

# OBJECTIONABLE COMMEMORATIONS: A SURVEY

A DRL READING GROUP BLUEPRINT BY TEN-HERNG LAI & CHONG-MING LIM

LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE-HARD

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## INTRODUCTION

What should we do about "objectionable" commemorations, especially statues or monuments that honour people responsible for injustice? The view that we should leave the decision to the tussle of politics appears implausible. In this blueprint, we consider several philosophical issues connected to the issue of objectionable commemorations. The blueprint is organised thematically, with several suggested readings per theme.

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## TOPICS

- Ethics and Socio-Politics of Aesthetics
- Social Epistemology
- Applied Ethics
- Ethics and Socio-Politics of Language
- Justice
- Law and Public Policy
- Culture
- Personal and Social Identity
- Race
- Technology and Material Culture

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## WEEK 1. COMMEMORATIVE SPEECH

### NGUYEN, C. THI. MONUMENTS AS COMMITMENTS: HOW ART SPEAKS TO GROUPS AND HOW GROUPS THINK IN ART

2019, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 100(4): 971-994.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Abstract:** Art can be addressed, not just to individuals, but to groups. Art can even be part of how groups think to themselves – how they keep a grip on their values over time. I focus on monuments as a case study. Monuments, I claim, can function as a commitment to a group value, for the sake of long-term action guidance. Art can function here where charters and mission statements cannot, precisely because of art's powers to capture subtlety and emotion. In particular, art can serve as the vessel for group emotions, by making emotional content sufficiently public so as to be the object of a group commitment. Art enables groups to guide themselves with values too subtle to be codified.

**Comment:** This paper highlights the role monuments can play as groups attempt to speak to itself to solidify its own commitment. As a form of art, it can publicly reinforce the commitments, especially through carrying the emotions, attitudes that cannot be easily expressed in propositions, towards certain individuals or ideals. The commitments can be something great, evil, or mediocre. Also consider the fact that art engages with our emotions rather than our rational capacity.

### FRIEDEL, DAVID, LIAO, SHEN-YI. HOW STATUES SPEAK

2022, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 80(4): 444-452.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate-Advanced

**Abstract:** We apply a familiar distinction from philosophy of language to a class of material artifacts that are sometimes said to “speak”: statues. By distinguishing how statues speak at the locutionary level versus at the illocutionary level, or what they say versus what they do, we obtain the resource for addressing two topics. First, we can explain what makes statues distinct from street art. Second, we can explain why it is mistaken to criticize—or to defend—the continuing presence of statues based only on what they represent. Both explanations are driven by the same core idea: the significance of statues arises primarily from what they do, and not what they say.

**Comment:** This paper can be used for discussions of the structure of commemorative speech within speech act theory.

### KUKLA, QUILL R. PUBLIC ARTIFACTS AND THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF COLLECTIVE MATERIAL TESTIMONY

2022, *Philosophical Issues*, 32(1): 233-252.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate-Advanced

**Abstract:** Many artifacts that are part of the public landscape—including monuments, memorials, murals, and many viewing towers, arches, gardens, public sculptures, and buildings—are designed to communicate knowledge. It is common to describe such public artifacts as speech, and also to describe them as transmitting knowledge of one sort or another. But the claim that these artifacts can be knowledge-transmitting speech is not typically developed as the complex claim in philosophy of language and social epistemology that it is. I will argue that such public artifacts can be testimony. This raises several philosophically important questions: How can public artifacts be speech, and more specifically, how can they testify? Whose testimony are they? To whom and about what are they testifying? And what is the epistemological status of this testimony—when should it be trusted? Surely if public artifacts can testify, then they can also mislead; it would be strange for them to be a form of testimony that is always trustworthy. Taking seriously their status as testimony means taking seriously as well the ways in which they can communicate false or unentitled claims. I hope that the idea that public artifacts not only communicate but testify is *prima facie* plausible; it certainly seems like monuments, memorials, and public artworks, for instance, tell us things, and that they can tell the truth or lie to us.

**Comment:** This paper can be used for discussions of how public artefacts can be collective testimony, and how such testimony can be true or false.

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. Can things speak?
2. How can commemorations speak?
3. What makes a commemorative speech successful?
4. How is commemorative speech related to collective speech?
5. Is the speech of objectionable commemorations a form of hate speech?

