

We The People
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We the People 392 The Cancel Culture and Alternative History



Good Day to you. If we gave out awards for idiocracy, the list of potential nominees would be legion, but surely the decision to remove the classic 1939 film *Gone with the Wind* from streaming services, as part of the new cultural purge of history, would be a front-running favourite to take the gong. Ignited by the protests and riots going on in numerous cities around the western world in the name of Black Lives Matter, we are now witnessing the emergence of an Orwellian Thought Police, a modern day Red Guard made up of intolerant younger people who are utterly hostile to difference of opinion and open debate. They seem hell-bent on obliterating the past. This collective madness has now manifested itself in a series of senseless, deranged attacks on historical monuments across several nations, illustrating a dystopia that could hardly be imagined just weeks ago. In the UK, a fervid mob went after statues of those they denounced as historical miscreants, ranging from Winston Churchill, to Edward Colston, to Queen Victoria. Even the statue of Abraham Lincoln, the American president who emancipated the slaves, was defaced, and he was denounced as a racist! In the US, targets included Christopher Columbus.

Here at home, the statue of Captain Cook in Sydney's Hyde Park was defiled. Cook was a brilliant navigator, a cartographer sans parallel and a very humble and humane man. His care for his crew was unmatched. His was the first long voyage where none of the crew died of scurvy. He did not lead colonial expeditions to conquer, kill or enslave native peoples. He was an explorer, mapping unknown lands, and carrying out astronomical observations. Yet his extraordinary accomplishments, which can be fairly compared to the Moon shot are barely celebrated today. According to the mob, he is now to be regarded as the quintessential colonial racist. This is a theme found in the modern school syllabus. He has been sacrificed on the altar of grievance and rancour. His great achievements are being erased from history. It's all part of the cancel culture. If you don't like any aspect of history, just cancel it. Expunge it. If you don't like the depictions of slavery in an old movie, make it disappear. Pretend it was never made. Send it down the memory hole with all the inconvenient truths that don't suit the new narrative.

Old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits, all gone. Speaking up for historical accomplishments or in defence of Western civilization is now a very risky business. You get de-platformed by wild-eyed gangs of illiterates. Express biological truths and you step on a land mine. **In my opinion some universities are teaching students that Western society is a morally bankrupt, racist, vile, patriarchal scourge. Ideas no longer need to be tested in the crucible of open and respectful public debate and that denouncing historical figures and holding lawless protests in the streets are rational and admirable acts.**

There is no doubt that many historical figures carry some unpalatable baggage. Colston was, after all, a 17th century slave trader, notwithstanding his enormous philanthropic contribution as a benefactor to the citizens of Bristol and the creation of the delicious Colston sticky bun. There are ugly and cruel aspects to the history of all nations but it can't be simply cancelled or erased at will. It's easy to look back through the lens of history from our time of privilege and plenty and find things badly wanting but it's a distorted lens. In the words of author LP Hartley: ***"The past is another country; they do things differently there."*** We don't get to cancel the facts and re-write our history, it is already writ large. The hallmark of an advanced and intelligent society, a civilized society, is its ability to reconcile the darker aspects of its past and to learn from them, whilst still celebrating its achievements and advancement.

Until next time this is Kent Bayley with special thanks to Deborah Kelly

