

Further Reading

“Statues and Reclaiming Space-Time—A Focus on One Aspect of the Revolt in Richmond: Do Statues Actually Matter?” by Monadists, monadists.medium.com.

The following texts are available at crimethinc.com.

“Accounts from the Battle of Grant Park—How Chicago Demonstrators Pushed Back the Police and Nearly Toppled a Statue”

“Accounts from the Fall of Silent Sam”

“Escaping Washington for Freedom—Let’s not Celebrate George Washington, but the Slaves Who Escaped Him”

“Tearing Down the Monuments to Thieves—How the Confederate Statue Came Down in Chapel Hill”

“When You Topple the Statues, Don’t Forget to Uproot the Pedestals”

Columbus Revisited

A Foreword to the 2021 Edition

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“Each Crueler Than the Last”

*Notes on Christopher Columbus and Henry Shaw
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The Government Didn’t Remove the Statues—We Did

*A Chronology of Monuments Defaced and Torn Down
May-November, 2020*

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“Each Crueler Than the Last” was originally published for Indigenous Peoples’ Day 2018. “The Government Didn’t Remove the Statues—We Did” was published to coincide with the removal of the Robert E. Lee statue in Richmond, Virginia, September 8, 2021. Digital versions of both texts may be found at crimethinc.com, along with further citations and images. Hard copies are available at aboulder.com.

The title of this compilation is drawn from James Baldwin’s 1966 essay, “Unnameable Objects, Unspeakable Crimes”.

Cover images: Protesters try to topple a statue of President Andrew Jackson across the street from the White House, 2020; the Taíno defending the coast of Xaymaca with darts, 1494; the Robert E. Lee statue in Richmond, Virginia, covered in graffiti, 2020.

“These Unnameable Objects”, first printing, September 2021.

monument to pioneers is tagged with “NO THANKS”, “LAND BACK”, “DECOLONIZE”, and “NO MORE GENOCIDE”. A George Washington statue is also torn down and tagged.

In Chicago, Illinois vandals throw a rope around a statue of President William McKinley and attach it to a truck. Though the vandals are unsuccessful in toppling the statue, they write “LAND BACK” on its pedestal.

In Portland, rioters smash windows of banks and businesses, tagging “LAND BACK” as they do. In a separate incident across town in Lone Fir Cemetery, a memorial to the veterans of the Civil, Mexican-American, Spanish-American, and Indian Wars is torn down and covered in red.

In Spokane, Washington a statue of Abraham Lincoln is splattered with red paint.

In the course of researching this article, we found reports regarding a number of arrests in which people were accused of taking action against these monuments. However, we have not been able to find much information about the current status of most arrestees. Please direct support to defendants and prisoners!



October 12

Following a three day occupation, a memorial once dedicated to U.S. troops who fought “savage Indians” is toppled and destroyed by protesters in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Police arrest two.

Overnight in Chicago, a statue for the Blackhawks hockey team, depicting their Native American mascot, is covered in red paint. Vandals also write “LAND BACK” and “DECOLONIZE” at the statue’s base.

In Vallejo, California vandals destroy a police memorial.

October 13

Vandals in Ridley Township, Pennsylvania dump detergent into a police memorial fountain.

November 26

To mark Thanksgiving, protesters and vandals target monuments across the country. In Minneapolis, Minnesota a

“In Henry James’ novel *The Ambassadors* published not long before World War I, and not long before his death, he recounts the story of a middle-aged New Englander, assigned by his middle-aged bride-to-be—a widow—the task of rescuing from the flesh-pots of Paris her only son. She wants him to come home to take over the direction of the family factory. In the event, it is the middle-aged New Englander—The Ambassador—who is seduced, not so much by Paris, as by a new and less utilitarian view of life. He counsels the young man to ‘Live. Live all you can. It is a mistake not to.’ Which I translate as meaning ‘Trust life, and it will teach you, in joy and sorrow, all you need to know.’ Jazz musicians know this. Those old men and women who waved and sang and wept as we marched in Montgomery know this. White Americans, in the main, do not know this. They are still trapped in that factory to which, in Henry James’ novel, the son returns. We never know what this factory produces, for James never tells us. He only conveys to us that the factory, at an unbelievable human expense, produces unnameable objects.”

James Baldwin, 1966



(that Forrest and his men thought should be fighting for the Confederacy) were massacred at Fort Pillow. After the war, Forrest was the First Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan from 1867-1869. The statue of Forrest had pink paint thrown on it in 2017, which was never removed.

October 7

A state troop memorial is found defaced in Dennis Township, New Jersey.

October 9

Police arrest six people in Collierville, Tennessee, accusing them of vandalizing a Confederate memorial in the town square. Police claim they caught the six while spray-painting the monument and dumping glue and feathers on it.

October 10

Overnight in Pueblo, Colorado vandals splash red paint on a bust of Christopher Columbus.

October 11

Amidst ongoing protests in Portland, Oregon, statues of Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln are torn down. Roosevelt was an enthusiastic expansionist in the late 1800s who helped push for America's involvement in the Spanish-American War, which resulted in America claiming possession of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippine islands, and Hawaii. The Lincoln statue has "Dakota 38" written on it, a reference to Lincoln approving the execution of 38 Dakota people following the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. This vandalism occurs on Indigenous Peoples' Day, formerly Columbus Day.

wrong doing. One person is arrested in relation to the vandalism.

September 25

A monument to Confederate Major General Lafayette McLaws in Savannah, Georgia is defaced a second time. Vandals write “JUSTICE 4 B. TAYLOR” and “BLM” on it.

September 26

Two cyclists biking along Schuylkill River Trail in Plymouth Township, Pennsylvania rip a Thin Blue Line American flag from a police memorial and throw it into nearby bushes. The memorial’s bench was already defaced earlier in the month.

October 4

Vandals in Louisville, Kentucky dump red paint onto a statue of George Rogers Clark, writing “STOP WHITE WASHING BLACK HISTORY” at its base and hanging a banner on a nearby overpass reading “LMPD WILL KILL AGAIN. RISE UP.” Clark, the older brother of explorer and governor William Clark, was a slave owner and military officer that fought on the frontier during the Revolutionary and Northwest Wars. In the latter he guided troops as they killed Native Americans and eventually drove them from their homes in the Ohio River Valley.

October 5

A statue of Nathan Bedford Forrest in Nashville, Tennessee is vandalized with the word “MONSTER”. Before the Civil War, Forrest was a plantation owner, cattle dealer, and slaver trader. During the war, he worked his way up to a general in the Confederacy. Under his command, hundreds of surrendering black troops and white Loyalist troops from Tennessee

The Christopher Columbus statue in Tower Grove Park has been taken down. In June of 2020, the park board of commissioners ordered its removal, denying protesters the chance to tear it down themselves. The commissioners had debated what to do for three years, citing how it was technically illegal for them to remove it. They eventually chose to take it down a week before a scheduled protest, apparently having no qualms breaking the law once it became clear the people of St. Louis were taking matters into their own hands.

The board seemed to care more about the potential damage protesters might cause the statue than the harm the statue inflicted on the people of south city. ‘Art’ and ‘history’ had more meaning for the commissioners than respect for people who live and work in south city.

The Columbus statue stood silently in the park for over 130 years but spoke volumes as to how those in power think Native and African Americans should be treated. We can take some small comfort in the fact that the Columbus statue, like other racist monuments the world over, was defaced, vandalized, and covered in red repeatedly over the years.

Opposite: A statue of Christopher Columbus behaded in Waterbury, Connecticut, July 4, 2020.

All across America and beyond, statues have gone from being ignored to scrutinized and attacked. In a wave of confrontations from late May until the fall of 2020, protesters targeted dozens of monuments honoring slave traders and enslavers, colonizers, Confederates, police, and other white supremacists. Monuments were defaced, redecorated, and pulled down in Nashville, East Memphis, and Dover, Tennessee; Detroit and Grand Rapids, Michigan; Birmingham, Montgomery, and Huntsville, Alabama; Dover, Delaware; Roanoke, Richmond, Williamsburg City, Norfolk, Virginia Beach, and Portsmouth, Virginia; Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota; Oxford, Mississippi; Worcester, Haverhill, Springfield, and Boston, Massachusetts; Houston and Fort Worth, Texas; Chicago, Illinois; New Orleans, Louisiana; Eugene and Portland Oregon; Dennis Township and Ridgefield Park, New Jersey; Little Rock, Arkansas; New York City and Buffalo, New York; Iowa City, Iowa; Washington, D.C.; Carmel and Fort Wayne, Indiana; San Francisco, San Diego, Los Angeles, Vallejo, and Sacramento, California; Ridley Township, Pittsburgh, Plymouth Township, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Columbia and Kansas City, Missouri; Raleigh, Wilmington, Greensboro, Cornelius, and Clinton, North Carolina; Boscawen, New Hampshire; Denver, Colorado Springs, and Pueblo, Colorado; Providence, Rhode Island; Franklin, Dayton, and Columbus, Ohio; Savannah, Macon, Resaca, Athens, Griffin, and Atlanta, Georgia; Phoenix, Arizona; Frederick, Lothian, White's Ferry, and Baltimore, Maryland; Pensacola and Jacksonville, Florida; Seattle and Spokane, Washington; Charleston and Anderson, South Carolina; Waterbury, Bridgeport, and Darien, Connecticut; and Santa Fe, New Mexico.*

Internationally, protesters made headlines by attacking monuments in Cape Town and Pretoria South Africa; Bristol

* See the chronology for details .

