate the removal or re-contextualization of cultural objects that are seen as symbols of white supremacy, colonialism, patriarchy, classism, ableism, heterosexism, indigenous genocide, or other forms of problematic social hierarchy. Like protesters of the Civil Rights era, they are targeting specific social practices in order to bring about wider cultural change.[22]

For example, indigenous activists and their allies, following Takir Mamani and Tupaj Katari, have long advocated using the name Abya Yala to refer to the land more widely known today as America.[23] Names and language shape understanding in deep ways.[24] Using a different name for the land reveals that America is constructed, and that this national identity is neither necessary nor natural. Refusing to use colonial place names is a way of asserting the authority of First Nations peoples' relationship to the land, and of rejecting the idea that the descendants of European colonists are legitimate inheritors and governors of the place they call America.

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[22] It is beyond the scope of this paper to survey these contemporary campaigns, which in 2015-2017 have included campaigns to remove Confederate monuments and flags in the US; a carefully-argued and successful petition for the removal of a newly-installed statue of Gandhi in Ghana; campaigns at Yale, Princeton, Brown, University of Mississippi and dozens of other institutions in the US; 'Rhodes must fall' protests against colonialist Cecil Rhodes in South Africa and Oxford; campaigns to remove statues of Christopher Columbus in Trinidad; campaigns to change how Edward Colston is memorialized in Bristol, England, and many more.

For just a few of these examples, *See* Southern Poverty Law Center, *Whose Heritage? Public symbols of the Confederacy*, (April 21, 2016), https://www.splcenter.org/20160421/whose-heritage-public-symbols-confederacy; Ampofo, Akosua Adomako, Akosua Adoma Perbi, Kwadwo Appiagyei-Atua, Obádélé Kambon & Mantse Aryeequaye, Gandhi's *statue at the University of Ghana must come down*, Petition to Chairman of Council/Government Appointee Prof. Kwamena Ahwoi (Sept. 12, 2016) https://www.change.org/p/the-members-of-the-university-of-ghana-council-gandhi-s-statue-at-the-university-of-ghana-must-come-down; Will Heaven, *Must Edward Colston Fall? Bristol's struggle with the complicated legacy of a slaver*, THE SPECTATOR MAGAZINE, (July 22, 2017) https://www.spectator.co.uk/2017/07/must-edward-colston-fall/; Achille Mbembe, *Decolonizing knowledge and the question of the archive*, (June, 30 2017), http://wiser.wits.ac.za/system/files/Achille.pdf; BBC Trending, *Will Rhodes Must Fall Fail?* (Jan, 18 2016), http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-35328444; Witt et al, *Report of the committee to establish principles on renaming*, Yale University (Nov. 21, 2016), https://president.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/CEPR_FINAL_12-2-16.pdf; *Harvard law school drops official shield over slavery links: University committee rules shield donated by family that build wealth through slavery does not reflect institution's values*, The Guardian (March 5, 2016), https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/mar/05/harvard-law-school-drops-official-shield-over-slavery-links

[23] Escalante, Emilio del Valle, *Self-determination: A perspective from Abya Yala*, E-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (May 24, 2014), http://www.e-ir.info/2014/05/20/self-determination-a-perspective-from-abya-yala; ANDERS BURMAN, INDIGENEITY AND DECOLONIZATION IN THE BOLIVIAN ANDES: RITUAL PRACTICE AND ACTIVISM (Lexington Books, 2016)

[24] EDWARD SAID, ORIENTALISM (Pantheon Books, 1978); EDWARD SAID, CULTURE AND IMPERIALISM (Knopf Books, New York, 1993).

Amongst the cultural objects that campaigners have sought to remove or re-contextualize are flags, statues, and place-names associated with colonialism and slavery. The rationale for removing such objects has several dimensions. One argument for removing statues and renaming places called after contested figures is as follows.

P1) Statues and place-names confer honour and esteem on their namesakes.

P2) They also express identity, and say something about who we are.

P3) Moreover, they send a signal to people about who in the community has power and authority, and who the community's leaders are.

P4) It is inappropriate to honour and esteem people who have carried out grave injustices. It is also wrong to identify with them, build community around them, or give them power and authority.

P5) Person X carried out grave injustices, and so (from P4) it is inappropriate to honour them.

C) The places named after X should therefore be renamed, and the statues of X should be removed.

By arguing that it is wrong for these objects to play their current cultural roles, campaigners bring attention to distortions or occlusions that have made it appear otherwise. Thus the second rationale for these campaigns focuses on the epistemic dimension of ideology critique. This argument is as follows:

P6) The social practices or social meanings connected to Object X are functioning to legitimize unjust social arrangements, and doing so through some kind of masking or illusion.

P7) Removing or re-contextualizing Object X will help to reveal these illusions for what they are.

P8) Revealing these illusions for what they are will make it easier to motivate people to transform unjust social arrangements.

C) Therefore we should remove or re-contextualize Object X.

This rationale focuses on the ongoing harms caused by the ideology, the social practices that maintain it, and the power relations that it stabilizes. Removing prominent symbols of white supremacy or colonial domination can be seen as part of a wider project of reparation for the harms of colonialism, practices of enslaved labour, and later effects of racism. Taking down symbols of white supremacy can accomplish several important aims, including expressing:

1) condemnation of the past injustice,

2) a commitment to telling the full truth about this problematic history in the future,

3) a rejection of its underlying rationale, and

4) a commitment to preventing its continuing harms.[25]

There are several possible harms and injustices that may be addressed in this way. One is a harm done to the historical victims of enslavement and colonialism, by a failure to tell the truth about historical injustices. Another is the harm done to contemporary persons who are negatively affected by racist ideologies and social structures, and by living in environments surrounded by symbols of white power and black disempowerment – for instance, through stereotype threat and internalized messages about social hierarchy.

