

Iconoclasm



Questions of Veneration, Destruction and Power

The Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, July 2020

Part of the *Current Issues in Anthropology* Series



MAXWELL
MUSEUM
OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Introduction



A statue of Edward Colston, a late 17th century slave trader, being pushed into the river Avon, Bristol, UK, June 7, 2020. Photo Credit: Giulia Spadafora/NurPhoto via Getty Images

(Audio of cheering crowd) That was the sound of a cheering crowd of protestors in Bristol, in the United Kingdom, as they pulled down the statue of seventeenth century slave trader Edward Colston, on June 7th, 2020.

Welcome to the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology's exhibition, *Iconoclasm: Questions of Veneration, Destruction and Power*

As long as humans have created symbols, others have sought to destroy them, creating cycles of veneration and destruction. Iconoclasm, the destruction of sacred images or representations, is so relevant to the work we do in anthropology museums, where a large part of what we do is preserve objects of cultural or ideological significance. This exhibition investigates current debates about iconoclasm.

Introduction



The defaced statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee on Monument Avenue, Richmond, VA, June 23, 2020. Photo credit: Mobilus in Mobili, via Flickr, CC

As long as humans have created symbols, others have sought to destroy them, creating cycles of veneration and destruction. Iconoclasm, the destruction of sacred images or representations, is so relevant to the work we do in anthropology museums, where a large part of what we do is preserve objects of cultural or ideological significance. This exhibition investigates current debates about iconoclasm.

This introductory image shows the defaced statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee on Monument Avenue, in Richmond, Virginia on June 23, 2020. The statue has been a focal point of protests over the death of George Floyd, resulting in vandalism of the monument. On June 4th, Virginia Governor Ralph Northam ordered the removal of the statue, but that was met with a court-ordered temporary injunction halting that action. As of yet, the issue is unresolved.

Introduction



An image of George Floyd is projected on the base of the statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee on Monument Avenue, Monday, Richmond, VA, June 8, 2020. Photo credit: Steve Helber/ Associated Press

In this image, taken on June 8th, 2020 a likeness of George Floyd and the acronym “BLM”, is projected onto the same monument, in a laser projection project created by lighting director Dustin Klein for that ongoing protest. Increasingly, laser projections are becoming a form of intervention and temporary iconoclastic action, or a means to respond to iconoclasm at sites of protest and defacement.

The acronym “BLM” stands for Black Lives Matter, which is a global organization and movement whose mission, in their own words, is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.

Introduction



Protest for George Floyd, the widely hated statue of former mayor Frank Rizzo covered in graffiti, Philadelphia, PA, May 30, 2020. Photo Credit: Joe Piette CC BY-SA 2.0

This exhibition was displayed in the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology in 2018 as part of our *Current Issues in Anthropology* series. We have created this online version in July of 2020 with the ongoing protests in response to the killing of George Floyd in mind. We are in turbulent times and join you in reflecting on them. The Maxwell Museum also joins so many in expressing our anguish and frustrations in these times of unrest and a global pandemic.

Some of the images and text in this exhibition have been updated.

In this image, taken May 30th, 2020, during a protest for George Floyd, the widely hated statue of former Philadelphia mayor Frank Rizzo, was covered in graffiti. For many, Rizzo, also once Philadelphia police commissioner, was a symbol of the brutal treatment of Black people and other minorities at the hands of white police officers. The statue was removed by the city on June 3rd, 2020.

Introduction



The defaced statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee on Monument Avenue, Richmond, VA, June 23, 2020, has been altered dramatically by artists and protesters. Photo credit: Carlos Bernate for The New York Times

To preface this updated exhibition, consider the words of former slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass, a likeness of whom is seen in this image being projected on the same General Robert E. Lee memorial. These words of Douglass' were invoked by Secretary of the Smithsonian Lonnie Bunch in a statement he made related to the protest over the death of George Floyd. Douglass said:

“Those who profess to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation, are people who want crops without ploughing the ground.... The struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, or it may be both. But it must be a struggle.”

Introduction



Still from a film recording of Marian Anderson singing in front of the Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C., April 9, 1939. Photo credit: The Robert H. Jackson Center.

Before considering *iconoclasm* proper, that is, the *destruction* of valued or sacred cultural sites and symbols, it is helpful first to consider such sites – such as monuments and memorials themselves - and ask, what purpose do they serve?

In this image, Opera singer Marian Anderson is seen singing in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., on April 9th, 1939. Anderson performed this concert in front of 75,000 people, after the Daughters of the American Revolution had her barred from singing in Washington D.C.'s Constitution Hall because she was Black. The Lincoln Memorial was chosen as the site for this concert because of its symbolic heft.

Introduction



Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivers his 'I Have a Dream' speech at the March on Washington, Lincoln Memorial, by Bob Adleman, Washington, D.C., August 28, 1963. Photo credit: The Library of Congress.