HIS NAME” and “DEFUND THE POLICE” are written on the Little Rock District Courthouse. Vandals also write “DEFUND THE POLICE” and “BREONNA TAYLOR” on a police memorial at a third location. The following morning during a news conference by the Little Rock Police Chief, passersby yell profanity at him.

September 5

After an anti-police rally in Detroit, Michigan, vandals tag a statue of U.S. General Alexander Macomb with “SLAVE OWNER LAND THIEF”.

September 7

Overwhelmed by the presence of a John A. Macdonald statue, two people in Charlottetown, Canada spontaneously knock it over and drag it through the street. The two are arrested.

September 16

Indigenous Misak protesters in Popayán, Columbia tear down a statue of conquistador Sebastián de Belalcázar. In the 1500s, Belalcázar established Spanish settlements in Nicaragua, Honduras, Columbia, and Ecuador, enslaving Native people and committing genocide as he did. The statue had been built atop El Morro del Tulcán, a Misak pyramid and holy site.

September 18

Vandals once again hit the McKinley monument in Buffalo, New York—the third time this summer. “WARDEL DAVIS” is written on the monument and red paint splashed on it. Wardel Davis was a young black man killed by Buffalo police in 2017. The officers who killed him were later cleared of any

August 17

Vandals in Darien, Connecticut fire paintballs at a police memorial outside the Darien Police Department.

August 23

Vandals in Buffalo, New York dump a bucket of blue paint onto an Abraham Lincoln statue.

A police officer memorial in Springfield, Massachusetts has “ACAB” and “FTP” written on it.

August 24

Overnight in Madison, Wisconsin, someone beats the police memorial outside the capitol with a sledgehammer. Later in the week police make one arrest. The memorial was previously defaced with paint in 2017.

August 26

Vandals in Victoria, Canada douse a statue of Captain James Cook with red paint. The following summer protesters tear it down and toss it in the harbor.

August 29

During an anti-police march in Montréal, Canada, protesters pull down a statue of John A. Macdonald.

September 3

During the early morning hours, the scalp-holding statue of Hannah Duston in Haverhill, Massachusetts is once again defaced. Vandals dump red paint on it.

Overnight in Little Rock, Arkansas, police vehicles outside the North Little Rock Police Department are defaced, including an SUV that’s lit on fire. Across town, “DANIEL PRUDE SAY

and London, England; Milan, Italy; Montreal, Charlottetown, Winnipeg, Vaughn, Toronto, and Victoria, Canada; Popayán, Columbia; Hamilton, New Zealand; Nuuk, Greenland; Melbourne, Ballarat, Perth, and Sydney, Australia; The Hague, Netherlands; and Martinique in the Lesser Antilles.

In the more dramatic episodes, protesters rolled statues through the streets, set fire to them, and dumped them in bodies of water, like in Richmond, New Orleans, D.C., Bristol, and Antwerp.

It was in this context that officials in dozens of cities across America, including the board of Tower Grove Park, removed monuments to Columbus, Washington,* the Confederacy, and others. Many municipalities did so in order to protect the artistic and historical value of the statues. Officials also feared the monument protests might sustain the George Floyd Uprising, in which attention was focused on historic and modern targets alike. Many municipalities resorted to removing monuments unannounced and under the cover of night. In other instances, private citizens used their own wealth or raised funds to protect the memorials. Some stood armed to guard them.

In response to these confrontations, many conservatives have doubled down on their version of the past, clinging to a comforting myth and forcing the rest of us to suffer the consequences. The products of America—genocide, cruelty, slavery, and so much more—must not be named. Some conservatives have even tried to codify their myth into law with bans on how race and history can be discussed in schools. Those

* For more on George Washington, see “Escaping Washington for Freedom—Let’s not Celebrate George Washington, but the Slaves Who Escaped Him”. A digital version is available at crimethinc.com and hard copies at aboulder.com.

who insist on this course risk replicating past atrocities, if not outright embracing them, as many neo-fascists have.

Liberals have responded in their own way, and as the statues come down and streets are renamed, they have offered heroes of their own. At its worst, this uplifting has taken the very things that make someone great—their triumphs despite the horrific limitations placed on them by those in power—and turned them into grounds for elevating them beyond reproach. Those who want to follow heroes uncritically risk losing their own agency, if not producing new objects whose essence cannot fully be discussed.

Politicians and corporations have answered the iconoclasm too. Some politicians have written laws against teaching children about the past, others have taken a knee while donning Kente cloth scarves. Whatever gets them through the next election cycle. And corporations have surpassed us all with how woke they've become. Yet strangely enough, conservative, moderate, and progressive politicians alike, along with all major corporations, continue to support the police.



work of their captives!”

July 30

A police memorial in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania is vandalized. Police say the memorial has been attacked already this year in May and twice in 2016. One of the previous vandalisms involved someone beating on it with a crowbar and breaking off large chunks.

August 4

In Huntsville, Alabama, vandals fling red paint at a Confederate monument outside the county courthouse.

August 8

A police memorial in Chicago, Illinois is vandalized with black paint.

August 12

Damage to a police memorial in Colorado Springs is found. Police say they have had to clean graffiti and other vandalism from the memorial a number of times since it was unveiled two years ago.

August 13

A Confederate memorial outside the county courthouse in Jackson, Tennessee is spray-painted with “TEAR IT DOWN”. In 2017 vandals tagged the memorial with “NO NAZIS” shortly after the United the Right Rally in Charlottesville.

August 16

Overnight vandals in Vaughn, Ontario once again spray-paint the statue of Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

Indeed, we can imagine how quickly their power would dissipate if not for the police protecting it.

Even those in power ready to admit that many of these monuments honor people who committed horrendous acts of racism and genocide, still insist that people must respect the law. Never mind that the law has always been used to perpetuate all manner of atrocities, and that the same law moves sluggishly slow in addressing oppression. Indeed, many of the monuments discussed in the chronology were asked to be taken down legally for decades. Protesters solved this problem in mere minutes by personally seeing to their removal.

In doing so, people showed the intrinsic link between ourselves and our surroundings, and affirmed the undeniable importance of interacting with our environment. But change cannot simply be aesthetic. We need to not only topple the signs of past oppressions but also pull down the distinctions that unequally distribute wealth and power here and now, elevating a select few to the stars while discarding the lives of countless others.

Let the politicians and corporations play catch up or disappear into oblivion. For we are most powerful when we are working outside of their reach, setting our own terms and values—as people did last summer.

Locally, perhaps our next target should be Tower Grove Park itself, built on the former land of Henry Shaw, who commissioned the statue of Columbus. While many people currently enjoy the park, there are limits to our freedom. Who has access to the park, for what, and for how long is inconsistent and restricted. We could expand these freedoms entirely, creating a space to fulfill our needs and desires.

Should a homeless encampment take root, it is because of the need for housing and other resources. Should a weekly

dance party pop up, it is because we are denied the space to enjoy ourselves free of buying and selling. The same could be said of a Really Really Free Market, in which resources are shared without money, should one appear. Perhaps a space would form too for neighborhood assemblies, used to discuss issues we face and ways of directly addressing them, free of the state and its mentality. We should also not forget to leave a section untouched, for the foxes, owls, plants, and other creatures that call this chunk of south city home. What becomes of a place like Tower Grove Park is limited only by our imaginations and willingness to defend it.

For a great levelling,
L.T., Fall 2021

Post scriptum

In St. Louis there still remains public statues of George Washington on the campus of Washington University and in Lafayette Park. The latter contains a statue of Thomas Hart Benton as well. There is also the “Where the Two Rivers Meet” statue that depicts the missionary Pierre Jean De Smet holding a crucifix above the heads of two submissive Native Americans, located on the campus of St. Louis University.

July 25

In response to the violence of local and federal police in Portland, Oregon, a protest in downtown Los Angeles, California attacks the federal building. Glass doors are broken and the interior and exterior of the building tagged. A memorial case holding the badges of fallen officers is also defaced. Police respond in riot gear, leading to injuries on both sides.

At another demonstration in solidarity with the unrest in Portland, protesters in Virginia attack the headquarters of the Richmond Police Department. Someone uses a fire extinguisher filled with red paint to deface a large, dystopian sculpture of a police officer’s head. They also write “ACAB” next to it in giant letters. Shortly after, a dump truck is set ablaze. Though police attempt to disperse the crowd with tear gas, the march regroups and continues moving through the city.

July 26

In Fort-de-France, Martinique, demonstrators tear down statues of Empress Joséphine and Pierre Belain d’Esnambuc. Joséphine was born on her family’s sugar plantation in Martinique, and when her husband Napoleon Bonaparte took power in France, Joséphine had slavery re-established on the island. Pierre Belain d’Esnambuc founded the first permanent french settlement in Martinique in 1635. The Joséphine statue has been headless since 1991 and covered in paint regularly since.

Previously in May, Martiniquais protesters had torn down and destroyed two statues of Victor Schœlcher, known for writing the decree that abolished African slavery in France’s colonies in 1848. According to the protesters, “Schœlcher was undeniably against slavery, but when it was necessary to negotiate reparations, he only offered freedom to Blacks and gave financial compensation to the slavers for the loss of the free

paint. Both protesters and police are hospitalized.*

A police memorial in Ridgefield Park, New Jersey is defaced with red paint.