These diverse rationales can be seen in arguments related to the recent removal of Confederate monuments in the US. In the week following the removal of Confederate monuments from New Orleans, poet and educator Michael 'Quess' Moore published an article entitled 'What the removal of New Orleans's White supremacist monuments means to my students'.[26] He writes:

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[25] These are drawn from Seana Shiffrin's more general analysis of the expressive aims of reparatory actions. Seana Shiffrin, *Reparations for U.S. Slavery and Justice over Time*, UCLA Public Law & Legal Research Paper Series, Research paper no. 15-46(2009).

[26] Michael Moore, *What the removal of New Orleans's white supremacist monuments means to my students*, ARTSY (May 15, 2017). https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-removal-new-orleanss-white-supremacist-monuments-students.

> *If 'Negroes' hadn't moved 12 blocks since slavery, it certainly was no coincidence. The city was literally gridded in the likeness of their once – and ostensibly still masters. A vast amount of public schools, institutions and streets were named after former slave owners.*

Moore argues that this is intentional, by design; that there is a *function* of keeping these figures in the landscape, and this is to keep black people in their place. Living in cities with innumerable landmarks named after people who kept enslaved labourers has the effect of leading people to internalize racially hierarchical social images. It sends a signal to people of European descent, communicating that they will not lose status as a result of the wrongs enacted against blacks. It also inferiorizes people of African or indigenous descent, by signalling that the deep injustices suffered by their ancestors are not important enough to the community to cause it to repudiate their actions publicly. Pointing to a 16-foot statue of Robert E. Lee, on a 68-foot column in the centre of New Orleans, Moore asks his students '*What do you think our city is trying to tell us when they make people like that monuments and put 'em way up in the sky?*' His students reply '*That, they are over us, like our parents*' and '*That they have power*'. Physical monuments and prominent place-names communicate important messages about the social world.

The shooting of nine church attendees at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston South Carolina in 2015, led to a growing agreement amongst many that the Confederate flag, Confederate statues and other symbols of the Confederacy are not neutral symbols of Southern pride, but are instead serving to support a continuing racial hierarchy, and a mythologized view of the south. As the National Trust for Historic Preservation states,

> *Put simply, the erection of these Confederate memorials and enforcement of Jim Crow went hand-in-hand. They were intended as a celebration of white supremacy when they were constructed…[and] they are still being used as symbols and rallying points for such hate today.*[27]

The Trust encourages open conversation and dialogue, as well as attention to local detail and decision-making on a case by case basis with open communication; but encourages people not to be overly influenced by ideals of preservation in all cases, saying 'We should always remember the past, but do not

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[27] National Trust for Historic Preservation, Statement on Confederate Memorials: Confronting Difficult History, June 19, 2017.

necessarily need to revere it'.[28] Mayor Mitch Landrieu agrees, stating: 'These monuments purposefully celebrate a fictional, sanitized Confederacy; ignoring the death, ignoring the enslavement, and the terror that it actually stood for'.[29] He argues that the presence of the statues lends credence to distortions of historical fact and moral reasoning, and that these have led to a mythologized self-understanding.

Joshua Zeitz contrasts the presence of Confederate monuments in the American landscape with the ways in which Germany has handled Nazi history since 1945.[30] Zeitz suggests that the case of the Confederacy is unusual, claiming that 'When armies are defeated on their own soil – particularly when those armies fight to promote racist or genocidal policies – they usually don't get to keep their symbols and material culture'.[31] By contrast, following the World War II, Nazi symbols were removed from public spaces. Zeitz suggests that 'in continuing to honour Confederate leaders and deny their crimes, we signal that the United States has not yet fully come to terms with its collective responsibility for the dual sins of slavery and Jim Crow'.[32] He argues that removing Nazi symbols did not, on its own result in re-education and often met resistance, but that it was a necessary step. 'If *just* removing statues and icons doesn't force a change in outlook, venerating and fetishizing them, and refusing to be honest about their meaning, almost ensures that the country won't fully confront its past'.

IV. OBJECTIONS

Almost everybody will agree that there are some cases where the argument above applies, and where it is appropriate to remove statues and change place-names. For instance, many people who oppose taking down Confederate statues nevertheless agree that it was appropriate for the statue of Saddam Hussein to be removed. This marked a change of political power, and was a way of communicating the end of an era of rule. However, symbolic expressions of remorse for a community's past are often controversial. They may be particularly controversial when they involve removing historic aspects of the cultural landscape

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[28] *Id.*

[29] Mitch Landrieu's Speech on the Removal of Confederate Monuments in New Orleans, THE NEW YORK TIMES (May 23, 2017), https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/23/opinion/mitch-landrieus-speech-transcript.html.

[30] Joshua Zeitz, *Why there are no Nazi statues in Germany*, POLITICO (Aug. 20, 2017) https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/08/20/why-there-are-no-nazi-statues-in-germany-215510; *See also* Yuliya Komska, *Take a lesson: How Germany handles monuments from Nazi and communist eras*, The Inquirer. (Aug. 17, 2017).