In broad terms, monuments, memorials and similar material expressions of state or community identity are sites where collective memory is created and marked.

In this image, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivers the 'I Have a Dream' speech at the Lincoln Memorial at the March on Washington, August 28, 1963.

Introduction



Demonstrators gather at the Lincoln Memorial during a protest against racial inequality in Washington, D.C., June 6, 2020. Photo credit: Carlos Barria/Reuters

Anthropological studies of such sites reflect that the materiality of monuments can elicit a collective mode of remembering, shaping our recall of the past, and creating shared cultural memories that may or may not be related to the specific facts of past events, but regardless, can be powerful places of emotional, communal and contested experience.

Here, again, in this image, the Lincoln Memorial, with demonstrators gathering during a protest against racial inequality on June 6, 2020.

Introduction



President Donald Trump with Fox News interviewers at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C., May 3, 2020. Photo credit: Anna Moneymaker for The New York Times

In some instances, such memorializing sites may also be places where we are asked to forget as well as to remember, directing us to select certain versions of history and events, while obscuring others.

In this final image at the Lincoln Memorial, President Donald Trump is interviewed by Fox News anchors, on May 3rd, 2020. Though most events had been banned at the memorial due to the coronavirus pandemic, U.S. secretary of the interior David Bernhardt granted an exception for this event.

Iconoclasm



(Detail) Khloodov Psalter, 9th century. The image represents the Iconoclast theologian, John the Grammarian, and an iconoclast bishop destroying an image of Christ. Image Credit: State Historical Museum, Moscow

Iconoclasm is the destruction of sacred images or representations. Originally iconoclasm referred to the destruction of actual *icons*, as major religious leaders and their followers sought to ban the veneration of sacred images (images representing Christian saints, the Virgin Mary and Christ) during Byzantine and Protestant Reformation eras.

Here we see a detail from the 9th century Khloodov Psalter, or Book of Psalms. The image represents the Iconoclast theologian, John the Grammarian, and an iconoclast bishop destroying an image of Christ. The Khloodov Psalter is the oldest of three remaining illuminated Byzantine Psalters to survive the 9th century, when Iconoclasm, in the original sense of the word, was at its height.

Iconoclasm



(Detail) "Pulling down the statue of George III by the "Sons of Freedom," at the Bowling Green, City of New York, July 1776". Painted by Johannes A. Oertel, engraved by John C. McRae, ca. 1875. Image Credit: The Library of Congress

Over time the term has expanded to include the destruction of symbols of cherished beliefs, people, or institutions such as monuments, memorials, flags and other such material manifestations of cultural capital.

In this image, an engraving from about 1875, the "Sons of Freedom", a mixed group of civilian new Yorkers and George Washington's soldiers, stirred up by a public reading of the Declaration of Independence, pull down the statue of the British Monarch, George III at Bowling Green, in the City of New York, in July of 1776. The statue, reportedly made of solid lead and gilded in gold, was moved to Connecticut and later used to make guns and bullets.

Iconoclasm



One of the 6th-7th century Bamiyan Buddhas of Afghanistan (West niche), before destruction by the Taliban in 2001. Photo Credit: Afghanistan Embassy

It would seem, as long as humans have created symbols, others have sought to destroy them, creating cycles of veneration and destruction. Religious zealots have destroyed the “idols” required by other forms of worship, or even their own religion’s icons.

In this image, one of the two 6th or 7th century Buddha images in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, before their destruction by the Taliban in 2001. The Buddhas, considered the largest in the world before their destruction, were carved into a side of a cliff. The motivation behind the destruction was part of the Taliban’s extreme iconoclastic campaign, as well as their resentment of Western efforts and resources poured into protecting the statues while there was, at the same time, a large humanitarian crisis in the region that was largely being ignored.

Iconoclasm



A 3D light projection of how a destroyed Buddha, known as Solsol to locals, might have looked in its prime, Bamiyan, Afghanistan, June 7, 2015. Photo credit: Jim Huylebroek for The New York Times

In June of 2015, two Chinese documentarians, Janson Yu and Liyan Hu, created and projected 3D holograms of the Bamiyan Buddhas into the empty niches where they once stood, as a temporary re-creation and counter action to the destruction of the statues 14 years earlier.

Iconoclasm



Diego Muñoz Camargo, "Friars Burning the Clothes, Books, and Adornments of Native Priests," Descripción de la ciudad y provincia de Tlaxcala, fol. 242r, late sixteenth century. Photo credit: University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

In other acts of iconoclasm over the ages, colonizers have destroyed the sacred sites and other rallying points of peoples they sought to conquer.

In this image from the 16th century book by mestizo historian of New Spain, Diego Muñoz Camargo, Catholic friars are seen destroying images of Aztec deities and religious paraphernalia.

