

**SUJET CENTRALE SUPELEC 2021 – PROPOSITION DE CORRIGE JG ROYER, LYCEE MARCELIN  
BERTHELOT, SAINT MAUR DES FOSSES**

**How to deal with a divisive past, in order to build a common future?**

The corpus under scrutiny reveals diverging views on the issue of removing certain memorials of a painful past, in the wake of the summer 2020 Black-Lives-Matter protests worldwide. While a June editorial from the-Economist theorizes about how some 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 opinionated testimonies for the-Washington-Post, by Landrieu, the mayor of New-Orleans, in 2017, and Barnes, a former Afro-American White-House official, in 2020, offer two grassroots and long-term approaches to the task.

Admittedly, all documents denounce the process of rewriting history: referring to various confederate figures, particularly general Lee, they show how a monument honoring a man can serve to glorify a perverse system in hindsight, be it white supremacy, tyranny or dictatorships. Yet, they nonetheless validate the association of historic moments with iconic figures who did make history. The-Economist thus warns about the current cancel culture: not all monuments deserve to be taken down and any removal should be supervised by competent authorities. By dubbing Black-Lives-Matter protesters a 'mob', the-Economist blames them for going too far. Instead, the editorialist advocates action through 'social consensus', which Landrieu's slow democratic process of removing statues from the streets of New-Orleans illustrates.

There, as in Barnes's Richmond, both former confederate hot-spots, both scarred by the civil war, some inhabitants nonetheless voiced concerns that removing monuments threatened to erase their history, even going so far as to retaliate with death threats to the removers. Yet 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 at the heart of the debate: for both southerners, the point of learning history is to help communities 'come together' and 'reconcile' past and present so as to turn to the future. In that perspective, all documents testify to the need to empower the people: the task at hand is not to rewrite but to shed light on a shared history. Thus, they express personal opinions which, in spite of their divergences, concur on the imperative necessity to memorialize adequately.

The-Economist's cautious approach does not meet with unanimity, though: the democratic process is time-consuming and often leads to half measures. For the cartoonist, adding a plaque to contextualize a monument is a no-go: he thus lampoons that approach by showing how grotesque it would be to add, say, Lee's anonymous victims at the foot of his statue. 'Just' adding context is wide of the mark: Barnes shows that the issue is too deeply rooted in people's personal histories to be dealt with so simply. The Black-Lives-Matter protester on the cartoon embodies this conundrum: protesting in front of dubious memorials, like Barnes did, while engaging in polite debate, is harrowing and hardly feasible.

Resultantly, the solution advocated by all three columnists is to take distance, either by relocating the statues to museums or through irony, like in the cartoon. The-Economist's example of the relocation of Edward VI's statue to Mumbai's zoo and Barnes's move-in to Monument Avenue, near Lee's statue, boil down to the same notion: the presence of memorials, wherever they stand, cannot change the course of history.

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