[31] *Id.*

[32] *Id.*

such as place-names, flags or statues. This has been evidence in the US, where a majority of Americans polled state that they oppose removals of confederate statues in New Orleans, Charlottesville, Baltimore, and elsewhere.[33]

In Bristol, England, for instance, trustees announced their decision to rename the city's premier music venue, Colston Hall, on the grounds that Edward Colston, (1636-1721), investor and manager of the enslaving Royal African Company, did not represent their values as a contemporary and inclusive arts organization.[34] The announcement was met with a flood of opposition in local, national and social media. Two petitions were launched against renaming the hall, gaining 5,000 signatures each; there was vigorous opposition expressed in social media; and hundreds of letters in the local press have expressed dismay at the decision. Letter-writers argued that removing Colston's name from Colston Hall amounted to erasing history, sanitizing the past, destroying heritage, doing injustice to a great Bristolian, pandering to a politically correct minority, removing decisions about Bristolian heritage from Bristolian hands, ignoring the fact that white people too have been exploited and enslaved, indulging a 'snowflake' victim mentality, ignoring more important contemporary issues like 'modern day slavery' and FGM, and unfairly blaming British people for slavery when it was Africans who enslaved fellow Africans in the first place. Several letter-writers described the renaming of Colston Hall as a fascist, Stalinesque and Orwellian rewriting of history. Many also offer a slippery slope argument. If we rename Colston Hall, what else will have to be renamed? The schools and streets? All of the other places named after morally dubious figures?[35] In the remainder of this paper I will address just a handful of common objections.[36]

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[33] Chris Kahn, *A majority of Americans want to preserve Confederate monuments: Reuters/Ipsos poll*, REUTERS (Aug. 21, 2017), https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-protests-poll/a-majority-of-americans-want-to-preserve-confederate-monuments-reuters-ipsos-poll-idUSKCN1B12EG.

[34] See Emine Saner, *Renamed and shamed: taking on Britain's slave-trade past, from Colston Hall to Penny Lane*, The Guardian (April 29, 2017), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/29/renamed-and-shamed-taking-on-britains-slave-trade-past-from-colston-hall-to-penny-lane; David Olusoga, *Bristol's Colston Hall is an affront to a multi-cultural city. Let's rename it now*, The Guardian (Feb. 25, 2017) https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/feb/26/colston-hall-bristol-should-look-honestly-at-its-history; Madge Dresser, *Obliteration, contextualization or "guerrilla memorialisation"? Edward Colston's statue reconsidered*, OPEN DEMOCRACY(2016).

[35] From letters of The Bristol Evening Post, April - December 2017. Thanks are due to Mark Steeds for collecting these letters. For discussion of memorialization of slavery in Britain more generally, see ALAN RICE, CREATING MEMORIALS, BUILDING IDENTITIES: THE POLITICS OF MEMORY IN THE BLACK ATLANTIC, (Liverpool University Press, 2010); KATIE DONNINGTON, KATIE, RYAN HANLEY AND JESSICA MOODY, BRITAIN'S HISTORY AND MEMORY OF TRANSATLANTIC SLAVERY: LOCAL NUANCES OF A NATIONAL 'SIN' (Liverpool University Press, 2016)

Within Britain, Bristol is a particularly interesting case, because of the major role that the city's merchants played in promoting Atlantic world slavery, and the fact that public memorialization of this history has often been reluctant. For discussion of Bristol's role in slavery and controversies around memorialization, see eg: Madge Dresser, *Slavery Obscured: The Social History of the Slave Trade in* Bristol, (Redcliffe, 2017), https://www.opendemocracy.net/beyondslavery/madge-dresser/obliteration-contextualisation-or-guerrilla-memorialisation-edward-colst; Olivette Otele, *Bristol, slavery and the politics of representation: the Slave Trade Gallery in the Bristol Museum* in SOCIAL SEMIOTICS, Vol 22, 2012. doi:10.1080/10350330.2012.665231;

First, people who favour the preservation of statues and historic place-names often argue that place-names and statues do not necessarily confer honour. Instead, they serve to remind us of both the good and bad aspects of history, and in doing so play and important pedagogical role by reminding us of human fallibility and the complexity of human lives. As time passes, the social function of these cultural objects can change. They can shift from being active parts of contemporary culture, to being historical artefacts. Statues from ancient times no longer signal who we *are* or who amongst us *has* power, but instead signal who we *were* and who *did* have power. When the history involved is genuinely ancient, it might be argued, then the representation of morally troubling figures does not seem to pose a threat. Moreover, from the perspective of later generations, it can be (although is not necessarily) positive to inherit ancient cultural objects, including objects that are morally complex. If the subsequent generations had destroyed those cultural objects as the culture changed, then we would not have them today, and that would be a loss. Thus it is possible to have ancient historical statues which represent people who carried out grave injustices, and for these statues to present no active threat, and for there to be good reason to preserve them. From this perspective, the idea that we should remove the names of places called after contested figures looks illiberal and fanatical; we might agree that person X carried out grave injustices but hold that we should keep their statues and place-names because they are part of our complex history.

It is true that the meaning of cultural objects can change over time, and that objects which at one point celebrate a major figure can later become artefacts. However, it is mistaken to think that objects like statues of colonial leaders are now mere artefacts, in many cases. Instead, they may be active part of cultural narratives about national identities. Many of the cultural objects that are currently contested are not 'inert', but directly connected to ongoing social injustice. Cleo Lake says, of a reluctance to replace un-interpreted, problematic objects with objects that tells the history more directly and critically:

 Sally Morgan, *Memory and the merchants: Commemoration and civic identity*, 4(2) International Journal of Heritage Studies 102-113(2013), doi.org/10/1080/13527259808722225.

[36] For succinct statements of other objections and replies, see Joanna Burch-Brown, *Speaker's Corner: Defenders of Colston are the ones airbrushing the past, says Bristol University academic*, Bristol Evening Post, (April 30, 2017).

> *'Maybe they want to forget their history. Maybe they can. Maybe we can't. Maybe we're walking with it every day. Maybe we're still going through the trauma. It's real for us…'*[37]

Speaking of the barriers to black women's progress, she says, 'How does it help being reminded every time you come to your premier cultural institution about that negative aspect?' Likewise, British MP Dawn Butler states in a debate about recontextualizing Admiral Nelson's column in London,

> *It is easy to ignore history if you're not affected by it. So does that mean that I want to see statues being torn down? No. But does it mean that I want to see the context of what that person represented highlighted, in the starkest possible terms? Yes.*[38]

That such symbols may influence political as well as personal outcomes is supported by findings such as evidence that priming people in the US South with images of Confederate flags lead to decreased willingness to vote for Barack Obama.[39] Having images of white power and black disempowerment through enslavement is not inert; instead it actively shapes people's ideas about the current social world. This does not necessarily show that such objects should be removed. However, it does show that there may be a good *case* for removal.