Iconoclasm



The damaged and decapitated head of a statue of Stalin, on Grand Avenue, Budapest, Hungary, October 23, 1956. Photo credit: Robert Hofbauer CC

As political regimes defeat rivals, they also remove or transform the symbols that represent the former order. Erecting or destroying monuments doesn't just reflect authority but is a way to promote *or* change it.

In this image, the damaged and decapitated head of a statue of Stalin, on Grand Avenue, Budapest, sits in the middle of the street. The statue was destroyed on October 23rd, 1956, by enraged anti-Soviet crowds during Hungary's uprising against Soviet rule.

Iconoclasm



A U.S. soldier watches as a statue of the former leader of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, falls in central Baghdad's Firdaus Square, Baghdad, Iraq, April 2003. Photo credit: Goran Tomasevic/Reuters

In another image A U.S. soldier watches as a statue of the former leader of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, falls in central Baghdad's Firdaus Square, April 2003. The statue was pulled down by American Marines as the war in Iraq was just getting underway.

Iconoclasm



A defaced image of Chinese President Xi Jinping is seen in Hong Kong, October 2019. Photo credit: Sam Tsang

In this image, a complicated history of colonization manifests in acts of protest and iconoclasm in Hong Kong, when a man contributes to the defacement of an image of Chinese President Xi Jinping in October of 2019.

Much property has been defaced or destroyed during the Hong Kong anti-government protests, including sites reflecting Chinese history and governmental ties. The protests, which are ongoing, are a response to Hong Kong transitioning from British to Chinese rule and expresses the desire of protestors to retain their independence, in this instance, from China.

Iconoclasm



The head of Dagoberto Godoy hangs from a statue of the indigenous Mapuche warrior Caupolicán after protesters decapitated a statue of the Chilean air force pilot in Temuco, Chile, November 2019. Photo Credit: Paulo Quintana/Araucania

In some instances, both in the United States, and around the globe, Indigenous and/or disenfranchised communities, groups or individuals as well as those that support or sympathize with their plight, have inverted the script on the colonial narrative, taking down or vandalizing public works that honor colonists, colonization or other odes to empire.

Just one such example, seen in this image from November 2019, is the decapitation of a statue in Temuco, Chile, of the Chilean military aviator Dagoberto Godoy. His head was hung by protesters from the arm of a statue of the Mapuche warrior Caupolicán – now also holding the Mapuche flag, or *Wenufoye*.

Iconoclasm



Bree Newsome takes down the Confederate flag from a pole at the Statehouse in Columbia, SC, June 27, 2015. Photo credit: Adam Anderson/Reuters

In another related example, on June 27, 2015, ten days after a white supremacist with an affinity for the Confederate battle flag, killed nine African American parishioners of Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, protester Bree Newsome climbed the 30 foot flagpole in front of the Statehouse in Columbia, South Carolina, and pulled down the Confederate flag.

Iconoclasm



Members of the Mississippi Honor Guard lower the state flag at the State Capitol, a day after a bill was signed into law that would replace the state flag that includes a Confederate emblem, in Jackson, Mississippi, July 1, 2020. Photo credit: Reuters

And now, beginning in June of 2020, many organizations, and local and state governments have begun banning the display of the Confederate flag, such as seen here, with the retirement of the Mississippi State flag on July 2nd, 2020. The retired flag was the last US state banner featuring a Confederate emblem.

Iconoclasm



The removal of the vandalized statue of King Leopold II of Belgium, Ghent, Belgium, June 30, 2020. Photo credit: AFP via Getty Images.

In this image, the bust of King Leopold II of Belgium was removed from a park in Ghent on June 30, 2020. That date was the 60th anniversary of the Democratic Republic of Congo's independence from Belgium.

The people of the Congo in Central Africa had experienced unimaginable suffering after their land was colonized by King Leopold in the mid 19th century. Estimates of the number of Congolese killed during his 44-year reign range from two to fifteen million. The bust was removed, after being vandalized by those opposed to honoring the memory of the former King and colonizer.

Iconoclasm



The activist group Culture Beyond Oil protesting in front of the Hoa-Haka-Nana-Ia in the Living and Dying gallery at the British Museum, London, UK, July 2010. Photo Credit: Culture 24

Iconoclasm deeply interests anthropology museums, which preserve objects of cultural or ideological significance. However, removing objects from their original contexts can be part of the destruction of cultures and assertions of political power. Can the collection of objects from other cultures be a form of iconoclasm? It is not just the display of images or objects of veneration that correlate to questions of power, but also the contexts in which they are accumulated and displayed.

In this image, the activist group *Culture Beyond Oil* protest in front of the Hoa-Haka-Nana-Ia in the Living and Dying gallery at the British Museum in July of 2010. This iconoclastic protest was in response to the British Museum accepting sponsorship money from BP, the British Petroleum company.