## WEEK 2. PUBLIC HONOURING

### **NILI, SHMUEL.** FROM CHARLOTTESVILLE TO THE NOBEL: POLITICAL LEADERS AND THE MORALITY OF PUBLIC HONOURS

2020, *Ethics*, 130(3): 415-445.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate-Advanced

**Abstract:** Political honors are ubiquitous in public life, whether in the form of public monuments, street names, or national holidays. Yet such honors have received scant attention from normative political theorists. Tackling this gap, I begin by criticizing a desert-based approach to political honors. I then argue that morally appropriate honors are best understood as marking and reinforcing the moral commitments of the collective in whose name they are being awarded. I show how this thesis clarifies and organizes core intuitions regarding a variety of honors, from those commemorating slave-owning founders of the United States to the Nobel Peace Prize.

**Comment:** This paper can be used for discussions of the relationship between political honours and collective commitments.

### **COHEN ROSSI, BENJAMIN.** FALSE EXEMPLARS: ADMIRATION AND THE ETHICS OF PUBLIC MONUMENTS

2020, *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*, 18(1): 49-84.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate-Advanced

**Abstract:** In recent years, a new generation of activists has reinvigorated debate over the public commemorative landscape. While this debate is in no way limited to statues, it frequently crystallizes around public representations of historical figures who expressed support for the oppression of certain groups or contributed to their past or present oppression. In this paper, I consider what should be done about such representations. A number of philosophers have articulated arguments for modifying or removing public monuments. Joanna Burch-Brown (2017) grounds her argument for removal in what I call the “honorific” function of such representations—the ways in which they express and tend to cultivate admiration for their subjects. In the first two sections of the paper, I develop a novel argument for modifying these representations based on this insight. I argue that leaving such representations unmodified in the public space tends to undermine the dignity of members of oppressed groups as well as their assurance that society and government are committed to their rights and constitutional entitlements. In the paper’s third section, I develop a “balancing test” for determining whether the relevant moral and pragmatic considerations favor making a particular representation inaccessible to the public, or recontextualizing it for public consumption. Unlike some of the existing philosophical treatments of honorific representations that focus on particular monuments, this balancing test is designed for general application to any honorific representation that satisfies the presumptive case for modification. To conclude, I offer some reasons why weak forms of recontextualization that do not involve altering institutional context may often be an insufficient remedy for the problems I describe.

**Comment:** This paper can be used for discussions of how to balance the moral and pragmatic considerations relevant to removing or recontextualising objectionable commemorations.

### **ARCHER, ALFRED, MATHESON, BENJAMIN (EDS.).** HONOURING AND ADMIRING THE IMMORAL: AN ETHICAL GUIDE

2021, Routledge: New York.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Abstract:** Publisher’s Note: Is it appropriate to honour and admire people who have created great works of art, made important intellectual contributions, performed great sporting feats, or shaped the history of a nation if those people have also acted immorally? This book provides a philosophical investigation of this important and timely question. The authors draw on the latest research from ethics, value theory, philosophy of emotion, social philosophy, and social psychology to develop and substantiate arguments that have been made in the public debates about this issue. They offer a detailed analysis of the nature and ethics of honour and admiration, and present reasons both in favour and against honouring and admiring the immoral. They also

take on the important matter of whether we can separate the achievements of public figures from their immoral behaviour. Ultimately, the authors reject a “onesize-fits-all” approach and argue that we must weigh up the reasons for and against honouring and admiring in each particular case. Honouring and Admiring the Immoral is written in an accessible style that shows how philosophy can engage with public debates about important ethical issues. It will be of interest to scholars and students working in moral philosophy, philosophy of emotion, and social philosophy.

**Comment:** This book provides a good overview of the landscape, and complications, of honouring and admiring immoral people.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What emotional or mental states are required for honouring?
2. What are the moral standards associated with honouring?
3. What is the nature of public honouring?
4. What are the political standards associated with public honouring?
5. Can the state permissibly direct public honouring?