Moreover, although it is crucial to retain some contested cultural objects for posterity, we can be selective. If removing some problematic cultural objects creates room for more diverse creativity, then doing so may allow us to leave a richer inheritance to posterity. For instance, discussing the aftermath of Nazi Germany, Yuliya Komska emphasizes that removing relics is not a panacea, and that what matters most is the process and aftermath of these decisions. Komska affirms the removal of the most prominent Nazi symbols. However, more subtle symbols pervade the landscape, through architecture, arts and culture. Komska argues that it was important for major Nazi symbols to be removed, but suggests that there is not a need to remove all such objects. Instead, important education can take place through appropriate, well-scaffolded engagement with them. Observing that 'bad history can be put to good use', she cites cases in Ukraine,

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[37] Cleo   Lake   &   Christine   Townsend,   Channel   4   News   (April   29,   2017), https://www.facebook.com/Channel4News/videos/10154791005066939/?pnref=story.
[38] Dawn Butler MP, Alan Duncan MP, Ian Paisley Junior MP, Ella Whelan, 'Any Questions?' BBC Radio 4. http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b091wf86.
[39] Joyce Ehrlinger et al. *How exposure to the Confederate flag affects willingness to vote for Barack Obama*, 32(1) POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY, 131-146(2010).

Taiwan and Germany to argue that 'the task at hand is to purge the imagery in a way that guards against amnesia, while also transforming the statues from celebratory monuments to objective evidence'[40]

Another argument is that removing these objects erases history and sanitizes the past. It is true that if we remove the objects with no further action, then this could have the effect of obscuring the past. However, as the Yale Guidelines on renaming emphasize, any choice to either retain or remove a name on moral grounds comes with duties of non-erasure – i.e. a duty to ensure that the action does not have the effect of airbrushing history.[41] Removing relics without comment is not the only option, nor the best one. For instance, a school that chooses to change its name might commission artists to create a permanent exhibition about the relevant history of the name and the historic name change, so as to educate future generations about the changes that have been made. Similarly, it is possible to change a place name, but include a smaller plaque or sign stating the historical name. Derek Alderman reports that in Chapel Hill, one barrier to naming a street after Martin Luther King was that the community felt that Airport Road was an important part of its heritage.[42] They created a compromise sign which showed clearly that the road was now called after Martin Luther King, but with a sign beneath stating 'Historic Airport Road'. This shows that it is possible to 'layer' place-names instead of solely removing them. Another example comes from Paris. Historian Olivette Otele describes a street previously named after Antoine Richepanse (who Otele states helped re-establish slavery in 1802) was renamed after Joseph Boulogne, a renowned musican and son of an enslaved woman. A plaque was erected to explain the change. Otele states that 'The joint presentation of both men's names ensures that visitors are confronted by multiple histories'.[43]

Moreover, un-interpreted statues and place-names do not necessarily help people learn the true history of their communities. Instead, they are likely to lead people to assume that the figures involved are broadly positive and appropriate sources of pride. For instance, Christine Townsend analyses the way in which Colston has been valorized in Bristol despite his involvement in slavery.

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[40] Yuliya Komska, *Take a lesson: How Germany handles monuments from Nazi and communist eras*, THE INQUIRER (Aug. 17, 2017), http://www.philly.com/philly/opinion/commentary/charlottesville-nazis-germany-communists-monuments-trump-20170817.html.
[41] Witt, *supra* note 22.
[42] Derek Alderman, 'A street fit for a King', http://mlkstreet.com.
[43] Otele, Olivette, *Slavery and Visual Memory: What Britain can learn from France,* OPEN DEMOCRACY (Aug. 29, 2016), https://www.opendemocracy.net/beyondslavery/olivette-otele/slavery-and-visual-memory-what-britain-can-learn-from-france

> *This man was "our hero", "our heritage", "our philanthropist" who gave so much to "our" city. A uniting figure, we were told, who used his money and influence to "help the poor" – a legacy that remains with us today. Then, as now, we saw this man embellished by local institutions, our historical churches, our Cathedral and within state educational practice.*[44]

She writes that the prominence of Colston in statues, stained-glass and civic rituals lead to miseducation, not historical awareness. Arguing that Colston does not in fact represent Bristolians in general, but instead a select elite wealthy class, she writes:

> *My ancestors, like most of my fellow Bristolians' ancestors, would have been despised by Colston. Their labour would have been used to expand his personal wealth'… He is not my 'hero', any more than he is your 'hero'…. The 'legacy' he left the city is one elevated, maintained and used by the elite to promote an image that suits their own purposes: Enabling a tiny number of people to hide behind a surface of benefaction, as this man has done down the ages….The murder, the kidnap, the suffering and enforced labour of my ancestors and of yours, has a legacy we see all around us today in the inequitable access to education, housing and quality jobs alike.*[45]

If the concern with preserving awareness of 'history in the round' is a sincere one, then there should be no problem with removing ambiguous and potentially problematic cultural objects, and replacing them with ones that convey the history in a balanced way, in its complexity.

A further argument against removing, re-contextualizing and renaming is a concern that people from the past should be judged by the standards of their time. The concern is that judging historical figures by today's moral standards does them an injustice. The fact that few people in Colston's milieu were vocally critical of African enslavement or other forms of labour exploitation means that his practices were not subject to the kind of critique that would have led him to see his actions as problematic. Indeed, the thought goes, with respect to slavery, Colston was a man of his time; what made him exceptional was his unusual generosity in bequeathing his wealth to Bristol charities.