Iconoclasm



William Downing Webster, posing with carved ivory tusks taken from the city of Benin, 1890. Photo Credit: The British Museum

So, for example, in addition to being ritual objects, works of art, and historical documents, Benin bronze plaques and carved ivories also serve to document historical interactions between the Benin Empire and Europe. Those stories, however, may be fragmented, owing to the manner in which the plaques and ivories were removed from their original context. Here you see these objects pictured with William Downing Webster, one of the most famous dealers of ethnographic objects of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Iconoclasm



(Detail) British soldiers posing with works of art of the City of Benin, Sir Harry Holdsworth Rawson, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, 1897. Photo Credit: The British Museum

It was Britain's so-called Punitive Expedition of 1897, which destroyed the Kingdom's capital, Benin City. The accompanying looting, which could also be considered an act of iconoclasm, scattered many of these plaques and ivories into new networks of circulation. Pictured here, British soldiers surrounded by looted works of art, from that time.

Iconoclasm



Brass (copper alloy) plaque/waist pendant, pre-20th century, Maxwell Museum of Anthropology collection, Made by the Edo (Bini) people of the Benin Kingdom of modern-day Nigeria. Photo credit: The Maxwell Museum of Anthropology

These networks of circulation include museum collections, such as the Pitt Rivers Museum, the British Museum and, the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology. The display of Benin plaques or ivories in Western museums tells a different history of the Kingdom of Benin than the royal history of its Oba or King.

In this image a pre-20th century Brass waist pendant plaque, from the collection of the, Maxwell Museum of Anthropology.

(this text has been adopted from the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology 2015 exhibition SA'E Y'AMA: The Power of Brass in the Kingdom of Benin)

Iconoclasm: The National Debate



A protester kicks the toppled statue of a Confederate soldier after it was pulled down at the old Durham County Courthouse, Durham, NC, August 14, 2017. Photo credit: Casey Toth for the Herald Sun

In the United States, many current debates of the last few years about iconoclasm center on the memorials of colonists, particular political figures and Confederate soldiers, whose venerated status is increasingly a matter of sometimes-violent disagreement.

In this image, a protester kicks the toppled statue of a Confederate soldier after it was pulled down at the old Durham County Courthouse, August 14, 2017, in Durham, North Carolina.

Iconoclasm: The National Debate



Statue of Robert E. Lee being removed from University of Texas, Austin, TX, August 21, 2017. Photo Credit: Eric Gay/Associated Press

In another example from 2017, on August 21st of that year, at the University of Texas, Austin, statues of two Confederate generals, Robert E. Lee, pictured here, and Albert Sidney Johnston, and the Confederate cabinet member John Reagan, were removed. This was following the removal of a statue of Jefferson Davis in 2015.

These examples illustrate that beginning in the twenty teens, there was an uptick in public interest in the histories and appropriateness of various monuments and memorials honoring the Confederacy of the U.S. Civil War, with a particular jump in interest and attendant iconoclasm beginning in August 2017.

Iconoclasm: The National Debate



Torch-bearing white nationalists gather around the base of a statue during a demonstration, Charlottesville, VA, August 11, 2017. Photo Credit: Edu Bayer for the New York Times

In 2017, Charlottesville, Virginia became the epicenter of the national debate on race. On August 11, 2017, white nationalists descended on Charlottesville, and on the University of Virginia campus for a “Unite the Right” rally protesting the plan to remove a statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. During the violence that erupted, counter-protester Heather Heyer was killed.

In this image, torch-bearing white nationalists gather around the base of a statue during a demonstration in Charlottesville, Virginia on August 11, 2017. The statue they are gathered around is of Thomas Jefferson not the statue of Robert E. Lee proposed for removal. The group of white nationalists gathered there to surround a small group of counter protesters who positioned themselves at the base of that statue.

Iconoclasm: The National Debate



Members of the Atlanta delegation of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, by Holland Studio, Albany, GA, 1930. Photo credit: The Library of Congress.

The confrontation was covered widely on national news and inspired further acts of vandalism and iconoclasm focused on monuments that nominally honor the Confederacy. Opponents of the monuments point to the fact that most were erected to legitimize continued white dominance of Southern society. Indeed, Robert E. Lee himself, the losing general of the Civil War, had denounced the construction of monuments, writing in 1869, in response to a proposal to build a monument at Gettysburg, he said:

“I think it wiser, moreover, not to keep open the sores of war but to follow the examples of those nations who endeavored to obliterate the marks of civil strife, to commit to oblivion the feelings engendered.”

The erection of the majority of Confederate monuments fueling conflict today occurred in the early to mid 20th century, organized and funded by various individuals and groups sympathetic to the Confederate cause, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, or UDC, an organization of Southern white women founded in Nashville in 1894, chief among them.

