

## Monuments and propaganda: a case against statues

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There is art and there is propaganda. Art is often in pursuit of beauty and meaning. Propaganda is about selling an idea to the most amount of people as possible. It is a sign of a healthy and culturally advanced republic when the pursuit of beauty is heralded above the cheapened pursuit of promoting exceptionalism. In America, despite our rich artistic and cultural heritage, there remains a plaguing love affair with the story of a perfect past. The flaws of our founders and leaders are the refiner's fire that formed a mostly perfect nation. The statues of these men, gallant atop a sturdy horse, litter the nation with the narrative that America is the greatest country in the world. Any potential evils are reduced to some minor personal folly yet lying about our history is a sure ingredient for never learning from it. We should have the courage to allow our monuments to be honest.

Thomas Jefferson had a child sex slave. Franklin Roosevelt put innocent civilians into concentration camps. George Washington used dentures that were made from the teeth of slaves. Andrew Jackson was responsible for the murder of thousands of innocent Native American men, women, and children. Robert Lee fought a war of white supremacy. The ugly list goes on.

This past haunts us because we needlessly refuse to bury it. We are not a nation that rests on the shoulders of these evil men, we are a nation that is built upon their ideas. Why then, must we insist on worshipping our leaders? Were Thomas Jefferson's ideas so weak that we need to couch them into some sort of personal greatness on his part? Our founders were quite explicit about this when they declared that these truths are self-evident. The beauty of their writings was that they transcended their personas.

If we continue to celebrate the greatness of our leaders then we will likewise be tied to their evils. Our monuments will only become more beautiful and meaningful as we detach them from personalities. Art can be about equality and independence without a bronze bust of a dead president. If we were founded upon the rejection of the supremacy of kings and queens, then it certainly makes sense that we resist the urge to present our past as if it were a naked emperor. Our nation has sacrificed too much to be beholden to weak men and monuments should honor that sacrifice.

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