Overnight in Savannah, vandals once again target the “Silence” monument in Laurel Grove Cemetery. Red paint and a swastika are put on the Confederate memorial. Nearby Confederate headstones are also defaced.

July 18

The police headquarters in Kansas City, Missouri is vandalized during a demonstration against federal agents being brought to town to investigate violent crimes. “FUCK FEDS AND COPS” is written on the headquarters’ front doors and “FEDS GO HOME”, “NO ROOM 4 FASCISTS”, and “ABOLISH KCPD” are left on a police memorial.

A demonstration in Toronto, Canada targets a statue of John A. Macdonald, throwing paint on it and draping it with a banner that reads, “TEAR DOWN MONUMENTS THAT REPRESENT SLAVERY, COLONIALISM, AND VIOLENCE”.

July 19

A monument in Nashville, Tennessee to Confederate and Union troops is vandalized with “BLM” and “EAT ASS AMERICA”.

July 23

Overnight, vandals push over a statue of Robert E. Lee in Roanoke, Virginia.

* For first hand perspectives, see “Accounts from the Battle of Grant Park—How Chicago Demonstrators Pushed Back the Police and Nearly Toppled a Statue” at crimethinc.com.

“Each Crueler Than the Last”

*Notes on Christopher Columbus & Henry Shaw
for the destruction of their honor*

September 2018

Last month, a crowd tore down a Confederate monument in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, continuing a tradition of iconoclasm initiated in nearby Durham a year ago after the clashes in Charlottesville. Now, as we approach Columbus Day 2018, a panel of experts is debating the fate of the Columbus statue in St. Louis, where several other recent struggles have taken place against police and white supremacy. It's a good time to revisit the colonization of the so-called New World and Native, African, and underclass resistance against it.

This story extends from the islands of the Caribbean to the settlement that became St. Louis, charting connections between the two and the statue that stands in Tower Grove Park today. The following text contains many descriptions of graphic violence—the violence that was necessary to impose European colonialism, white supremacy, capitalism, and ultimately the sovereignty of the United States on this land. Christopher Columbus set this violence in motion; Henry Shaw, the commissioner of the statue in St. Louis and the founder of the Missouri Botanical Garden, perpetuated it.



ny, he made a fortune off the exploitation of black Africans. Rhodes was also the namesake of Rhodesia, later renamed Zambia and Zimbabwe.

July 14

A statue of President Ronald Reagan in his boyhood home, Dixon, Illinois, is vandalized with “BLACK LIVES MATTER”.

July 15

A George Washington statue in New Orleans has red paint thrown on it and “BLM” written on its base.

July 17

Following a rally in Grant Park—the site of horrific police violence during the Democratic National Convention of 1968—hundreds of demonstrators outwit police officers, winning an opportunity to try to topple a statue of Christopher Columbus. Though the crowd is unsuccessful in toppling the monument, the statue's pedestal is left covered in graffiti and

In Little Rock, Arkansas a Confederate memorial is covered in tags, including “BLACK LIVES MATTER”, “POWER TO THE PEOPLE”, and “STAY DEAD”. Later in the week police make one arrest.

July 10

Overnight, four statues are vandalized throughout New Orleans. People push over a statue of John McDonogh and a bust of Confederate officer and state legislator Charles Didier Dreux. Vandals also cover a bust of Confederate Brigadier General Albert Pike in paint and write “DIE PIG” on it, then write “BLM” on a statue of Sophie B. Wright. Wright was a social reformer and proud member of the Daughters of the Confederacy in the late 1800s. The bust of Dreux had its nose chiseled off in 2017 and “FUCK THIS SHIT” written on it in 2018.

July 11

Overnight a Confederate monument outside of the Sampson County Courthouse in Clinton City, North Carolina is damaged by vandals.

July 12

Another person is arrested at the statue of Thomas Jefferson in Columbia, Missouri. They are accused of throwing red paint on it.

July 13

Vandals in Cape Town, South Africa use an angle grinder to decapitate a bust of Cecil Rhodes. In the 1890s, Rhodes was an incredibly powerful British colonizer. As prime minister of the Cape Colony (present day South Africa) Rhodes oversaw the theft of Indigenous land and the tripling of the wealth required to vote. As owner of the De Beers diamond compa-

The Conquest of the Caribbean

In October 1492, Columbus landed on Guanahani, an island in the Caribbean populated by the Taíno people. According to him, the Taíno “brought us parrots and balls of cotton and spears and many other things, which they exchanged for the glass beads and hawks’ bells. They willingly traded everything they owned. . . . They do not bear arms, and do not know them, for I showed them a sword, they took it by the edge and cut themselves out of ignorance. They have no iron. Their spears are made of cane. . . . They would make fine servants. . . . With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want.” Christening the island San Salvador, Columbus began the enslavement and genocide of Native Americans—though it didn’t go as easily as he had anticipated.

In December, Columbus came upon the island of Ayiti, home to somewhere between 100,000 and 3,000,000 Taíno. Knowing the power of names, the Spaniards renamed the Taínos’ home “Hispaniola.” On Christmas Day, one of Columbus’s ships, the *Santa Maria*, sank while docked along the island, and he ordered the remnants of it used to build La Navidad, the first* European colonial settlement in the Americas. He then set sail to Spain with gold, parrots, and six enslaved

* This ‘first’ does not include visits by Africans, Vikings, Asians, or Basque fisherman to the Americas.

Táinos.

Columbus returned a year later with 17 ships, 1300 men, 20 cavalry, and sugarcane for cultivation. No longer interested in finding Asia, Columbus now fantasized about colonizing Hispaniola for Spain and getting “as much gold as [the King and Queen require] . . . and as many slaves as they ask.” But when he arrived at Hispaniola, he found the fort burned to the ground and the Spaniards he had stationed there killed by the Taíno, Ciguayo, and Macorix tribes. While Columbus was away, his men had abducted and raped Native people, which the local tribes would not tolerate.

This was hardly the misconduct of unsupervised underlings. Columbus was well aware of the conquistadors’ desire for sex slaves; on his return trip to Hispaniola, he was already awarding concubines to his officers. In 1500, Columbus wrote a friend that in the Caribbean, “A hundred *castellanoes** are as easily obtained for a woman as for a farm, and it is very general and there are plenty of dealers who go about looking for girls; those from nine to ten are now in demand.”

Over the course of Columbus’s second voyage, he established a number of forts and villages along the south of the island and in the interior to find gold. Among these early settlements was Santo Domingo, a hub of European colonialism for the next few hundred years. Any inhabitants that the Spaniards found were treated as serfs and forced to bring their lord a quota of gold. Those who were unable or unwilling to meet the quota were beaten, tortured, whipped, maimed, and killed. By the end of 1494, 7,000 Táinos were in open revolt.

With difficulty, Spain crushed the uprising, and in its aftermath began to understand that they could make better use of Hispaniola as a sugar plantation laid out in the semi-feudal

* Spanish currency.

has been damaged.

July 6

Vandals in Cornelius, North Carolina tag a Confederate memorial with “RACIST” and “BLM”. Three people are soon arrested and charged.

July 7

A Confederate memorial is toppled by protesters in Greensboro, North Carolina.

A person is arrested in Columbia, Missouri while writing, “SAY HER NAME SALLY HEMINGS” at the foot of a Thomas Jefferson statue on the Mizzou campus. Hemings was enslaved to Jefferson and had six children with him. It is likely that Jefferson initiated a sexual relationship with Hemings when the two were overseas together and Hemings was only fourteen years old.

July 9

Vandals in Haverhill, Massachusetts go after a monument to Hannah Duston. They write on the statue, which depicts Duston holding Native scalps, “HAVERHILL’S OWN MONUMENT TO GENOCIDE”. In early May, demonstrators had used red paint to target another statue of Duston in Boscawen, New Hampshire, also depicting her holding scalps. The Alnôbak (Abenaki) took Duston captive in 1697, and during her captivity killed her infant daughter. Duston eventually escaped, but not before killing the Alnôbak family she was bound to and scalping them. She later received £25 for the scalps, a considerable sum.

In Savannah, Georgia, people break the arms off the Confederate monument known as “Silence,” stenciling “SILENCE NO MORE” on it in large letters and splashing red paint on it.

July 2

People remove dozens of Confederate flags from graves in Resaca, Georgia and use them to spell out “STOP RACISM”.

July 3

In Lothian, Maryland a statue of Confederate Private Benjamin Welch Owens is toppled. This is the second time in a few weeks that the statue has been vandalized.

In Seattle, Washington a memorial to Confederate soldiers in Lake View Cemetery is pulled down and defaced.

Overnight in Buffalo, New York, a monument to President William McKinley is vandalized with vulgarities and “BLM”. McKinley was president during the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars and also sent troops against striking workers domestically. Anarchist Leon Czolgosz assassinated McKinley in Buffalo in 1901.

July 4

A demonstration in Sacramento, California sprays flaming red spray paint at a statue of colonizer and missionary Junípero Serra and then tears it down.

Protesters in Baltimore, Maryland topple a Columbus statue and throw it into Baltimore Inner Harbor.

Overnight in Waterbury, Connecticut a Columbus statue is beheaded. Police later charge one person.