In this image, members of the Atlanta delegation of the UDC, at their convention in Albany, Georgia, in 1930. They pose in front of a marble sculpture dedicated to “Our Confederate Dead”, that was erected in downtown Albany in 1901. The statue still stands, residing in the privately-owned Confederate Memorial Park.

Iconoclasm: The National Debate



*Jefferson Davis Monument, Jefferson Davis Memorial Park, by Carl Mydans, Irwinville, GA, June 3, 1936.
Photo Credit: The Library of Congress.*

At its founding, the UDC had 30 members. It grew to about 100,000 women by the nineteen teens, with the goal to, according to Karen Cox, professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, “... preserve and perpetuate the myths that the Confederate cause was a just and honorable one and that states’ rights, not slavery, was its call to arms.”

In this image, a monument to Jefferson Davis - president of the Confederate States from 1861 – 1865, marking the spot where Davis was captured by Union soldiers on May 10, 1865. The monument was erected by the Ocilla, Georgia chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, on June 3, 1936, almost seventy years after the end of the Civil War. The memorial still stands in Irwinville, Georgia today.

Iconoclasm: The National Debate



A vandalized statue of Christopher Columbus in Central Park, New York City, NY, October 3, 2017. Photo Credit: Christen Clifford

More recently, protests against Columbus Day have been accompanied by acts of iconoclasm aimed at representations of Christopher Columbus. Many opponents of Columbus Day believe that it should be replaced with Indigenous Peoples Day, to recognize the violence inflicted on the original inhabitants of the Americas by Columbus and later colonizers.

In this image, a statue of Christopher Columbus in Central Park was vandalized on October 3, 2017. One of many that have been vandalized or removed in the intervening years.

Iconoclasm: The National Debate



A statue of Christopher Columbus, torn down at the Minnesota State Capitol, Saint Paul, MN, June 10, 2020. Photo Credit: Tony Webster via Flickr, CC

Very recently, with the civil unrest sparked by the George Floyd protests, many memorials in the United States – those of government officials and political or historical figures with contentious histories, Confederate soldiers, and colonizers— have begun to be removed by state and local officials, or defaced, pulled down, or destroyed by protestors. This statue of Columbus at the Minnesota State Capitol was pulled down by protestors on June 10, 2020.

Iconoclasm: The National Debate



The vandalized Theodore Roosevelt statue outside the American Museum of Natural History, New York City, NY, October 26, 2017. Photo Credit: Jeenah Moon for the New York Times

As already mentioned, museums are not spared such responses, in relation to the collections they hold, the funding they receive, and the memorials that are often part of their architecture and settings. On October 26th, 2017, an organization calling themselves “The Monument Removal Brigade” splashed a red paint on a statue of Theodore Roosevelt, in front of the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

A published statement released by the group on the internet called for the removal of the statue as an emblem of “patriarchy, white supremacy and settler-colonialism,” as they asked the museum to “rethink its cultural halls regarding the colonial mentality behind them.”

Iconoclasm: The National Debate



Part of an exhibition at the American Museum of Natural History, "Addressing the Statue," New York City, NY, July 15, 2019. Photo Credit: Mary Inhea Kang for The New York Times

Although the museum opened an exhibition entitled "Addressing the Statue", a graphic from the exhibition pictured here, that asked the public to weigh in on the controversy over the Roosevelt sculpture, many felt that was not enough, and on June 21, 2020, after many years of controversy, the museum announced the removal of the sculpture that many have argued depicts Black and Indigenous people as subjugated and racially inferior.

Iconoclasm: Regional Debate in New Mexico



The man who 20 years ago, said he cut off the right foot of the Don Juan de Oñate statue in Alcalde, NM, September 2017. Photo credit: Adria Malcolm for The New York Times

On September 30, 2017, the front page of the *New York Times* highlighted the saga of the statue of Spanish colonizer Juan de Oñate erected in 1993 in Alcalde, New Mexico. In January 1998 the statue's right foot was removed. The act recalled the 1598 battle between Oñate's Spanish forces and the village of Acoma. After winning the battle, Oñate severely punished the people of Acoma. Many Acoma men over the age of twenty-five had one foot cut off and then were forced into twenty years of penal servitude.

This 2017 image shows the man who said that 20 years prior he had cut off the right foot of the Don Juan de Oñate statue in Alcalde, New Mexico.

Iconoclasm: Regional Debate in New Mexico



A red tinge remains from vandalism to the boot of the Don Juan de Oñate equestrian statue in Acalde, NM, September 2017. Photo Credit: Eddie Moore for the Albuquerque Journal

The individuals who anonymously removed the foot from the statue sent photographs of it and the following statement to local newspapers:

“We invite you to visit the Oñate Distortion Museum and Visitor Center. Located eight miles north of Española. We took the liberty of removing Oñate's right foot on behalf of our brothers and sisters of Acoma Pueblo.”