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[44] Christine Townsend, *How we Bristolians have been brainwashed into thinking that Edward Colston is a hero*, BRISTOL EVENING (Nov. 2, 2017) http://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/opinion-how-bristolians-been-brainwashed-698067.
[45] *Id.*

One thought expressed in this objection is the idea that morality is relative to a given time and culture. According to this view, morality is constructed by communities, and there is no continuity from one time to another; what is wrong today *was not wrong* in the past, if a given community did not see it this way. There are several ways of responding to this. First, moral relativism is not the only option. It seems plausible to instead argue for at least some limited form of moral universalism. On this view, there are some kinds of things that are in fact wrong or unjust, even if people do not know it at a given time. For instance, many argue that the system of mass African enslavement was a crime against humanity, and that this is true regardless of what people carrying out the enslavement believed. If people sincerely did not understand the moral significance of what they were doing, then this matters, because it influences the kinds of attitudes we should hold towards them. However, it does not show that there is no need for reparatory action in light of the injustices suffered by enslaved people. For instance, it does not show that we should continue to celebrate Edward Colston in the same way that we have done historically. It is possible to agree that his historical context is an important factor which acts to mitigate responsibility. However, this does not change the immense harm suffered by people who were enslaved on his ships. A great injustice was still suffered by these individuals, and we have a duty to take appropriate steps now to repair this injustice, for instance by now showing due respect for the lives of people who were harmed.[46]

Another argument against renaming is a counterfactual one. Colonialism and Atlantic world slavery profoundly affected the course of world history, making it difficult to evaluate harms. One argument is that the people who exist today would not have been alive had a different course of history occurred, and thus that they have not been harmed by this history. Another argument is that colonial exploitation involved problematic relations but that it is impossible to evaluate whether people today are worse off than they would have been had colonialism not occurred. One response, from Daniel Butt, says that in reflecting on this question the correct counterfactual is not how people would have been had no colonial interaction occurred. Instead, it is how people would have been had interactions taken place on just terms, i.e. without subjugation, domination or unfair use.[47] This seems to make the harmfulness of colonialism clearer. A second argument, from Seana Shiffrin, states that the conceptions of harm above are problematic, because

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[46] Perhaps more contentiously, in some cases, it is also possible to argue that people in a given era *should* have understood the moral significance of their actions, given the conceptual resources available to them at their time. For instance, given the emphasis on values of freedom, people in Enlightenment era Europe arguably *should* have understood sooner the wrongness of enslaving African people.

[47] Daniel Butt, *Repairing historical wrongs and the end of empire*, 21(2) SOCIAL AND LEGAL STUDIES 227-242(2012).

they treat harm as a matter of costs and benefits. Instead, she says that a person is harmed if they are treated in a way that is in fundamental violation of their personhood. The kinds of relationships involved in colonial subjugation and enslavement are unambiguously harmful in this way, as are the ongoing racial injustice that is the legacy of these periods. This shows that we should reject the claim that people involved were not harmed and thus that reparatory actions are not needed.[48]

Finally, a common argument against renaming and removing symbols of white supremacy is a slippery slope argument.

> Premise 1) Many places across the world are named after people who benefited unjustly from colonialism and slavery.

> Premise 2) If we rename one of these places for moral reasons, then for consistency we would have to rename all of the others.

> Premise 3) It would be absurd to rename all of these places. That would be airbrushing history and denying our past.

> Conclusion) Therefore we should oppose attempts to rename any of these places on moral grounds.

However, this argument is problematic. Premise 1 is uncontroversial; it is true that there are many places named after people involved in slavery. However, we can reject the idea that consistency would require renaming all of these places (*Premise 2*), because there is no reason to assume that every place should be treated in the same way. Different places serve different social functions, so there might be good reasons to rename some places while retaining the names of others.

For instance, there could be strong arguments for renaming schools that are currently named after people who famously endorsed white supremacist ideals, because of the unique role that schools play in the formation of young people's self-concepts and group identities. It may be problematic to ask young people

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[48] Seana Shiffrin, *Reparations for U.S. Slavery and Justice over Time*, SSRN(2009).

to form positive shared identities and school community around the name of a person who defended white supremacy.[49] Young people may feel like it is incompatible with their self-respect or their moral principles to form a strong positive identity associated with such a figure. Moreover, because of phenomena like stereotype threat, and the potential for moral conflict with teachers over the name, having a school named after a known white supremacist might negatively affect the learning environment for some students, particularly for students racialized as black.[50]

Likewise, as we have seen, it is possible to put pressure on the idea that renaming places leads to airbrushing history and denying the past (*Premise 3*). Renaming need not involve airbrushing the past. Instead, any choice to either retain or change the name of a place comes with attendant duties to avoid sanitizing history, and to instead tell history in the round. A place which decides to change its name would be airbrushing the past if it simply removed all references to its previous namesake, and discouraged further engagement with its history; but it would not be airbrushing the past if it created a permanent educational display telling both positive and negative aspects of the former namesake; explaining the decision change the name; and prompting people to think for themselves about the issues of public ethics involved.

These are not decisive arguments; there might be other reasons to keep school names and statues. However, the discussion above does show that a) there are some prima facie reasons in favour of changing the names of the schools and removing prominent statues; and that b) several of the most prominent arguments against changing at least some names and removing some statues are ineffective. For instance, schools play a unique role in society, so we may have an obligation to rename the schools even if we do not rename other places; and doing so will not erase history provided we take appropriate steps to raise historical awareness in conjunction with changing the names. There are many other issues that bear on whether a name change is appropriate; but this shows that several of the most common objections can be rejected.

