**A monumental challenge**

In the wake of the 2020 Black-Lives-Matter demonstrations worldwide, the documents reveal diverging views on the protesters’ calls to remove controversial memorials. While a June editorial from the-Economist theorizes about how some monuments may go and why others should stay, a cartoon published concomitantly in the-Philadelphia-Observer shows a Black-Lives-Matter protester ironizing about the spuriousness of such arguments. Two op-eds for the-Washington-Post, by Mitch-Landrieu, the mayor of New-Orleans, in 2017, and Melody-Barnes, a former Afro-American White-House official, in 2020, offer two grassroot and long-term approaches to the task.

Drawing a fine line between reassessing and erasing history, the corpus examines how best to deal with a divisive past and build a common future. (115 words)

*Admittedly, all documents denounce the process of rewriting history.*

Referring to various confederate figures, particularly general Lee, they show how a monument can serve to glorify a perverse system in hindsight, be it white supremacy, tyranny or dictatorships. Yet, they do not invalidate the association of historic moments with iconic figures who did make history. The-Economist thus cautions today’s cancel culture: not all monuments deserve to be taken down and removals should be supervised by competent authorities. By dubbing Black-Lives-Matter protesters a ‘mob’, the editorialist blames them for going too far, and instead, advocates action through ‘social consensus’, which Landrieu’s painstaking democratic process of removing statues from the streets of New-Orleans illustrates.

*Removing monuments nonetheless threatens to erase a community’s history.*

Some citizens in Landrieu’s city or in Barnes’s Richmond, both former confederate hotspots scarred by the civil war, thus voiced concerns, a few of them going so far as to retaliate with death threats to the removers. Rejecting such extremes of conservatism, both Landrieu and Barnes are adamant that removing the statues is a way to begin a new chapter, not a negation of history. Indeed, progress is central to the debate: for both southerners, the point of learning history is to help communities ‘come together’ and ‘reconcile’ past and present to turn to the future. Accordingly, all documents testify to the need to empower the people, all the more as shedding light on a shared history is a daunting task. Thus, despite their divergences, the highly personal opinions conveyed in the corpus concur on the imperative necessity to memorialize adequately.

*A cautious consensus-based approach is not a panacea, though.*

While Landrieu shows how time-consuming the democratic process is, Barnes’s testimony reveals that claims and counterclaims beget endless litigation. Likewise, the cartoonist lampoons the two-way option of adding a plaque to contextualize a monument, showing how grotesque it would be to pile up Lee’s anonymous victims at the statue’s foot. If mitigation proves unsatisfactory, it is because the issues are too deeply rooted in the communities’ personal histories, Barnes shows. Striking a simple balance is therefore impossible. The Black-Lives-Matter protester on the cartoon literally embodies this conundrum: protesting in front of contentious memorials, like Barnes did, while engaging in polite debate, is utterly aggravating. Resultantly, all four documents eventually endorse a somewhat similar approach: taking distance from the memorials, whether by relocating them or through sheer irony. The-Economist’s example of the relocation of Edward-VII’s statue to Mumbai’s zoo and Barnes’s move-in to Monument Avenue, near Lee’s statue, are proof enough that the presence of memorials, wherever they stand, cannot stem the flow of history.

550 words