The people who originally commissioned the statue subsequently had a new foot made. In 2017, the statue was once again vandalized, when, as seen in the image here, the right foot of Oñate was painted red in advance of a protest held in Santa Fe on September 8th of the same year. The protest, organized by Native American activists, disrupted the “Entrada,” the annual reenactment of the 1692 return of the Spanish to New Mexico after the Pueblo revolt of 1680.

Iconoclasm: Regional Debate in New Mexico



Indigenous activists at the end of an anti-racist rally held on the Santa Fe Plaza, Santa Fe, NM, August 14, 2017. Photo Credit: Aaron Cantú for the Santa Fe Reporter

Other New Mexican acts of iconoclasm have focused on public monuments and traditions, particularly in the state capitol of Santa Fe. One such event, pictured here, occurred on the Santa Fe Plaza, on August 14th, 2017, led by a group of Indigenous activists participating in an anti-racist rally. As the crowd for the rally thinned, a small group of activists took to the stage while others positioned themselves in front of the monument pictured here.

They began chanting, "The Entrada is racist," a reference to the Entrada de Don Diego de Vargas (which celebrates Spanish colonists' return to Santa Fe in 1692). When the monument, an obelisk, was erected in 1868, the phrase "To the heroes who have fallen in various battles with savage Indians in the Territory of New Mexico" was inscribed on its marble base. In 1974, an individual illegally chiseled out the word "Savage." The word was never restored. In 2019 the Entrada was abolished.

Iconoclasm: Regional Debate in New Mexico, Epilogue and Prologue



Sculpture of Juan de Oñate being removed 'temporarily', Alcalde, NM, June 15, 2020. Photo Credit: Eddie Moore for the Albuquerque Journal

In recent turns of events, as pictured here, on June 15th, 2020, Rio Arriba County removed the sculpture of Don Juan de Oñate, not in response to protests, but rather to protect it from protestors, who were scheduled to protest its removal later that day – the protest did go forward, the fate of the sculpture remains a question.

Iconoclasm: Regional Debate in New Mexico, Epilogue and Prologue



Protesters attach a chain to the statue of Juan de Oñate in Albuquerque, NM, June 15, 2020. Photo Credit: Anthony Jackson for the Albuquerque Journal via AP

On the same day, June 15th, 2020, a University of New Mexico Student was shot and seriously wounded in Albuquerque, when he was peacefully protesting in support of the removal of the monument called “La Jornada”, which features several sculpted images including Juan de Oñate leading oxen drawn carts and families involved in the Spanish colonization of the southwest in 1598. The monument, pictured here being prepared to be pulled down by protesters, was located on the property of the Albuquerque Museum, in Tiguex Park. Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller had the monument removed, stating “the City will be removing the statue until civic institutions can determine next steps.” Police took into custody several members of a right-wing militia group “The New Mexico Civil Guard” and a one-time Albuquerque City Council candidate was charged related to the shooting.