July 5

Overnight vandals tear down a memorial to Confederate troops in Green Hill Cemetery, Greensboro, North Carolina.

Around the same time in East Memphis, Tennessee, a Christopher Columbus statue is covered in black paint and feathers. This is the second time in two weeks the monument

encomienda model. They saw now too that the Taíno would make better slaves than serfs. Over the course of 1495-1496, the Taíno were forced to give up traditional foods for Spanish crops, though many refused to plant or harvest the colonizers’ fuel and chose fasting and starvation instead.

Of the first 500 Native slaves Columbus sent back to Spain, 250 died en route. Over the next few decades, hundreds of thousands more enslaved people would die working in the gold mines and sugar plantations of Hispaniola and resisting Spanish domination. By 1508, not even a full generation after their first contact with Europeans, Hispaniola’s Indigenous population had dropped to 60,000. According to one witness who arrived in the Caribbean in 1502, “The longer [the Spanish] spent in the region, the more ingenious were the torments, each crueler than the last, that they inflicted on their victims.”

Borikén and Xaymaca

The Spanish had known about Borikén, which they renamed Puerto Rico, since 1493, but it wasn’t until the discovery of gold in the early 1500s that they wanted to settle it. By now, Columbus was dead, but other vicious colonizers, including his son Diego Colón,* had taken his place.

In 1508, Juan Ponce de León and a slew of conquistadors were sent to the island to build a fortified settlement, Caparra, and enslave the local Taínos. Life under the Spanish was cruel, and after three years of slavery in the gold mines, enduring habitual beatings and assaults by the the Spaniards,† the Taí-

* One can roughly translate Columbus’s Spanish name, Cristóbal Colón, as “Christ-bearer the Colonizer”.

† When the Taíno became pregnant from Spaniards raping

no had had enough. In a daring act of heresy, a group of slaves cornered a conquistador along a river and tried to drown him—they wished to know whether or not the Spanish were truly gods. Once dead, the illusion of Spanish superiority was gone. Shortly after, the Taíno sacked the town of Sotomayor, killing eighty and severely wounding General Cristóbal de Sotomayor.

Ponce de León responded by engaging the Taíno in a series of battles. To punish them and teach others a lesson, Ponce de León ordered 6,000 executions, but many escaped from the island or killed themselves before the Spanish could kill them. The following year, some of Governor Diego Colón's slaves ran away and waged war on the Spanish for a few months. Try as they might, on both the small and large scale, the Spanish had great difficulty subduing the Native Caribbean population.

At the time of first contact with Europeans, there were between 600,000 and one million people living on Puerto Rico and the nearby Jamaica. After forty years of work, disease, and torture, only 200 Native people remained. The Spaniards, according to Bartolomé de las Casas,

“perpetrated the same outrages and committed the same crimes as before, devising yet further refinements of cruelty, murdering the native people, burning and roasting them alive, throwing them to wild dogs and then oppressing, tormenting, and plaguing them with toil down the mines and elsewhere.”

By the 1540s, African slaves had begun to fill the Taínos' miserable vacancies. Over the next three hundred years, be-

them, they commonly killed themselves rather than breed more colonizers and slaves.

June 28

A monument to Robert E. Lee in Franklin, Ohio is damaged with paint and eggs. The ground next to it is tagged “NO RACIST MONUMENTS.”

June 29

In the early morning hours, vandals throw red paint across two statues of George Washington in Manhattan, New York. Ever a man of action, President Trump takes to Twitter:



As of this writing, no one has been arrested for the vandalism.

Meanwhile, in Pensacola Florida, a monument to Confederate martyrs is hit with red paint.

Vandals in Frederick, Maryland cover multiple memorials to Confederate soldiers in red and topple two. One loses its limbs, and the other its head.

July 1

During a protest in Louisville, Kentucky, an eternal flame dedicated to fallen police officers is extinguished. “NO JUSTICE NO PEACE” is written nearby.

revered American monuments such as the Lincoln Memorial. Many of the rioters, arsonists, and left-wing extremists who have carried out and supported these acts have explicitly identified themselves with ideologies—such as Marxism—that call for the destruction of the United States system of government. Anarchists and left-wing extremists have sought to advance a fringe ideology that paints the United States of America as fundamentally unjust and have sought to impose that ideology on Americans through violence and mob intimidation. They have led riots in the streets, burned police vehicles, killed and assaulted government officers as well as business owners defending their property, and even seized an area within one city where law and order gave way to anarchy. . . .”

“My Administration will not allow violent mobs incited by a radical fringe to become the arbiters of the aspects of our history that can be celebrated in public spaces. State and local public officials’ abdication of their law enforcement responsibilities in deference to this violent assault must end.”

Later in the day Trump tweets an FBI wanted poster of fifteen protesters, exclaiming “Ten year prison sentences!”

June 27

In Columbia, South Carolina, a device filled with stump remover is found near the state capitol. The smoldering device was placed at the base of a statue of governor and white supremacist Benjamin Tillman. Police charge two people with felonies.



The drawing of conquistador Diego Salcedo, which sparked the uprising of 1511. Having heard tale of Christians who could rise from the dead, the Taíno made sure to hold Salcedo under water for three days.

tween 11,000,000 and 100,000,000 Africans were kidnapped from their homelands to supply the labor demanded by Europe’s ruling class throughout the Americas. Between 9,000,000 and 20,000,000 people are believed to have died in the course of being enslaved by the rich and powerful of West Africa and while being transported by European merchants heartless enough to trade in slaves.

Caobana

In August 1511, Diego Velázquez set off from Hispaniola to capture Caobana, which he christened Cuba. To his dismay,

four hundred Taínos beat him there to warn the local Guanahatabey, Ciboney, and Taíno about the Spanish. According to folklore, Hatüey, a Taíno from Hispaniola and an influential figure in Native resistance to the colonization of Cuba, showed the inhabitants a basket of gold and warned them:

“Here is the God the Spaniards worship. For these they fight and kill; for these they persecute us and that is why we have to throw them into the sea.... They tell us, these tyrants, that they adore a God of peace and equality, and yet they usurp our land and make us their slaves. They speak to us of an immortal soul and of their eternal rewards and punishments, and yet they rob our belongings, take our women, violate our daughters.”

Few of the listeners believed that anyone could be so cruel and most decided, at first, not to join him.

For months, Hatüey and other guerillas kept the Spanish confined to their fort, Baracoa, through a campaign of harassment, intimidation, and sniping. Eventually, however, Hatüey was captured and condemned to be burned at the stake. Before his execution on February 2, 1512, a Dominican priest asked Hatüey if he would like to be baptized so he could go to Heaven and be spared damnation in Hell.

“Are there Spaniards in Heaven?” he asked.

“Yes,” replied the priest.

“Then I prefer Hell.”

* * *

Overnight in Winnipeg, Canada, vandals dump white paint onto a statue of Queen Victoria. Her sixty-four year reign saw the subjugation, abuse, and murder of countless people around the globe as the British Empire maintained and expanded its power. In the summer of 2021, protesters tear down the Victoria statue along with one of Queen Elizabeth I.

June 24

Vandals in East Memphis, Tennessee throw red paint on a Columbus statue.

June 25

Amidst ongoing anti-police protests, a demonstration in Denver, Colorado pulls down a statue dedicated to Christopher Columbus.

In Kansas City, Missouri two vandals are caught defacing a statue of President Andrew Jackson. The two manage to cover the statue in red and write “SLAVE OWNER” on it before being arrested.

June 26

President Trump issues Executive Order 13933, “Protecting American Monuments, Memorials, and Statues and Combating Recent Criminal Violence”. The order threatens protesters who target monuments with ten years imprisonment under the Veterans’ Memorial Preservation and Recognition Act of 2003. It also threatens to withhold funding to prosecutors and police departments that do not adequately repress protesters. Trump’s order reads in part,

“Over the last 5 weeks, there has been a sustained assault on the life and property of civilians, law enforcement officers, government property, and



As Spain began to establish footholds in the Caribbean, King Ferdinando II and Queen Isabella I issued a decree justifying Indigenous slavery. It was to be read to all Native people upon first contact with Europeans. The decree declared that all humanity, including Indians, were equals, and that God had left certain people—popes and kings—in charge on earth to do his bidding. The Pope had given Spain free reign of the Americas. Would the Indians submit to God’s representatives and do his will—that is, would they subjugate themselves and become obedient, enslaved Spanish subjects? If not, then,

“With the help of God, we shall powerfully enter into your country, and shall make war against you in all ways and manners that we can, and shall subject you to the yoke and obedience of the Church and of their highnesses; we shall take you, and your wives, and your children, and shall make slaves of them, and as such shall sell and dispose of them as their highnesses may command; and we shall take away your goods, and shall do you all the mischief and damage that we can, as to vassals who do not obey, and refuse to receive their lord, and resist and contradict him: and we protest that the deaths and losses which shall accrue from this are your fault, and not that of their highnesses, or ours, nor of these cavaliers who come with us.”

La Florida

Around this time, Spain became interested in colonizing Florida. With three ships full of two hundred men, Juan Ponce de León landed on the west coast of Florida in Escam-

paba and was greeted by the Calusa.* Though the Spanish had never heard of the Calusa, the Calusa had heard plenty about them—refugees had been arriving from Cuba the past two years. On the tenth day of the Spanish visit, the Calusa attacked them, killing a few and driving the rest back to their ships. The next day, eighty canoes attacked the Spanish and forced them to retreat to Puerto Rico.