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[49] John Fabian Witt et al., *Report of the committee to establish principles on renaming* (Nov. 21, 2016).
[50] MICHAEL INZLICHT & TONI SCHMADER, STEREOTYPE THREAT: THEORY, PROCESS AND APPLICATION (Oxford University Press, 2011).

V. OBJECTIONS FROM POLITICAL POLARIZATION

There is a further set of objections that is more difficult to address. These concern the ethical significance of the fact that removing cultural objects and renaming places may be a polarizing strategy.[51] Recall the example that indigenous activists and their allies have long advocated using the name *Abya Yala* to refer to the land more widely known today as America.[52] As this example immediately reveals, challenges to place-names and statues can be radical in their implications, and may lead to intense opposition. Calls to remove or re-contextualize historical cultural symbols can be experienced as – and sometimes are – rejections of people's identities, their heritage and history. In the US South, debate about the Confederate flag has long been divided between those who claim that flying the flag is a racially unbiased celebration of Southern pride and heritage, and those who claim that it is a symbol of white supremacy. Opposition to the flag is seen by many as rejection of southern identity and culture. Flags, historical place-names and statues are often chosen by a few people for idiosyncratic reasons, but they can become part of the 'sense of place' and emblems of community history.[53] At their most polarized, therefore, debates over place-names and historical artifacts can become conflicts over territory – over whose place this is – and patriotism and national loyalty. When they take on this tone, they may be deeply divisive. For instance, when Afua Hirsch called in The Guardian for statues of Admiral Horatio Nelson to be re-contextualized, a passionate article on the BNP website attracted the following comment:

> *In a way, I hope they do take Nelson down. If that quintessentially English ethnic patriotic hero is toppled, it could be the point where it finally dawns on even the ever so patient, browbeaten English what is being done to them. They might well then rise up against their political class tormentors and oppressors and tear them limb from limb. Bring it on. I look forward to rioting in the streets.* (Vita Brevis, Manchester Grammar School).

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[51] I am grateful for conversations with Edson Burton, Tim Cole and Madge Dresser, all of whom have helped me to think about the objections articulated in this section.

[52] *Supra* note 17.

[53] Derrida for instance describes names as an 'instrument of public memory' and 'an essential way of reconstituting a tradition, or organizing and preserving a culture'. He speaks of preserving names as an act of friendship towards forebearers, and as 'crucial to the survival of a culture', going so far as to state that 'inheriting a culture is inheriting a set of proper (distinguished) names', CHRISTIAN MORARU, '"We embraced each other by our names": Levinas, Derrida and the ethics of naming'. in Names 48:1, pp. 55-56 (2000). Scholars of toponymy, or the study of place-naming, have also focused on the role of names in creating a 'sense of place', and on geographic place-names as part of cultural heritage. *See* Derek Alderman, 'Places, naming and the interpretation of culturla landscapes' in Brian Graham and Peter Howard (eds), The Ashgate Companion to Heritage and Identity, (Ashgate Press, 2008)

Sometimes the replacement of one cultural symbol with another may assert, or be perceived as asserting, the latter groups' superior status, and generate opposition on this ground. Moreover, in the face of profound material disadvantage, such symbolic actions may seem superficial and thus a misdirection of energy, using up valuable social capital, alienating potential allies, fueling opposition, and indeed perhaps causing harm to people who have emotional attachments and identification to these objects, while achieving no real shifts in power nor material changes in circumstance. Arguments over statues, flags and place-names can become symbolic of larger suites of disagreement, and arguments over their removal or protection may turn into contests over much larger world-views.

These concerns are the basis for an important objection to campaigns for removing putative symbols of white supremacy, which is as follows:

P1) We should seek to overcome racial injustices.

P2) Campaigns to remove statues, flags, and place-names may be perceived as evidence that the interests of different racialized groups are incompatible.

P3) If people see the interests of different racialized groups as incompatible, this will increase racial hostility and racial tensions.

P4) Increased racial tensions may generated further racial injustices. For instance, it might popularize support for laws that disadvantage racialized minorities and migrants.

P5) Campaigns to remove symbols of white supremacy may therefore increase racial injustice overall.

C) We should therefore prefer other approaches to challenging racial injustice.

Given that removing cultural symbols from the public sphere may be deeply polarizing, such strategies should be approached carefully. One theme amongst the current far right is the idea of a global conspiracy

to remove or replace the white race, and the worry that multi-culturalism is a threat to white indigenous identities and cultures. Removing statues may appear to provide a dramatic confirmation of these fears, and lead people to sympathize with the far-right who did not previously do so. For instance, in the Bristol Post a number of letter writers state that they had never before agreed with Councillor Richard Eddy, a local far-right conservative, but that they fully agree when he says that changing the name of Colston Hall destroys history and panders to an elite, politically correct minority. In a time of deepening political divides, Trump and Brexit, progressives may reasonably judge that certain kinds of symbolic change are not responsibly within reach, because reaching for them would entail unacceptable political risks. They might risk strengthening the vigour of movements on the populist right.

This connects to a second argument against removing objects that are seen as symbols of white supremacy. This argument is as follows:

P6) We should act with love and respect towards every person.

P7) Loving one another requires taking each other's needs seriously.

P8) All people have a need to be valued and affirmed.

P9) Loving one another therefore requires valuing and affirming one another.

P10) Attacking cultural objects that people are emotionally attached to expresses rejection of parts of their identities.

C) Where possible we should therefore prefer other approaches to challenging injustice.

Many campaigners are committed to the idea that their activism should be guided by principles of love or agape, nonviolence and respect. Principles of love imply a duty to take each other's needs seriously, including taking threats to one another's identities seriously. Campaigns to remove flag, statues and place names that are meaningful for many people can be experienced as a violation of this need for social affirmation, and a threat to people's standing in the community. Activists who are committed to principles

of love and respect must therefore think deeply about how to harmonize the need to alter symbols of white supremacy and challenge injustice, with the need to express consistent respect towards each person.