Iconoclasm: Regional Debate in New Mexico, Epilogue and Prologue

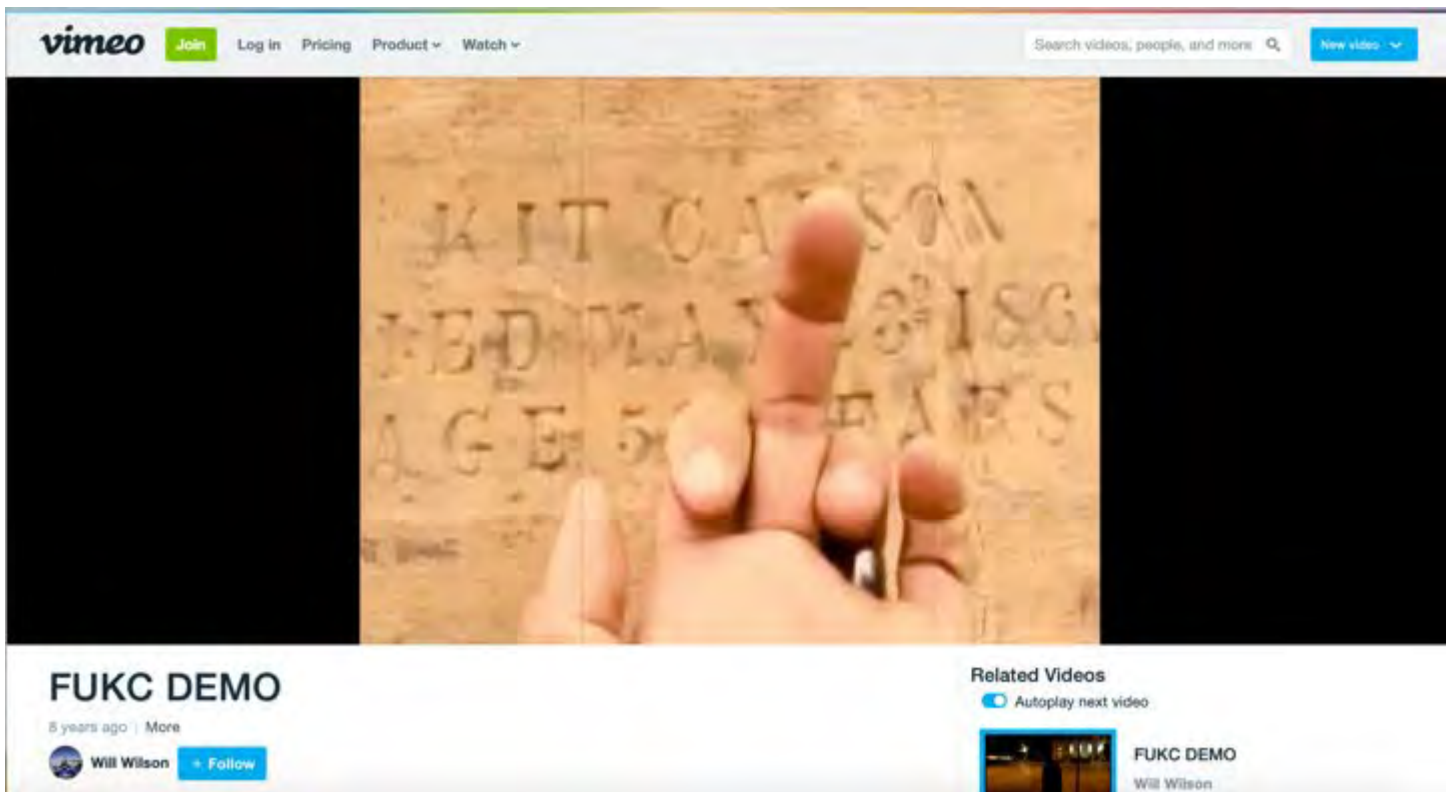


A vandalized obelisk in front of the U.S. Courthouse in Santa Fe honoring frontiersman Kit Carson, Santa Fe, NM, June 17, 2020. Photo credit: T.S. Last for the Albuquerque Journal

On June 18th the Mayor of Santa Fe, Alan Webber, signed a proclamation announcing the removal of three controversial monuments related to New Mexico's history of colonization by first, the Spanish, and later the United States. These include: a statue of Don Diego de Vargas, an obelisk commemorating the life of Kit Carson; and another obelisk honoring U.S. Union soldiers of the Civil War. This proclamation in turn sparked counter protests, though the proclamation currently stands.

In this image, the obelisk in front of the U.S. Courthouse in Santa Fe honoring frontiersman Kit Carson, having been vandalized with the words "Stolen Land", on June 17, 2020. The obelisk shape as memorial itself is interesting – an Egyptian shape, taken to Europe first by the Romans in the first century CE as a way to express and assert Roman power, later, in the 18th and 19th centuries, being adapted as a symbol of imperialism and empire by Napoleon, Queen Victoria, famed American businessman William H. Vanderbilt, and the United States Government.

Iconoclasm: Regional Debate in New Mexico, Epilogue and Prologue



Still from "Fukc" video by Navajo artist Will Wilson, Santa Fe, NM, 2012. Photo credit: Will Wilson

Eight years earlier, Navajo artist Will Wilson created a video with the monument, a still from which is seen here, as an intervention on the monument. And not unlike the projections on monuments seen at the beginning of this exhibition, his work serves as an act of virtual and ephemeral iconoclasm.

Iconoclasm: Regional Debate at UNM



Nick Estes leads a group of protesters burning copies of UNM's official seal, Albuquerque, NM, April 29, 2016. Photo Credit: Marla Brose for the Albuquerque Journal

In Albuquerque, home to the University of New Mexico campus, similar protests and acts of iconoclasm have taken place. Beginning in 2015, after student and local protests, the city of Albuquerque now recognizes Indigenous Peoples Day. And in 2019, after years of protest and various acts of iconoclasm, the University of New Mexico has stopped using a seal that celebrates Spanish and Anglo colonists while ignoring Native Americans.

In this image from April 29th, 2016, Nick Estes in the center of the photograph, leads a group of protesters burning copies of UNM's official seal. Estes is a former University of New Mexico student activist and now a UNM assistant professor, and one of the founders of the Red Nation, a coalition of Native and non-Native activists, educators, students, and community organizers advocating Native liberation, based in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Iconoclasm: Update



Fran Coles, Bristol City Council Conservation Manager, works on preserving the graffiti on the defaced statue of Late 17th century slave trader Edward Colston, Bristol, UK, June 17, 2020. Photo Credit: John Kent/Bristol Live

Increasingly, as in previous examples, when officials have been unwilling or slow to act, protestors have been taking matters into their own hands. On June 7th, 2020, a statue of Edward Colston, a late 17th century slave trader, was toppled by protestors and pushed into the river Avon, in Bristol, in the United Kingdom.

