



## The New Iconoclasm

### **Publish Date:**

December 2016

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Two anniversaries that fall in October, both important for lovers of western civilisation, highlight the new iconoclasm at the heart of modern western progressives.

The first date is Columbus Day, which commemorates Christopher Columbus' arrival in the Americas on 12 October 1492. The effective discovery of the Americas by Europeans is an obviously important event in Western history: for one thing, it exported the West to the New World through colonisation, and led to the eventual creation of the United States of America, the remaining superpower in the world today.

Perhaps because of this, symbols of Columbus' achievements are a target for the self-loathing progressive Left. Such is their obsession that a group of local politicians in Barcelona, apparently unfazed by the prevalent street crime and high unemployment, are calling for the removal of one of Barcelona's most iconic monuments: an imposing bronze figure of Columbus, who, since 1888, has been pointing out to sea in three-dimensional glory atop a towering 40 metre Corinthian column, located at the lower end of the pick pocketers paradise known as *La Rambla*.

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The far Left councillors calling for its removal say that the statue, its plinth, and other historical characters unfortunate enough to be depicted in bronze at the base of the explorer's column, has to go because its very presence praises the conquest of another nation which was then subjected to "imperialism, oppression and segregation."

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated example. Public statues have increasingly come under attack, specifically statues of dead white males who either built empires or colonised other countries, by certain members of society who, wracked with guilt, have become a new breed of modern day iconoclast.

Until he had caught the attention of a socialist Peruvian architecture professor, the Spanish *conquistador*, Francisco Pizarro González and his steed had been standing on top of a plinth in Lima's central squares since the 1930s. Pizarro has since been moved out of sight to an obscure park, condemned as a criminal and unfit for the general public's consumption.

In 2015, students at the University of Cape Town began the Rhodes Must Fall campaign. claiming that the seated statue of Cecil Rhodes 'represented institutional racism'. The campaign spread across the globe to other universities, most notably Oxford University's Oriel College, where Rhodes was an intermittent student between 1873 and 1881.

Students at Oxford voted 245 to 212 in favour of the motion to remove his statue because they wanted to 'challenge the structures of knowledge production that continue to mould a colonial mindset that dominates our present'.

Oriel College responded by saying that 'the College does not share Cecil Rhodes's values or condone his racist views or actions' but when it realised that it stood to lose £100 million of gifts and bequests from furious donors, it decided that insofar as Oriel was concerned, Rhodes Must Not Fall.

At Jesus College, Cambridge, the student union passed a motion to repatriate a bronze cockerel which was taken from Benin, in Nigeria after a punitive British naval expedition in 1897. According to Varsity, the student magazine, 'the contemporary political culture surrounding colonialism and social justice, combined with the university's global agenda, offers a perfect opportunity for the college to benefit from this gesture.' In other words, everyone was going to feel a lot better about themselves if the giant metallic fowl was returned to Benin at once.

Iconoclasm is not a new phenomenon. The Eastern Orthodox Church for example, has never accepted monumental sculpture. In the 1640s, Oliver Cromwell's puritanical regime reached its apogee by establishing a 'Committee for the Demolition of Monuments of Superstition and Idolatry' which would send in hammer wielding henchmen at the slightest whiff of idolatry.

Islam has consistently and violently rejected nearly all figurative sculpture. In 2001 the Taliban reduced the monumental 4<sup>th</sup> Century Bamiyan Buddhas to piles of dust and rubble, while in 2015, Isis blew up the cultural treasures of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Palmyra.



But there is an important distinction between that style of iconoclasm, present throughout history where leaders of new regimes replaced or removed symbols of old regimes, and this new iconoclasm.

What we are seeing is a campaign to remove the very symbols that embody the essence of Western Civilisation, by the West itself. That western spirit of adventure and discovery that took western civilisation itself to the new world as symbolised Christopher Columbus, has now become something to be ashamed of.

Columbus's statue was constructed for the Universal Exhibition of 1888, one of many world exhibitions which were being held across the globe in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to promote new industrial products and show the latest scientific achievements being made.

But the new iconoclasts turn their backs on the insights and advances propelled by the Renaissance, the Scientific revolution and Enlightenment. Instead, they seek to replace social and scientific-progress with warm and fuzzy relativist goals of respect and recognition.

The removal of statues has become a form of atonement for guilt and self-loathing. It is an expression of a moral revulsion at the supposed racism and ideas of cultural superiority displayed by our forebears.

The second anniversary to take place this month is the Battle of Hastings, which took place 950 years ago. It is a perfect contrast to Columbus Day, and highlights that fact that the Left does not possess a principled concern for the historic conquest of indigenous peoples. On October 14, 1066, a Norman Frenchman effectively invaded England, took the Crown from the King and initiated a Normanisation of English society that fundamentally and irrevocably reshaped Britain.

It is safe to say that statues of William the Conqueror dotted across the British Isles, including the iconic statue of the Norman King on his horse in front of the Houses of Parliament in London, will not be subjected to the same fate of other European conquerors. The Left will leave them well alone, preferring to let this particular anniversary pass unnoticed, as it highlights an extremely uncomfortable fact: that history is littered with warfare, competition and conflict, and is not something to be perpetually aggrieved about.