Arriving home, the Spanish found their barely five-year-old capitol, Caparra, in disarray. In Ponce de León's absence, the Taíno had risen up along with Kalinagos† from a nearby island. They had attacked the town and burned much of it to the ground, including Ponce de León's house, the seat of colonial power.

Four years later, on his return from the Yucatán, Francisco Hernández de Córdoba stopped in southwest Florida—but the Calusa quickly drove him out. In 1521 Ponce de León returned to Florida with two hundred men, priests, farmers, artisans, fifty horses and other domestic animals, and farming implements. Yet once again, the Calusa drove them out as well, mortally wounding Ponce de León with a poison-tipped

* The Spanish recorded Escampaba as the Calusas' name for their kingdom. The name Calusa comes from one of the tribe's leaders in the 1560s, whom the Spanish renamed Carlos. Their name for themselves has been completely lost.

† The Kalinago word for people, *karibna*, became the European word for the tribe, *Carib*, as well as the area in general, the *Caribbean*, and also the English word *cannibal*.

Though Europeans told many stories of Kalinago cannibalism, little to no evidence of it exists. Suspiciously, cannibalism was considered an incurable sin and grounds for the enslavement of Native people. Remember too that the mines and plantations run by European colonists were devouring thousands of humans annually.

troops who fought against “savage Indians”.

Overnight in Jacksonville, Florida, vandals fling red paint on a statue of Andrew Jackson and write “SLAVE OWNER” on it. Among other deeds, Jackson enslaved over a hundred people, led troops against the Seminole People as a general during the Florida Wars, and while president ordered the forcible relocation of all Native Americans across the Mississippi River. Thousands of people died from exposure, disease, and starvation as they were forced west along the Trail of Tears.

In Carmel, Indiana a statue of a fallen police officer has red paint put on its hands and “IT COULD HAPPEN HERE” (i.e., police could kill someone) written on its back.

June 22

Amidst ongoing protests and riots in Washington, D.C., protesters try to topple a statue of President Andrew Jackson across the street from the White House. “KILLER”, “RACIST SCUM”, and “BLM” are written on its pedestal before police prevent protesters from pulling it down. From within his well-guarded palace, Trump threatens protesters with ten years imprisonment.

Vandals in Jacksonville hit the President Jackson statue again, writing “REMEMBER MAY 28, 1830” on it—a reference to the Indian Removal Act.

June 23

During the early morning hours, vandals in Worcester, Massachusetts cover a Columbus statue in red paint. This is the second time this month the statue has been defaced.

Vandals in Anderson, South Carolina paint a Confederate monument red.

olina targets a Confederate monument. Two life-size statues are ripped from it and dragged through the streets. The crowd leaves one statue on the steps of a courthouse and the other dangling from a streetlight. An attempt to topple the statues was made earlier in the day during a march, but was thwarted from lack of support and a fast police response. The next day, city employees remove all remaining Confederate monuments.

In Phoenix, Arizona protesters dump red paint on a memorial to Confederate troops outside the capitol.

In Washington, D.C. a statue of Confederate Brigadier General Albert Pike is torn down and set on fire by protesters.

June 20

During an anti-police demonstration in Toronto, Ontario, “BLM” is written on a police memorial.

A statue of George Washington in Baltimore, Maryland has red paint flung on it.

June 21

In Nuuk, Greenland, a statue of Danish missionary and colonizer Hans Egede is splashed with red paint and tagged “DECOLONIZE”. Egede founded a colony in Greenland in the early 1700s on Inuit land, revitalizing European interest in the island and paving the way for long-lasting European settlements. Police make an arrest in connection to the vandalism.

Someone writes “BLM” on a Confederate monument in Brunswick, Georgia.

In Santa Fe, New Mexico vandals place red handprints and write “RACIST” and “END GENOCIDE” on a memorial to Union troops who fought against Native Americans. Until the 1970s when protesters chiseled it off, the memorial was dedicated to

arrow as they did. Several more attempts were made over the years—but other than Christian missions, which altered and destroyed Native life in their own way, Florida remained un-subjugated for generations more.

* * *

Before the scene shifts to Missouri, let’s consider two more examples of enslavement and resistance in that era, beginning with the Bahoruco Maroons of Hispaniola, a colony of escapees founded by Mencía and Enriquillo.

Enriquillo was born in the mid-1490s, a Taíno subject of the Spanish. As a child, he witnessed the near destruction of his people. While attending peace talks in 1503, his father and eighty other Taíno delegates were locked in a building which the Spanish set fire to. The conquistadors killed anyone who managed to escape the flames. Enriquillo was taken and raised by Dominicans, among them Bartolomé de las Casas.

In 1519, Mencía was raped by her slave master. When her husband Enriquillo tried to have the Spaniard prosecuted, which was theoretically a right of the Taíno, he was publicly whipped for asserting himself. Mencía and Enriquillo assessed their situation. The new world Columbus had imposed on them was characterized by rape, Spanish impunity, and other cruelties of slave life, the genocide of their people, and the acute pain of losing loved ones. The Church, the supposed moral compass of Spanish colonization, had sided with their master. No, this new world was no place to live, Mencía and Enriquillo decided, and so they took off for the Bahoruco Mountains.

In the highlands, their camp slowly grew into a maroon community of Native and African runaways of all ages, who together fought the Spanish. After fourteen years and the

slaves' guerilla war bringing the commerce of Hispaniola to a grinding halt, the Spanish offered the maroons a truce. Sadly, Enriquillo passed away a year after it was signed, and four years later the Spanish renege on the deal. We must trust no contract promising freedom.

On Christmas Day 1521, around the same time the Bahoruco Maroon camp was getting off the ground, between 20 and 40 of Diego Colón's slaves rose up. Together, they killed their overseers, slaughtered Colón's livestock, and burned fields of sugarcane. The group made its way to at least one other plantation before being stopped, having killed nine Spaniards along the way. The majority of the insurgents were enslaved African, making this one of the first known African slave revolts in the Americas. Retaliation was fast and severe—most participants were likely captured, tortured, and executed.

Before the revolt, most Spanish slave owners preferred African-born slaves, assuming that they would be more disoriented and dependent on their masters, unable to communicate with each other or fend for themselves in the wilderness. Despite these obstacles, the rebels had been effective, and spilled Spanish blood was making the colonizers rethink their strategy. Within two weeks, Governor Colón passed the Caribbean's first ordinances concerning enslaved Africans.

Colón decreed that slaves could not leave their master's property without their master's permission, and even then their mobility would be restricted. What slaves were allowed to buy and sell was also curtailed, and no slaves, not even loyal ones, were allowed to bear arms.

These laws, alongside others introduced by the Spanish in the Caribbean and supplemented by the white supremacist customs of France and Britain, eventually formed the foundation for colonial and state law elsewhere in the so-called New

egon attacks a statue of George Washington. After covering its face in a burning American flag, the crowd pulls it down and writes on it "YOU'RE ON NATIVE LAND" and "BLM".

In San Francisco, California statues of Francis Scott Key, Ulysses S. Grant, and Junípero Serra are toppled. Key is famous for writing "The Star-Spangled Banner" but also owned slaves and as a lawyer prosecuted runaways and abolitionists while defending the rights of slave owners. Grant was a Union general and Reconstruction-era president who oversaw slaves before the war and committed genocide against Native Americans afterward. Serra was a missionary who established settlements ranging from Querétaro, Mexico to San Francisco, California, forcibly converting, enslaving, and abusing Native people along the way. Over the past five years a number of Serra statues have been decapitated and covered in red.

Overnight in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada, vandals cover a statue of John A. Macdonald in red paint. Macdonald was Canada's first prime minister and among other acts established the residential school system. Over the course of their existence, the schools took over 150,000 Indigenous children from their parents and forcibly taught them European values. Thousands of children were abused and killed at the residential schools.

As of August 2021, 4,100 Indigenous children have been documented as having died at Canada's residential schools. Throughout the summer of 2021, statues of Macdonald, Queen Victoria, and Catholic figures have been defaced and torn down throughout Canada. Catholic churches have also been set on fire in retribution for the Church's involvement in Native genocide.

June 19

A demonstration outside the capitol in Raleigh, North Car-

White's Ferry after having "BLACK LIVES MATTER" written on it in 2017.

In Columbus, Ohio a statue of the city's namesake is vandalized with black and red paint.

In Nashville, Tennessee a Confederate memorial in Centennial Park is tagged with "THEY WERE RACISTS" and has red paint thrown on it.

June 17

A demonstration in Charleston, South Carolina targets the John C. Calhoun monument. Calhoun was a statesman from South Carolina—a long-time U.S. senator and two-time vice president—who championed white supremacy and states' rights. In the 1830s, he led the nullification faction, a precursor to South Carolina succeeding from the Union three decades later. Protesters cover the monument with signs, tag it, and throw eggs at it. Police arrest nine.

In Silver Springs, Maryland another Confederate memorial is targeted by vandals. After pulling the monument down, a note claiming responsibility is left behind.

"Here lies 17 dead white supremacists who died fighting to keep black people enslaved. The Confederacy was and always will be racist. Let this marker be a more accurate depiction of history because the last one was a disgrace. PS We toppled the Confederate statue at White's Ferry."