In light of the two arguments above – one pragmatic/political, and the other principled – one might agree that a given cultural object is functioning as a symbol of white supremacy or racial hierarchy, and supports the idea of civic landscapes free of such symbols, but believe that movement in this direction should take place more or less organically, or at least gradually, in a way which allows people to come on board from a wide range of starting points. One might hold that the strategy of challenging statues and historical place-names is too oppositional and threatening to be consistent with respect and love towards all members of the community, and perhaps that it fails to extend a bridge to those who do not yet understand the reasons for change.

VI. REPLIES

The arguments above do not necessarily show that campaigns to remove symbols of white supremacy are misguided. There are several reasons that the campaigns may still be morally necessary, or at least well-justified. First, the fact that social tension and misunderstandings are likely to result in the course of these campaigns is not necessarily an argument against them. The 1960s sit-ins ultimately generated profound shifts in social understanding, but as the interviews in the first part of this paper demonstrated, these campaigns initially generated intense social tension, distress, misunderstanding, and even violence. Civil rights campaigners emphasized the idea that if we are to move from conditions of injustice to justice, social tension may be necessary en route. This is because, as Frederick Douglass and many others have observed, power never gives up power willingly. Shifts in power will only take place when the discomfort of maintaining the status quo becomes greater than its benefits. Indeed, the purpose of the 1960s direct action campaigns was to generate enough social tension as to open the door to negotiation.[54] Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. argues that just as philosophical tension motivates movement towards understanding, so

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[54] As the great Civil Rights leader Bayard Rustin puts it, 'We need in every community a group of Angelic troublemakers. Our power is in our ability to make things unworkable. The only weapon we have is our bodies, and we need to tuck them in places so that wheels don't turn'. CALIFORNIA NEWSREEL (Nov. 18, 2009) *Brother Outsider the Life of Bayard Rustin*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=BkhKgnyWcuw.

nonviolent direct action campaigns use social tension in order to bring about movement towards justice.[55] He also argues that the tensions in question already exist, but are buried, and that what direct action does is to bring tensions out into the open, so that they can be worked through. Likewise, the social tension generated around campaigns to remove symbols of white supremacy may potentially be productive. For instance, in Bristol campaigns to change the memorialization of Edward Colston have generated vocal and passionate opposition in some parts of the city, but have also helped to catalyse important conversations across the city, with Colston's Hall, the Cathedral, the Society of Merchant Venturers, Colston's Primary, Colston's Girls' School, St Stephens Church, and University of Bristol all taking unprecedented reparatory steps – either altering their commemoration practices, agreeing to alter their names, or taking steps to acknowledge the history of their institutional connections with Atlantic world slavery. Thus, in itself, the fact that a campaign or an institution's decision generates social tension is not necessarily a mark against it. As Cornel West states of the Black Lives Matter movement, 'I think that's a marvellous new militancy that has to do with courage, vision… The fundamental challenge always is will their rage be channelled through … love and justice. You got to push them toward love and justice'.[56] West points to the power of 'the tradition of a Frederick Douglass or a Malcolm X, who used hyperbolic language at times to bring attention to the state of emergency'. West's intervention emphasizes that provocative actions can sometimes open a door to compassionate and productive communication.

Secondly, the arguments from love and respect can be challenged in two ways. Many activists reject the argument that there are unconditional moral duties of love and nonviolence, arguing that this exerts an unrealistic demand on people suffering the effects of injustice. Nonviolence presents an asymmetrical demand, requiring people who are experiencing injustice to go to great measures to avoid harming people advantaged by it. It is argued that principles of self-respect and self-defence take priority in cases where one is interacting with people who are not showing an equivalent respect.[57]

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[55] King writes, 'Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, we must see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.' Martin Luther King, *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, KING INSTITUTE, STANFORD (April 16, 1963) https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/letter-birmingham-jail.

[56] Cornel West, *Cornel West says Black Lives Matter A Marvellous Militancy* (March 16, 2016) http://thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/273704-cornel-west-says-black-lives-matter-a-marvelous-militancy.

[57] For powerful articulations by Angela Davis, Stokely Carmichael, Kathleen Cleaver and others see Olsson, Göran Hugo, 2011, The Black Power Mixtape (1967-1975). Documentary. AB Stories. For written analysis see e.g. RHONDA Y. WILLIAMS, CONCRETE DEMANDS: THE SEARCH FOR BLACK POWER IN THE 20TH CENTURY, (Routledge, New York, 2015). For a superb philosophical examination see Tommie Shelby's discussions of what he calls the 'stand and fight' tradition in black

However, even if there is an unconditional requirement to show love and respect towards each person, this does not mean that we must affirm every aspect of one another's identities. Instead, it might constrain how we go about our action. Specifically, it might mean that we should communicate global affirmations at the same time that we isolate specific problems for critique. It might also mean that we should place pressure only on those elements of identity and culture whose change is necessary to resolve a serious injustice. This is not always straightforward, since cultural objects that may be putative symbols of white supremacy from one vantage point are often not simply that; people have many legitimate, positive values that can be bound up with cultural objects like flags, place-names and statues, and this is what makes these cases so morally complex and challenging. For instance, it was impossible, in the segregated South, to challenge racial segregation without being seen as attacking people's families, faiths, and most deeply held values. The fact that values are densely connected to one another is part of what makes the ethical pursuit of major social change so difficult.