### WEEK 3. HISTORY AND REMEMBRANCE

#### MATTHES, ERICH H. WHO OWNS UP TO THE PAST? HERITAGE AND HISTORICAL INJUSTICE

2018, Journal of the American Philosophical Association, 4(1): 87-104.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Abstract:** 'Heritage' is a concept that often carries significant normative weight in moral and political argument. In this article, I present and critique a prevalent conception according to which heritage must have a positive valence. I argue that this view of heritage leads to two moral problems: disowning injustice and embracing injustice. In response, I argue for an alternative conception of heritage that promises superior moral and political consequences. In particular, this alternative jettisons the traditional focus on heritage as a primarily positive relationship to the past and thus offers resources for coming to terms with histories of injustice.

**Comment:** This paper can be used for to map out different attitudes that we can take towards the past.

#### STEMPLOWSKA, ZOFIA. THE RHODES STATUE: HONOUR, SHAME AND RESPONSIBILITY

2021, The Political Quarterly, 92(4): 629-637.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Abstract:** Oriel College persists in displaying a statue of Cecil Rhodes, despite his role in British colonialism and despite opposition from the Rhodes Must Fall movement. This article considers arguments in support of Oriel's position—including three versions of the charge that removing the statue might distort history—and show that they all fail. I argue that the conclusion that the statue should be removed, despite possible costs and complexity, follows once we realise that the statue makes demands on our attention and once we correctly understand that the descendants of those previously oppressed by Rhodes and who are currently subject to racism have a special insight, standing and claim to shape the environment in which they study, work and live.

**Comment:** This paper can be used for discussions on how we should respond to competing demands on our attention in the context of commemorations.

#### ABRAHAM, DANIEL. THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY TO THE HISTORY-ERASING DEFENCE

2020, Journal of Applied Philosophy, 39(5): 745-760.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Abstract:** In this article, I argue that the primary goal of statues honouring public figures is to create and shape a collective identity. The way that these statues further the goal of identity is not by holding up the subjects of the statues as admirable but rather by asserting that the subjects were in some way objectively important and central to some group surrounding the statue. I will look at the defences for keeping statues of and awards named after John A. Macdonald and show that the primary concern is not with defending the character of Macdonald but rather that removing him is 'erasing history'. These defences are not about defending Macdonald as a person but rather defending a conception of the Canadian identity that requires Macdonald play a central role. Against these defences of Macdonald, I show that the 'objective history' case for him and other such similar figures fails. In the particular case of Macdonald, it fails because he was actually not that important for Canadian history. In the general case of negative public figures, I provide a short defence of how group identities are not static and not unchangeably rooted in a single historically based articulation.

**Comment:** This paper can be used for discussions of the purported relevance of history in the debates about removing commemorations.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What is the relationship between commemorations and history?
2. How do we choose which aspects of history to present (in the form of commemorations)?
3. How should we remember unsavoury parts of our history?
4. How is removing commemorations tantamount to erasing history?
5. Is there a distinct category of 'public history'?

## WEEK 4. AESTHETIC CONSIDERATIONS

### BACHARACH, SONDRA. BEARING WITNESS AND CREATIVE ACTIVISM

2023, The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 81(2): 153-163.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Abstract:** In this article, I explore the relationship between witness-bearing arts as a form of creative activism designed to respond to social injustices. In the first section, I present some common features of bearing witness, as conceptualized within media studies and journalism. Then I explain how artworks placed in the streets can bear witness in a similar way. I argue that witness-bearing art transmits knowledge about certain unjust and harmful events, which then places a moral burden or responsibility on the viewer. To defend this view, I offer some examples of activist art that bears witness to certain events. I suggest that witness-bearing art is placed in the streets in order to make certain truths publicly available, by offering evidence of them embedded in the artwork. The final section considers why the bearing witness is especially effective for activist art. Witness-bearing art plays a crucial knowledge-transmitting function, one which enables art to engage in creative activism. I conclude by considering how witness-bearing art offers a powerful and persuasive voice for the oppressed.