In Vaughn, Ontario vandals spray-paint a statue of Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

June 18

On the eve of Juneteenth a demonstration in Portland, Or-

World—including Missouri. But just as repressive traditions found their way to the Show Me State, so too did customs of resistance. They were spread by subversive storytellers and the insurgents themselves as they were pressed, indentured, enslaved, and transported throughout the increasingly globalized world of the following centuries.

Our story now moves two thousand miles northwest and two and a half centuries forward in history.

The Growth of Missouri

In 1763, at the end of the Seven Years War, the Treaty of Paris shifted Europe's colonies: Illinois became part of Britain's colony of Virginia, which now stretched from the Atlantic Ocean all the way to the Mississippi. The lands west of the Mississippi came under Spanish rule and (to confuse things further for the modern audience) Missouri and northern Arkansas were known as *Spanish Yllinois*. The name was a corruption of the Inoka people, who, along with the land, were misnamed the Illinois. In reality, although monarchs and merchants from thousands of miles away claimed to own what we call Missouri and Illinois, Native Americans were still the vast majority of the region's inhabitants. The few European settlers throughout the area were living in Native Americans' homes—and *knew it*, unlike many of their heirs today. They depended on the region's tribes for survival and profit.

As British law took effect in Illinois, many French slave owners, fearing repercussions that could harm their financial interests, moved across the river to Missouri. During this colonial period spanning the 1700s, some merchants brought slaves to work in their mines in central Illinois and southern Missouri, but many French settlers weren't interested in manufacturing a product, preferring to trade for Native furs. Es-

pecially in trading towns like St. Louis, some enslaved people worked in the fields or shipping, but most served as domestic help or performed other forms of household labor. Most slaves were Native Americans; a few were African.

Naturally, slaves who rebelled made use of the same tools they were forced to use every day. The colonial era of slave resistance saw constant petty theft and many large-scale burglaries carried out by those enslaved to the shipping and service industries, not to mention cooks burning down their masters' barns and homes or poisoning them and their families.

In late summer of 1785, a series of fires ripped through the village of St. Louis, likely set by disgruntled slaves. Two months later, three more barns were set ablaze as cover for eleven Native and African slaves to escape. They marooned together for a month, living off of the wilderness and what they could pillage from the few European settlements of eastern Missouri. Sadly, four of the runaways were caught while trying to free others in St. Charles and St. Louis. The fate of the other seven remains unknown—perhaps they were adopted by one of the region's tribes or joined the interracial Mississippi River pirates of southern Missouri.

The enslaved population of St. Louis struck another major blow against the ruling class in the early 1800s, when the slaves of Pierre and Auguste Chouteau tried to light their masters' mansions on fire. The two brothers, known as the River Barons, controlled the fur trade coming out of the Missouri River—the longest river in the United States. As the wealthiest men in town, they held considerable political and legal power.

Many of the people they enslaved were Native American, and according to Spanish law, their enslavement had been illegal for over a decade. But the crown was based in New Or-



“Justice 4 Jayson” set up camp outside the police department. Bridgeport police killed 15-year-old Jayson Negron in 2017. During the occupation, someone writes “FUCK THE POLICE” on a police memorial.

Protesters in Portland, Oregon pull down a Jefferson statue from outside the Thomas Jefferson High School.

A Confederate monument in Silver Springs, Maryland is spray-painted black.

In Little Rock, Arkansas, a memorial to Confederate soldiers is damaged.

June 15

Overnight in Dover, Delaware, “BLACK LIVES MATTER” is stenciled onto the Delaware State Police Memorial.

In Fort Wayne, Indiana vandals write “BLM”, “QUIT PIGS”, and “ACAB” on a memorial to fallen police officers and fire fighters.

June 16

A Confederate monument is toppled by protesters in Richmond, Virginia.

In Macon, Georgia a Confederate memorial has “HOW OFFENDED ARE YOU NOW?” written at its base, a reference to those who are more offended by the vandalism of monuments than the things they stand for.

Someone dumps a bucket of red paint on a police memorial in Baltimore, Maryland. “I CAN’T BREATHE” is written at its base.

In White’s Ferry, Maryland vandals pull down and deface a Confederate memorial, writing “RACIST” nearby. The statue had originally been in Rockville, Maryland, but was moved to

leans, a three- or four-month trip upstream to Ste. Genevieve or St. Louis and a 12 to 20 day return trip downstream—so the powerful merchants conducted themselves as they pleased.

Before the fires were set, a number of the Chouteaus’ slaves had run away or sued for their freedom. To punish them, Auguste Chouteau had three of his most assertive slaves tied to stakes and beaten. The first arson attempt took place in the wake of these whippings, but the fire was extinguished before it did much damage.

Pierre Chouteau was not so lucky. Three years later, he stood outside in the freezing night air and watched “in the space of one hour . . . the flames devour the fruits of 25 years of unremitting work.” He was largely speaking about *others’* work, of course.

By the time Missouri became a territory of the United States in 1804, Anglo-American settlers had been trickling into the area from the Upland South for at least a generation, bringing with them their slaves and racial customs of land settlement. More often than not, wealthy Southerners from the plantation class went west across the Missouri River with their slaves, settling the middle of the state to form Little Dixie. Poorer Southerners who enslaved a fewer or no people tended towards the Ozarks in southern Missouri and northern Arkansas. By the time Missouri gained statehood in 1821, Native American slavery had transitioned into African-American bondage. Population, culture, and law also shifted from French and Spanish to British and American. This transition was hardly smooth.

Settlers from Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee skirmished with and eventually fought wars against Native Americans. Some of these groups had been driven to Missouri a few generations before; others had been living in the region since

the beginning of time. Wishing to transform the free wilderness into privatized farmland, the settlers aimed to drive Native peoples from their hunting grounds and homes.

By the time Missouri was recognized as a state in 1821, hundreds if not thousands of settlers were streaming into and through the state annually. Most of these Anglo-American immigrants had been abusing people of color for generations. Many had been raised by parents and grandparents who owned slaves or fought wars of removal against Native Americans to the east. By the early 1800s, even those who had not previously played an active role in the establishment of white supremacy were plugging into two hundred years of British settler traditions.

As westward expansion accelerated in the mid-1800s, Missouri merchants grew rich off the thousands of immigrants and traders going up and down its rivers. Money continued to pour in as overland routes like the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails were established in the territory. Black steamboat workers, barmaids, field hands, cooks, servants, stevedores, and washwomen—both enslaved and free—played an integral role in supplying and serving this mass migration, though historians have largely rendered them invisible.

Henry Shaw Arrives on the Scene

Young Henry Shaw traveled from Britain to the United States, arriving in this boom town at the heart of 1820s westward expansion. Back home, his family owned cutlery factories, and Shaw hoped to unload their product on westward settlers.*

* The part of England in which Shaw's family and factories were located was in the heart of the Luddite Triangle. An adolescent during the Luddite uprising, Shaw may have witnessed

In Milan, Italy a statue of journalist Indro Montanelli is covered in red paint. Montanelli fought in the 1930s to colonize Ethiopia and was an enthusiastic supporter of Fascism, penning articles about the superiority of the white race and supporting Italy's control of North Africa. While stationed in Ethiopia in the '30s, Montanelli bought and sold a 12-year old Eritrean girl.

A bust in New Orleans, Louisiana of businessman and slave owner John McDonogh is removed by protesters and tossed into the Mississippi River. In retaliation, police arrest least two people.

Protesters topple and drag statues in Eugene, Oregon celebrating white settlers, "The Pioneer" and "The Pioneer Mother."

In Providence, Rhode Island white paint is thrown onto a Columbus statue. Prosecutors charge three people with felonies but the charges are later dropped. The previous year the same Columbus statue was doused in red and left with a sign reading "STOP CELEBRATING GENOCIDE". A year later, in June 2021, a group of teens in nearby Westerly, Rhode Island follow up by pelting a Columbus statue with eggs and blue paint. Two are later arrested.

June 14

In the early hours of the morning, vandals in Chicago, Illinois place a white hood over a statue of George Washington. They also fling white paint at it and write "SLAVE OWNER" and "GOD BLESS AMERIKKKA" on it.

Around the same time in Wilmington, North Carolina a Confederate memorial is vandalized with paint. Police arrest two people later in the week.

Protesters in Bridgeport, Connecticut calling themselves

take control of the Atlantic Slave Trade.

In Philadelphia “COMMITTED GENOCIDE” is written on a memorial to George Washington.*

June 12

An ax-wielding vandal nearly decapitates a Delaware law enforcement memorial. When police arrive on the scene, all they find is the ax and a urine-soaked Delaware flag.

In Pretoria, South Africa statues of Paul Kruger and two Boer soldiers are covered in red paint. “KILLER” and “I CAN’T BREATHE” are written on the monument. Kruger was a military officer, president of South Africa, and white supremacist during the second half of the 1800s.

Vandals in Ballarat, Australia deface the busts of former prime ministers, covering them in red paint and draping one in an Aboriginal flag. In Sydney, protesters vandalize a statue of Captain James Cook. The 18th-century explorer was the first European to chart many parts of the Pacific, paving the way for genocide as he did. In Perth, Western Australia, a statue of Captain James Stirling is vandalized. As the first Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Western Australia, Stirling committed the Pinjarra Massacre among other acts of colonial genocide.