This suggests that any campaigns to remove symbols of white supremacy should be guided by a sense of proportionality and purpose. First, campaigns to remove cultural objects that are putative symbols of white supremacy must be undertaken not merely for the sake of doing so, but in order to correct a real and deep injustice.[58] The evidence of this injustice should be clear. Second, in cases where there are deep and legitimate (i.e. not inherently unjust) attachments to the cultural objects in question, it is important to ask searchingly whether the injustice in question can be redressed in ways that protect and affirm the legitimate parts of people's positive attachments and identities. Third, what effect movements have seems likely to depend significantly on how they are conducted, and on choices about the tenor of communication.[59] Fourth, there is a need for proportionality. The political risks involved, the expenditure of energy, and the costs to others (for instance, the cultural losses or threats to personal identity and so on) should be proportional to the injustice that is correctable through the measures proposed.

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philosophical thought, and his nonideal theory of ethics and agency in black ghettos. *See* TOMMIE SHELBY, DARK GHETTOS, (Harvard University Press, 2016).

[58] This follows King's instruction that the first step prior to direct action is to establish clear evidence of injustice.

[59] I will not attempt to say more here about tone or tenor. For one interesting discussion see SIGAL R. BEN-PORATH, FREE SPEECH ON CAMPUS (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

Finally, it is crucial to attend to the specifics of local circumstances. It is true that protest movements that heighten social tension have sometimes been effective. But that does not mean that heightening social tension is always good, or that *all* such movements will be effective. More argument is needed to show that a given action is well-justified in a specific local and global context, be it Mississippi in the era of Trump, or Bristol in the era of Brexit. For instance, one reason to think that these measures are well-justified in the Trump era is as follows. A powerful way to influence public attitudes is through strong leadership. Institutional leaders can shape public opinion through strong symbolic statements that demonstrate their commitment to acknowledging the community's problematic history and taking steps towards reparation. Having President Trump in office has emboldened and affirmed many whose racist attitudes had previously been pushed underground. Institutional leaders may be able to counteract Trump by taking strong stances that express a firm repudiation of Trump's values. Evaluating whether this argument supports any given action, however, requires deep knowledge and judgment of local politics. This speaks in favour of having strong local leadership in campaigns, with leaders who understand the details of local meanings and culture. Campaigns may easily misfire in the absence of local leadership from a diversity of social positions. In Bristol, local leadership has meant that campaigners have been able to offer powerful critiques that connect criticisms of Colston to wider issues of class and inequality in Bristol.[60] Media appearances in diverse venues (TV, radio and local printed press) help reach a wider range of people than social network platforms.

In Bristol, we have learned some important lessons, in part through successes and in part through failures. A lesson affirmed by our experience, and worth emphasizing in closing, is that artists and historians both have an extremely important role to play. Simply describing the details of history that has previously not been told often speaks for itself; and artistic interventions can help make this knowledge meaningful for the public.[61] Historical description can transform public attitudes. In Bristol, for instance, Roger Ball and Mark Steed's recent historical research has made it impossible to maintain a widely upheld myth in Bristol that claims of Colston's involvement in slavery are merely speculative.[62] Historical details matter and can go a long way to shifting public perception.

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[60] See e.g. Christine Townsend, *How we Bristolians have been brainwashed into thinking that Edward Colston is a hero*, Bristol Post (Nov. 2, 2017), http://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/opinion-how-bristolians-been-brainwashed-698067.

[61] See e.g. the work of the Atlanta History Center, including its Confederate Monument Interpretation Template. ATLANTA HISTORY CENTER http://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/research/confederate-monuments/confederate-monument-interpretation-template

[62] Roger Ball, *Edward Colston Research Paper 1: Calculating the number of enslaved Africans transported by the Royal African Company during Edward Colston's involvement (1680-1692)*; *Edward Colston Research Paper 2: The Royal African Company and Edward Colston (1680-1692)*

CONCLUSION

This paper began with the 1960s sit-ins, as an illustration of the insight that challenging social practices can sometimes function to shift large constellations of social meanings. I then introduced Sally Haslanger's account of ideology critique, to provide a general model of this insight. With these tools in hand, I turned to the contemporary movements to challenge symbols of white supremacy. I explicated three underlying rationales for these campaigns, and then addressed several potential objections. The argument overall supports the idea that there are real injustices associated with racism and colonialism that can be significantly corrected by renaming places or removing statues, provided that further steps are taken to ensure that the overall effect is to tell history in the round. Removing or transforming symbols of racial hierarchy, and creating affirming sites of memory in their place, is a way of expressing respect towards the lives of people who were harmed by the historical injustices of enslavement and its long legacies of harm, dignifying the memories of ancestors and affirming a commitment to future generations. Crucially, removing public symbols of white supremacy communicates a commitment to protection and respect. It sends a firm signal to the whole community that black people's lives matter, and that the community as a whole acknowledges and now firmly repudiates the wrong that it previously perpetrated. Finally, removing these symbols communicates a firm repudiation of the rationale of previous injustices, and a commitment against their continuation through new forms of injustice.

BRISTOL RADICAL HISTORY GROUP (2017) http://www.brh.org.uk/site/articles/Edward-colston-research-paper-1/; http://www.brh.org.uk/site/articles/Edward-colston-research-paper-2/; Roger Ball and Mark Steeds, *Letter to the Editor: Let's get the facts straight on Colston*, BRISTOL EVENING POST (Nov. 6, 2017); Roger Ball, and Mark Steeds, *Renaming Colston Hall is an opportunity to rediscover the hidden history of Bristol*, BRISTOL EVENING POST (March 6, 2017) http://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/news-opinion/comment-renaming-colston-hall-opportunity-6353. Their work has been effective because popular understanding of the city's participation in slavery has been raised more generally through the tireless work of historians and artists like Madge Dresser, the Bristol Radical History Group, Edson Burton, Bandele Iyapo, Michael Jenkins, Cleo Lake, Ros Martin, Olivette Otele the M-Shed and the city's other museums and public libraries, the Bristol Records Office, and many others.