**Comment:** This paper can be used for discussions on the potential of art to challenge received narratives.

### DIXON, DAISY. ARTISTIC (COUNTER) SPEECH

2022, The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 80(4): 409-419.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate-Advanced

**Abstract:** Some visual artworks constitute hate speech because they can perform oppressive illocutionary acts. This illocution-based analysis of art reveals how responsive curation and artmaking undermines and manages problematic art. Drawing on the notion of counterspeech as an alternative tool to censorship to handle art-based hate speech, this article proposes aesthetic blocking and aesthetic spotlighting. I then show that under certain conditions, this can lead to eventual metaphysical destruction of the artwork; a way to destroy harmful art without physically destroying it.

**Comment:** This paper can be used for discussions of how artistic interventions can constitute counter-speech to commemorative speech.

### SHAPSHAY, SANDRA. WHAT IS THE MONUMENTAL?

2021, Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 79(2): 145-160.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Abstract:** The aesthetic category of the sublime has been theorized (especially in the Kantian tradition) as integrally intertwined with the moral. Paradigmatic experiences of the sublime, such as gazing up at the starry night sky, or out at a storm-whipped sea, lead in a moral or religious direction depending on the cognitive stock brought to the experience, since they typically involve a feeling of awe and reflection on the peculiar situation of the human being in nature. The monumental is a similar aesthetic category, integrally intertwined with the political, but, by contrast, has garnered almost no attention from aestheticians. My main goal in this paper is to sketch a theory of 'the monumental' as an aesthetic category—one that is a species of the sublime but differs qualitatively from the natural/environmental sublime in significant ways, and thus merits a distinctive label. In doing so, I aim to shed light on the nature and power of monuments specifically, and to begin to address a lacuna in our understanding of a long-standing and culturally important form of public art.

**Comment:** This paper can be used for discussions of whether the 'monumental' is a unique aesthetic category, especially in relation to the sublime.

### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What is the relevance of the aesthetic features of commemorations?
2. How can the aesthetic features of commemorations (or art more generally) transmit knowledge?

3. Is there a clearly demarcated aesthetic category of the commemorative (or the monumental)?
4. How do the aesthetic features of commemorations mark them out as a unique aesthetic category?
5. What is the potential of aesthetic interventions with regard to objectionable commemorations?



## WEEK 5. REMOVAL

### FROWE, HELEN. THE DUTY TO REMOVE STATUES OF WRONGDOERS

2019, *Journal of Practical Ethics*, 7(3): 1-31.

**Difficulty:** Easy-Intermediate

**Abstract:** This paper argues that public statues of persons typically express a positive evaluative attitude towards the subject. It also argues that states have duties to repudiate their own historical wrongdoing, and to condemn other people's serious wrongdoing. Both duties are incompatible with retaining public statues of people who perpetrated serious rights violations. Hence, a person's being a serious rights violator is a sufficient condition for a state's having a duty to remove a public statue of that person. I argue that this applies no less in the case of the 'morally ambiguous' wrongdoer, who both accomplishes significant goods and perpetrates serious rights violations. The duty to remove a statue is a defeasible duty: like most duties, it can be defeated by lesser-evil considerations. If removing a statue would, for example, spark a violent riot that would risk unjust harm to lots of people, the duty to remove could be outweighed by the duty not to foreseeably cause unjust harm. This would provide a lesser-evil justification for keeping the statue. But it matters that the duty to remove is outweighed, rather than negated, by these consequences. Unlike when a duty is negated, one still owes something in cases of outweighing. And it especially matters that it is outweighed by the predicted consequences of wrongful behaviour by others.

**Comment:** This paper highlights several important things. First, statues are blunt tools and express pro-attitudes to the persons they represent as a whole. Second, it sets out a clear standard for removal, and defends the conclusion that we should remove many or even most existing statues. Third, to the question "what if removal incites violence?" this paper provides a good answer. Fourth, a legitimate question is what we should do about statues of wrongdoers of the distant past? The discussion on this here is insightful.