June 13

Overnight in Melbourne, Australia vandals paint “DESTROY WHITE SUPREMACY”, “STOLEN LAND”, and “FUCK COOK!” on a memorial to Captain Cook.

* For more on George Washington, see “Escaping Washington for Freedom—Let’s not Celebrate George Washington, but the Slaves Who Escaped Him”. A digital version is available at crimethinc.com and hard copies at aboulder.com.

Eventually, Shaw became wealthy beyond his wildest dreams, tapping into the overwhelming tide of settlers and obtaining military contracts with all nine US forts west of the Mississippi. As settlers displaced Native Americans further west, US soldiers did the actual killing—using Shaw’s hardware, tools, and cutlery throughout their day-to-day lives.

But trade work two ways, and while Shaw imported goods, he was also exporting cotton, tobacco, lead, and sugar—all made with slave labor. By the 1840s, he had become a billionaire by today’s standards, able to retire and tour the royal gardens of Europe. It’s not surprising that Shaw, who made his wealth off the backs of the enslaved and the blood of Native Americans, chose to honor Christopher Columbus. We should view the statue he commissioned in this light.

For those who consider trade removed from the blood and gore of capitalist production, let’s conclude with a few anecdotes that highlight what a real piece of shit Henry Shaw was.

From the 1820s to 1850s, Shaw owned at least eleven people, and by the 1850s, they were proving unruly. In May 1854, 20-year-old Sarah ran away from Shaw with her four-year-old son. Shaw immediately placed an ad describing Sarah as “medium height, slender, consumptive make, and bad teeth, some of which have been gold plugged in front” and her son as

the machine-breaking, as well as his family’s response.

I would also love to know Shaw’s position during the American Civil War (Missourians were very divided on the war, and supposedly there’s no proof of which side Shaw supported) as well as the General Strike of 1877, which was known locally as the St. Louis Commune. We can imagine his country estate, now known as the Botanical Garden and Tower Grove Park, serving as a refuge for the besieged owning class of St. Louis.

“a strong, hearty looking child, with curly hair.” He instructed anyone who could find them to take them to Bernard Lynch’s slave pen downtown, colloquially known as his “n— pen,” promising to pay \$300 for Sarah and \$100 for the boy. Though their fate remains unknown, *we hope they made it out!*

The following summer, Esther and two of her children ran away from Shaw. They likely disappeared into one of the many networks set up by free and enslaved black people in the densely populated St. Louis area. Eventually, they made contact with Mary Meachum, an abolitionist from the local black upper class.

On the night of May 21, Mary Meachum and a free black man named Isaac helped Esther, her two kids, and six other runaways cross the Mississippi just north of downtown. They may have been heading towards the maroon town of Brooklyn, Illinois, a major destination on the Underground Railroad just south of their point of departure. Unfortunately, when they reached Illinois, they were immediately intercepted by a group of slave catchers. In the resulting chaos, only four of the runaways were able to escape. Esther, her children, Mary, and Isaac were all arrested. Mary and Isaac were charged with slave stealing, while Esther and her children were returned to Henry Shaw.

Filled with rage, Shaw had Esther whipped, beaten, and, in an act of unimaginable cruelty, sold south away from her children. No one should ever have this right—to separate loving parents from their children.* Shaw not only had it, but wielded it.

* Today, nearly a million mothers are enslaved in the modern American prison system or else caught up in the courts, parole, and probation—not to mention the families separated by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

At Fort Donelson in Dover, Tennessee vandals deface a Confederate monument with “END WHITE SUPREMACY”, “ACAB”, “TAKE ME DOWN”, “BLM”, and “DEFUND THE POLICE”.

In Savannah, Georgia a bust of Confederate Major General Lafayette McLaws has a white hood placed over it and a black fist stenciled across it.

In Brussels, Belgium, a statue of King Leopold II is vandalized.

In Hamilton, New Zealand vandals cover a statue of the town’s namesake, Captain John Hamilton, with paint. After serving as a British naval officer in China and Crimea in the mid-1800s, Hamilton fought to put down Māori rebellions in New Zealand. With a Māori-led protest that threatens to tear down the statue just days away, the city removes the statue.

June 11

During daily protests outside the state capitol in Atlanta, Georgia, a person is arrested for writing “TAKE IT DOWN” on a statue of plantation-owner, Confederate general, and governor John Brown Gordon.

A police memorial in Richmond is vandalized with red paint and “JUSTICE FOR ALTON”, a reference to Alton Sterling, a Black man murdered by Baton Rouge police officers.

Overnight in Brussels a bust of King Baudouin, the Belgian monarch who oversaw genocide in Congo in the mid-1900s, is covered in red paint. “REPARATION” is written on the monument’s pedestal.

In the Hague, Netherlands, vandals throw red paint onto a statue of Piet Hein. In the 1600s, Hein was as a privateer and a vice-admiral for the Dutch West India Trading Company. Hein worked to seize colonies in Central and South America from Spain, committing genocide as he did. Hein also tried to



statue of Columbus.

In Griffin, Georgia multiple Confederate memorials are defaced. Vandals write “FUCK THE POLICE”, “PEOPLE OVER PROPERTY”, and “BLM” on them.

June 10

Protesters in Richmond, Virginia topple a statue of President Jefferson Davis.

A hundred miles away in Portsmouth, Virginia protesters attack a Confederate monument. Four statues are beheaded and one pulled down.

Overnight in Houston, Texas and Miami, Florida vandals cover Columbus statues in red paint. The statue in Houston has a sign hung on it reading “RIP THE HEAD FROM YOUR OPPRESSOR”.

In Lothian, Maryland someone damages a statue of Confederate Private Benjamin Welch Owens.

Esther’s escape may have been the final straw for Shaw, however. Within a couple of years, he had rid himself of all his slaves. Keeping them was simply too much trouble. Historians like to say he did this for humanitarian reasons, but it was clearly because the people he enslaved had made owning them more trouble than it was worth.

Nowadays, of course, people prefer to remember Shaw for the flowers in the Missouri Botanical Garden. This is easier than reckoning with the sea of blood that fills the centuries behind us.

Statues, Streets, and Names

Statues, streets, and institutions are typically used to honor people from the same terrible class as Henry Shaw and Christopher Columbus. We often ignore* the stories behind these names on account of the banality and obscurity of the past. Perhaps we also do so because of the monotony of life associated with the buildings and streets themselves—or else, at best, because we’ve infused them with our own meaning.

The Columbus statue is one of countless marks upon the scarred landscape of St. Louis. But we should not remove the statue simply in order to have him out of our minds. Perhaps Columbus should stay, covered in a new coat of red every October, with a plaque reading, simply, “MURDERER. RAPIST. COLONIZER.”

As we enter an era of exposing these men, let us do more than simply rename institutions that are still exclusive concentrations of wealth, knowledge, and power. If a street we’re forced to traverse as commuters on our way to exploitative

* How much this has changed in the three years since this essay was first published!

jobs or boring classes is renamed after someone we like, it will still be a part of our boring commute. If neighborhoods are renamed after better people, but we're still policed and excluded or only allowed to exist as consumers, we will have failed once more. Indeed, what's the use of renaming Shaw Boulevard if young men like VonDerrit Myers, Jr.* are still gunned down there by police with impunity? Our task is not simply to change the names that sanctify an alienating and oppressive society, but to fundamentally transform this society.

Likewise, we should take care not to elevate the individuals that we ourselves gain inspiration to positions of glory in place of the heroes of white supremacy. Better there be none above us, and none below. Let's not just topple the monuments, but uproot the pedestals as well.

For a great leveling, both social and material,
Leopold Trebitch, September 2018

* VonDerritt "Droop" Myers, Jr. was killed by Officer Jason Flanery on October 8, 2014, less than a month after Michael Brown. Myers' death led to another wave of anti-police marches, property damage, and burning US flags. Though the SLMPD had no qualms employing Flanery after he killed VonDerrit Myers, Jr., Flanery was fired in 2016 after he crashed his squad car in a wealthy neighborhood while drunk and high on cocaine. The cars of white, middle-class St. Louisans was worth more to the SLMPD than the life of a young black man.



June 8

Vandals in Fort Worth, Texas deface a police memorial with "FUCK 12", "BLM", and "ACAB".

June 9

Shortly before dawn in Louisville, Kentucky, police arrest three people, accusing them of vandalizing a statue of King Louis XIV outside the county sheriff's office. Black paint had been sprayed on the statue along with "GEORGE FLOYD", "WE WILL WIN", and "BLM".

In St. Paul, Minnesota, members of the American Indian Movement pull down a Christopher Columbus statue at the state capitol.

A demonstration in Richmond, Virginia targets a Columbus statue as well, toppling it, lighting it on fire, and dumping it in a nearby lake.

That night in Boston, Massachusetts vandals behead a

red. Over the next week, vandals repeatedly paint the statue red, forcing the mayor to remove it.

Protesters pull down a statue of Confederate General Williams Carter Wickham in Richmond, Virginia. Members of the crowd proceed to spray-paint and urinate on the statue.

In Iowa City, Iowa a demonstration makes it way by Kinnick Stadium. Chris Doyle, the football strength and conditioning coach, has recently been outed for years of racist comments towards players. Protesters tag the stadium and statues outside of it with “TREAT YOUR PLAYERS RIGHT”, “ACAB”, and “FUCK THE KKK”.