In this image Fran Coles, Bristol City Council Conservation Manager, works on preserving the graffiti on the defaced statue, which will be displayed in a museum in Bristol, accompanied by the story of how the statue was both erected, and toppled.

However, even those who agree with removing statuary that honors those who represent oppressive or racist views and actions, have argued that such actions run the risk of removing reminders of a troubled history that we would do well to remember.

Iconoclasm: Update



A stereo view of the Emancipation Memorial in Lincoln Park by J.J. Jarvis, 1880s. Photo Credit: Streets of Washington, via Flickr, CC

One such contested call for removal involves the controversial Emancipation Memorial in Lincoln Park in Washington, D.C., seen in this photograph from the 1880s, some years after it was erected. The memorial depicts a freed slave kneeling at the feet of President Abraham Lincoln. Racial justice protesters want the monument removed saying the imagery, that of a freed slave crouching at Lincoln's feet, is offensive, despite the fact that the memorial was commissioned and paid for by Black people after the Civil War. At the same time, the man who was the model for the figure of the slave, Archer Alexander, who was born a slave in Virginia in 1813, escaped to freedom decades before posing for the memorial, so in fact, was not freed by Lincoln.

Iconoclasm: Update



The Emancipation Memorial in Lincoln Park, depicting a freed slave kneeling at the feet of President Abraham Lincoln, Washington, D.C., June 25, 2020. Photo credit: J. Scott Applewhite/ Associated Press

Seen here is a contemporary photograph of the memorial, which was unveiled in April of 1876. At that time, the abolitionist Frederick Douglass wrote a letter to the newspaper *The New Republic*, voicing *his* discontent with the statue, saying “The Negro here, though rising, is still on his knees and nude. What I want to see before I die is a monument representing the Negro, not couchant on his knees like a 4-footed animal, but erect on his feet like a man. There’s room in Lincoln Park for another monument and I throw out this suggestion to the end that it may be taken up and acted upon.”

These words written by Douglass were only recently rediscovered by historian Scott Sandage of Carnegie Mellon University. Sandage has been advocating for the removal of the statue, though other historians argue for its preservation

Iconoclasm: Epilogue and Prologue



"Rumors of War", by Kehinde Wiley, on temporary display in Times Square, New York City, NY, September 2019. Photo Credit: My Modern Met

Contemporary artists have been issuing responses to the more recent vocal outcry about troublesome monuments too. One such response comes from American artist Kehinde Wiley, in which he acknowledges the troubled past while introducing a new icon, in his equestrian statue "Rumors of War", seen here on temporary display in Times Square, New York City, in September of 2019. The sculpture depicts an African American man in dreadlocks, a hoodie, ripped jeans and Nike high-tops, but takes the form of the heroic equestrian statues of Confederate generals of Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia.

Iconoclasm: Epilogue and Prologue



“Shadow on the Land, an Excavation and Bush Burial” by Tlingit and Unanga̓ artist Yéil Ya-Tseen Nicholas Galanin, March 2020. Photo credit: Rhett Wyman/SHM, courtesy Nicholas Galanin

Another example seen here comes from Tlingit and Unanga̓ artist Yéil Ya-Tseen Nicholas Galanin, with his contribution to the 2020 Biennale of Sydney, in Hyde Park, *Shadow on the Land, an Excavation and Bush Burial*. The work is a grave that has been dug for the widely reviled statue that is erected there of Captain James Cook, the 18th-century British Royal Navy captain who landed in what is now Australia.

In turbulent times of rapidly changing public opinion and politics, it remains to be seen what previous symbols endure *or* are subjected to acts of iconoclasm, and what new icons are given public space.

Acknowledgments



An aerial view of "BLACK LIVES MATTER" painted in roughly 50-foot-wide yellow letters on a section of 16th Street that sits just in front of Lafayette Park, Washington, D.C., June 5, 2020. Photo Credit: Unknown

In this final image, we circle back to where we began, with the protests over the killing of George Floyd. Muriel Bowser, the Mayor of Washington D.C., renamed a street near the White House "Black Lives Matter Plaza", and had muralists paint "BLACK LIVES MATTER" in roughly 50-foot-wide yellow letters on a section of 16th Street that sits just in front of Lafayette Park, June 5, 2020, altering the area conceptually and literally, which some have considered a defacement and others have celebrated. Lafayette Park, sits directly across from the White House, named for a French hero of the American Revolution, the Marquis de La Fayette. The park, sometimes referred to as "the people's park" was created by Thomas Jefferson, and is iconic both for its location, and for the celebrations and protests it has hosted over the centuries.

Numerous other cities have followed suit with painting "Black Lives Matters" on their own prominent streets in downtown districts.

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Audio Clip:

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