### FOX, CARL. DOWN WITH THIS SORT OF THING: WHY NO PUBLIC STATUE SHOULD STAND FOREVER

2023, *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 28(6): 1-22.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate-Advanced

**Abstract:** No statue raised in a public place should stand there indefinitely. Any such monument should have a set date when it is due to be replaced. I make three arguments to support this principle of non-permanence for public commemorative art. First, the opportunity cost of permanent statues is too high. States have a duty, grounded in their need for legitimacy, to support and cultivate democratic values. Public art is a powerful tool that is being drastically underemployed because existing statues are already taking up so many prominent sites. Second, permanence undermines stability by unnecessarily raising the stakes of change and so exacerbating predictable tensions between social groups who ought to be able to respect one another as honourable civic partners. My proposal reduces the significance of replacing a monument by making removals a commonplace event. Third, we ought to do away with permanent statues as a means of increasing democratic control for both current and future generations over public spaces. Each generation inherits a more cluttered civic landscape which makes it progressively more difficult to shape it in accordance with their needs, preferences, and cultural vocabulary. Taken together, these arguments tip the balance of reasons decisively against the status quo.

**Comment:** This paper can be used for discussions of whether commemorations should be permanent or transient.

### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What are the duties of the state with regard to objectionable commemorations?
2. What are individuals' duties with regard to objectionable commemorations?
3. What principles render it permissible or impermissible to preserve objectionable commemorations?
4. Can our duties to preserve or remove objectionable commemorations be defeated?

5. What considerations feature in lesser evil arguments for preserving or removing objectionable commemorations?

## WEEK 6. DEFACEMENT

### LIM, CHONG-MING. VANDALIZING TAINTED COMMEMORATIONS

2020, *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 48(2): 185-216.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Abstract:** What should we do about “tainted” public commemorations? Recent events have highlighted the urgency of reaching a consensus on this question. However, existing discussions appear to be dominated by two naïve opposing views – to remove or preserve them. My aims in this essay are two-fold. First, I argue that the two views are not naïve, but undergirded by concerns with securing self-respect and with the character of our engagement with the past. Second, I offer a qualified defence of vandalising tainted commemorations. The defence comprises two parts. I consider two prominent suggestions – to install counter-commemorations and to add contextualising plaques – and argue that they are typically beset with difficulties. I then argue that in some circumstances, constrained vandalism is a response to tainted commemorations which effectively adjudicates the demands of the two opposing views.

**Comment:** Lim’s paper represents one of the best attempts to charitably understand the view of those who support preservation, and furthermore constructively engages with them to the extent where a reasonable yet striking solution is proposed. Encouraged to be read with Lim, C.-M. (2020), “Transforming problematic commemorations through vandalism”, *Journal of Global Ethics*, 16(3): 414–421, where Lim defends the feasibility of his radical solution.

### LAI, TEN-HERNG. POLITICAL VANDALISM AS COUNTER-SPEECH: A DEFENCE OF DEFACING AND DESTROYING TAINTED MONUMENTS

2020, *European Journal of Philosophy*, 28(3): 602-616.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate-Advanced

**Abstract:** Tainted political symbols ought to be confronted, removed, or at least recontextualized. Despite the best efforts to achieve this, however, official actions on tainted symbols often fail to take place. In such cases, I argue that political vandalism—the unauthorized defacement, destruction, or removal of political symbols—may be morally permissible or even obligatory. This is when, and insofar as, political vandalism serves as fitting counter-speech that undermines the authority of tainted symbols in ways that match their publicity, refuses to let them speak in our name, and challenges the derogatory messages expressed through a mechanism I call derogatory pedestalling: the glorification or honoring of certain individuals or ideologies that can only make sense when members of a targeted group are taken to be inferior.

**Comment:** This paper can be used for discussions of how defacing objectionable commemorations can transform their speech.

### LAI, TEN-HERNG. OBJECTIONABLE COMMEMORATIONS, HISTORICAL VALUE, AND REPUDIATORY HONOURING

2022, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 102(1): 37-47.

**Difficulty:** Easy

**Abstract:** Many have argued that certain statues or monuments are objectionable, and thus ought to be removed. Even if their arguments are compelling, a major obstacle is the apparent historical value of those commemorations. Preservation in some form seems to be the best way to respect the value of commemorations as connections to the past or opportunities to learn important historical lessons. Against this, I argue that we have exaggerated the historical value of objectionable commemorations. Sometimes commemorations connect to biased or distorted versions of history, if not mere myths. We can also learn historical lessons through what I call repudiatory honouring: the honouring of certain victims or resisters that can only make sense if the oppressor(s) or target(s) of resistance are deemed unjust, where no part of the original objectionable commemorations is preserved. This type of commemorative practice can even help to overcome some of the obstacles objectionable commemorations pose against properly connecting to the past.

**Comment:** Many scholars in this debate have been too charitable to racists, colonialists, oppressors, and their sympathisers. While admirable, I think it is important to expose the flaws of preservationism: there is simply not much value in preservation.

**BELL, MACALESTER. AGAINST SIMPLE REMOVAL: A DEFENCE OF DEFACEMENT AS A RESPONSE TO RACIST MONUMENTS**

2021, Journal of Applied Philosophy, 39(5): 778-792.

**Difficulty:** Easy-Intermediate

**Abstract:** In recent years, protesters around the world have been calling for the removal of commemorations honouring those who are, by contemporary standards, generally regarded as seriously morally compromised by their racism. According to one line of thought, leaving racist memorials in place is profoundly disrespectful, and doing so tacitly condones, and perhaps even celebrates, the racism of those honoured and memorialized. The best response is to remove the monuments altogether. In this article, I first argue against a prominent offense-based account of the wrong of simply leaving memorials in place, unaltered, before offering my own account of this wrong. In at least some cases, these memorials wrong insofar as they express and exemplify a morally objectionable attitude of race-based contempt. I go on to argue that the best way of answering this disrespect is through a process of expressively “dehonouring” the subject. Removal of these commemorations is ultimately misguided, in many cases, because removal, by itself, cannot adequately dishonour, and simple removal does not fully answer the ways in which these memorials wrong. I defend a more nuanced approach to answering the wrong posed by these monuments, and I argue that public expressions of contempt through defacement have an ineliminable role to play in an apt dishonouring process.

**Comment:** Two things should be noted in this paper. First, many have discussed the importance of stopping or blocking the harm of objectionable commemorations. This paper goes a step further and discusses the importance of “answering” the wrong done by these monuments. Second, the paper engages with a “negative” emotion, namely, contempt, that is present at both racist monuments and the effort to confront them. It allows us to see the legitimate role this negative emotion may play in the struggle for equality: contempt can be apt towards inapt contempt expressed through racist monuments. It also nicely spells out the potential practical implications of taking this negative emotion seriously.

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. What is achieved by vandalising commemorations?
2. What are the alternatives to vandalism?
3. Is vandalism a second-best option?
4. What positive reasons are there to support vandalism?
5. How should we deal with the potential backlash to vandalising commemorations?

## WEEK 7. EDUCATION

### YUN, SUNINN. 'PLEASE DON'T DESTROY UNTIL IT'S COMPLETELY DESTROYED': ACTS OF EDUCATION TOWARDS DEMOCRACY

2021, Journal of Philosophy of Education, 55(3): 506–515.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Abstract:** The Black Lives Matter campaign has led many people around the world to reassess monuments that are installed in public spaces to commemorate historical figures. These reassessments raise questions about what it means to attack the statues of the past, what the rights and wrongs of such actions are, what this teaches us and how all this is passed on to the next generation. In line with this, I focus on a statue of the former dictator of Korea, Chun Doo-hwan, installed in 2019. The purpose of the statue was, however, somewhat different from that of many other statues currently at issue. It was erected for the purpose of humiliation rather than respect. By examining the case of the statue of Chun Doo-hwan in Korea, this paper discusses the nature of democracy in relation to these attacks on statues. In particular, it attempts to interpret the installation of the statue as a form of art for an emancipated community, where democracy is understood as involving a haunting of the collective memory. It concludes that democracy is something never to be grasped fully, something that slips away from its intentions and that is always to be tested and reconsidered. Finally, the paper addresses the educational significance of the statue in question in terms of how history is to be taught and how, in our interactions with the statues around us, the past is to be remembered.

**Comment:** This paper explores the educational significance of commemorations in terms of how history is to be taught and how our past is to be remembered.

### SYNOWICH, CHRISTINE. MONUMENTS AND MONSTERS: EDUCATION, CULTURAL HERITAGE AND SITES OF CONSCIENCE

2021, Journal of Philosophy of Education, 55(3): 469–483.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate

**Abstract:** Cultural heritage, manifest in public monuments, plays an important role in education, providing tangible artefacts that chart the history of a society, its achievements, tragedies and horrors, contributing to human understanding and well-being. The educational impact is lifelong—everyone from schoolchildren to senior citizens visit and take in heritage sites. How heritage is to be approached, however, is a complex question, with conflicting narratives vying for prominence. Kingston, Ontario, where my university is situated, is the hometown of Canada's first prime minister, John A. Macdonald, whose ambition to unite the country sea-to-sea brought Canada into being. Today debate rages about how to understand Macdonald's legacy of colonialism, his actions against the Indigenous peoples, whose lands and children were taken from them, and against the families of Chinese workers, who built Canada's railway and were then impeded from making their homes in this country. In a climate of increasing awareness of racial oppression, exemplified particularly by the protests of Black Lives Matter, Kingston is in the grip of debate and demonstration, centering on calls for the removal of a prominent statue of Macdonald from a downtown park. This paper explores the problem of historic monuments to suggest that a focus on education can enable an understanding of heritage that seeks to provide the necessary conditions in which historic wrongs can be understood.

**Comment:** This is one of the few papers that discuss how a focus on education can help us to address the problems posed by objectionable commemorations.

### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. How can public commemorations educate us about history?
2. How is school or public education related to what is achieved by commemorations?
3. Can the removal of commemorations be compensated for by increased public education?
4. How can art be marshalled in the service of democratic goals?
5. Can objectionable commemorations be transformed into sites of education?

## WEEK 8. NEGOTIATIONS

### SCHULZ, JOHANNES. MUST RHODES FALL? THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COMMEMORATION IN THE STRUGGLE FOR RELATIONS OF RESPECT

2021, *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 27(2): 166-186.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate-Advanced

**Abstract:** In June 2016, Corey Menafee, a dishwasher at Yale University, used a broomstick to smash a stained-glass window in the dining hall of Yale's Calhoun College depicting African slaves carrying bales of cotton. He had gotten sick of what he saw as a racist piece of art, unfit for a "modern era where we shouldn't have to be subjected to those ... degrading images." Menafee has since apologized, claiming "there's way better ways you can handle problems than just smashing something physically." In Oxford, student activists led protests for the removal of a statue of British imperialist Cecil Rhodes. The attempt to emulate the successful movement to topple a Rhodes Statue at the University of Cape Town was met with an enormous backlash and Oriel College refused to comply, after pressure from some of its biggest donors. With many arguing the students were setting the wrong priorities, Oxford University Chancellor Chris Patten went as far as to accuse them of leading an attack on the "open society." The statue of Cecil Rhodes and the stained-glass window in Calhoun College are commemorative symbols. To commemorate is to publicly remember a historic figure or event taken to play an important role in a community's history and in the formation of its self-understanding. The world is full of commemorations of the unjust past, in the form of paintings, monuments, flags, public holidays or names on buildings. Demands to see them removed from the public sphere are legion. Are we morally required to remove certain forms of commemoration or was Menafee right to apologize and Chris Patten correct in questioning the legitimacy of such actions in open societies?

**Comment:** This paper argues that our responses to objectionable commemorations should depend on whether there are wider processes of working through the past that those commemorations are connected to.

### BURCH-BROWN, JOANNA. SHOULD SLAVERY'S STATUES BE PRESERVED? ON TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE AND CONTESTED HERITAGE

2022, *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 39(5): 807-824.

**Difficulty:** Intermediate-Advanced

**Abstract:** What should we do with statues and place-names memorializing people who committed human-rights abuses linked to slavery and postslavery racism? In this article, I draw on UN principles of transitional justice to address this question. I propose that a successful approach should meet principles of transitional justice recognized by the United Nations, including affirming rights to justice, truth, reparations, and guarantees of nonrecurrence of human rights violations. I discuss four strategies for handling contested heritage, examining strengths and weaknesses of each strategy. Examples from Bristol, England, highlight common challenges and positive lessons.

**Comment:** This paper deploys principles of transitional justice to review the payoffs of different approaches to objectionable commemorations.

### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. How do we determine the social significance of objectionable commemorations?
2. How do objectionable commemorations affect the social bases of citizens' self-respect?
3. What principles can and should guide us in working through the past?
4. How should we deal with objectionable commemorations when their victims are no longer present?
5. Should our responses to objectionable commemorations be oriented towards reconciliation?