Overnight, vandals deface a number of Confederate monuments throughout Atlanta, Georgia, including the “Lion of the Confederacy”. The monument is covered in red paint and “BLM”. Over the next year vandals will continue to attack Confederate memorials throughout Atlanta.

June 7

A statue of slave trade Edward Colston is toppled in Bristol, England. Protesters roll the statue through the streets and dump it in Bristol Harbour.

That same day, outside Parliament in London, a demonstration defaces a statue of Prime Minister Winston Churchill, a prolific colonizer and white supremacist.

In Louisville, Kentucky, vandals dump paint on a statue of Confederate officer John Breckinridge Castleman. Like many of these monuments, the Castleman statue has been vandalized repeatedly over the years. In response, armed protesters gather an hour away in Brandenburg to protect a Confederate monument there.



Further Reading

The Caribbean

“Indigenous Names of Caribbean Islands” (Wikipedia)

“Paradise Lost: The Taíno Rebellion of 1511” (Youtube)

“Hatüey” (Wikipedia)

“Enriquillo” (Wikipedia)

También la lluvia (Even the Rain)

In Bolivia, a European film crew works on telling the story of Christopher Columbus and Native resistance as the Water Wars of 2000 play out around them. While the crew struggles with artistry, cynicism, and accuracy, the people of Bolivia demand the basics of life—including rain water, which the government has recently privatized. As they do, the line between life, history, and art begins to blur.

Africa

Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route by Saidiya Hartman

The Slave Ship: A Human History by Marcus Rediker

The Hanging of Angelique: The Untold Story of Canadian Slavery and the Burning of Old Montreal by Afua Cooper

While this book focuses mainly on slavery in Canada in the 1700s, it also contains an excellent section on the pre-American African slave-trade conducted by the Portuguese in the 1400s.

Fighting the Slave Trade: West African Strategies, edited by Sylviane A. Diouf.

premacist policies during his time in office.

At the end of a weekend filled with looting and rioting in Mobile, Alabama, a statue of Admiral Raphael Semmes is vandalized with “CONFEDERATE SCUM” and “ACAB”.

June 3

Vandals set fire to a statue of King Leopold II in Antwerp. This is the second time the statue has been targeted in four days. A number of Leopold statues are defaced and torn down throughout Belgium over the coming months.*

June 4

A police memorial in Virginia Beach, Virginia is vandalized with paint.

June 5

In Jacksonville, Florida people write “BLM” and dump red paint onto the “Women of the Southland” Confederate monument.

June 6

Vandalism of a Confederate monument in Williamsburg City, Virginia is discovered. The memorial’s flag has been crossed out and “BLM” written across its base.

In New London, Connecticut a march in honor of those killed by the police stops by a Christopher Columbus statue. Protesters chant “TAKE IT DOWN!” and spray-paint the statue

* Completely removed from reality (go figure!), Prince Laurent, the great-great-great-great nephew of Leopold II, charges that the protesters are misguided on the grounds that his ancestor never set foot in Congo—as if kings ever do their own dirty work.

Protesters in Birmingham, Alabama pull down a statue of banker, industrialist, and Confederate officer Charles Linn. The crowd also attacks a nearby obelisk dedicated to soldiers and sailors of the Confederacy. Throughout the night, rioters smash windows and set fires throughout the Birmingham.

In Athens, Georgia a demonstration stops by a Confederate monument to write “BLACK LIVES MATTER” and “GEORGE FLOYD” on it.

Over the weekend in Dayton, Ohio, a roadside police mural reading “SUPPORT, COMMUNITY, HOPE, PEACE” is twice defaced. The first time a police officer’s face is painted over with that of a pig. The second time profanity laced, anti-police graffiti is left.

In Antwerp, Belgium, a statue of King Leopold II is covered in red paint. Leopold oversaw the horrific colonization of Congo in the late 1800s, during which the Belgians enslaved, maimed, and killed millions of people.*

June 1

Protesters in Montgomery, Alabama topple a statue of Lee outside of the Robert E. Lee High School. For years students, parents, and alumni had asked that the predominantly black school be renamed and the statue be removed. In response, police charge four people with felonies.

In Asheville, North Carolina demonstrators surround the Vance Memorial, tagging it with “ACAB”, “BLACK LIVES MATTER”, “FUCK 12”, and “SLAVES SOLD HERE!” Zebulon Baird Vance was a captain in the Confederacy and latter a senator for and governor of North Carolina. He oversaw white su-

* For an overview of these atrocities, see Adam Hochschild’s *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*.

Resilience, Disaster, Elusion: The Life and Times Below John Adams, Part I

This book too covers a broad area (colonial New England and its ties to the Caribbean and Africa), but a sizable chunk focuses on the enslaving process in West Africa and resistance to it.

Columbus

The Journal of Christopher Columbus (During His First Voyage, 1492-93)

A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies by Bartolomé de las Casas

“A Mohawk perspective on the suffering of Haiti” by Doug George-Kanentiio

“Christopher Columbus | Native Americans | One Word | Cut”
Word association by Native Americans about Christopher Columbus (Youtube)

“Columbus Day? True Legacy: Cruelty and Slavery” by Eric Kasum

Missouri

“What It’s Like To Reenact St. Louis History” by Jarrett Medlin

An Interview with Natasha Griffin, who, along with her children, re-enacts Esther’s attempted escape at the Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing

“Mary Meachum” (Wikipedia)

Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad: The Geography of Resistance by Cheryl Janifer LaRoche

Henry Shaw: His Life and Legacy by William Barnaby Faherty.



U.S. Soldiers and Sailors Monument and tags it with “GEORGE FLOYD”, “FTP”, “COLONIZERS”, “TAMIR RICE”, and “NO JUSTICE NO PEACE”. Protesters also take an American flag from the memorial.

Overnight vandals hit monuments throughout the country. On the campus of the University of Mississippi in Oxford, a Confederate memorial has red handprints painted on it. Vandals also write “spiritual genocide” across it.

In Raleigh, North Carolina a Confederate monument near the state capitol has “RACIST” and “FUCK 12” written on it.

May 31

As the media labels the violence of the past week the work of Antifa,* President Trump takes to Twitter:



* Antifa is short for “anti-fascist”, and rarely do formal chapters exist. The term is used instead to refer to informal and temporary groupings of people willing to confront fascists and white supremacists. Trump’s threat is also ill-informed, since the United States does not have the ability to label domestic groups as terrorist organizations. However, law enforcement can choose how thoroughly it wants to investigate acts of domestic terrorism, including from groups it has labeled extremists like neo-fascists, anarchists, and black lives matter protesters.

In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania a statue of tough-on-crime, white supremacist Mayor Frank Rizzo is attacked. Protesters tag it with “FTP”, unsuccessfully try to pull it down, and then light a fire at its base.

During a protest in Sacramento, California, “FUCK THE POLICE” appears on a police memorial. Protesters also leave signs reading “SAY HIS NAME” and “BLACK LIVES MATTER”.

That night in Washington, D.C., George Floyd demonstrators target a number of monuments, including the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, a statue of Revolutionary War hero Casimir Pulaski, and the National Law Enforcement Memorial. The latter is tagged with the word “MURDERERS”.

In Lincoln, Nebraska protesters rampage through the city, smashing windows, fighting riot police, and lighting at least one building along Lincoln Mall on fire. The mall also holds a statue of President Abraham Lincoln, which protesters cover in yellow paint.

At a protest in Norfolk, Virginia, demonstrators climb onto a Confederate monument, tag it, and cover it in toilet paper.

In Richmond, Virginia, people tag memorials to Confederate General Robert E. Lee; Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederacy; General J.E.B. Stuart; and the Confederacy itself. The headquarters of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, a group responsible for erecting Confederate monuments across the country and resisting their removal, is painted and set on fire. As the former capital of the Confederate States of America, Richmond is home to dozens of memorials to the Confederacy, ranging from stained glass in churches to grandiose statues along Monument Avenue. In the coming days, protesters in Richmond attack these symbols relentlessly, forcing the city to remove many of them.

In Cleveland, Ohio, a rowdy anti-police demo stops by the

The Government Didn't Remove the Statues—We Did

*A Chronology of Monuments Defaced and Torn Down
May-November, 2020*

September 2021

Today, after years of protest, the authorities in Richmond, Virginia are finally removing a 12-ton statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee, the largest remaining Confederate monument in the United States. This is an opportunity for Democratic politicians to promote the narrative that *they* are the ones who can reckon with the legacy of white supremacy in the United States, encouraging anti-racists to focus on state-led forms of social change. It is also a chance to narrow the debate about public monuments to Confederate statues alone, when in fact the demand to remove Confederate statues is just one element of a much broader movement against all forms of structural white supremacy, memorial and otherwise.

The Lee statue is not coming down because law-abiding citizens participated peacefully in the democratic process until they succeeded in achieving a popular reform. If those who desire to see the Lee statue and others like it removed had confined themselves to the democratic process, all of those statues would still be in place, because that process disproportionately centers the agency of wealthy white conservatives and liberal politicians whose approach to social change is based chiefly in appeasement and empty promises.

May 28

At a rowdy march for Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky, demonstrators clash with police, barricade streets, attack law enforcement vehicles, light fires, and smash storefront windows. Outside the county sheriff's office, protesters find time to rip a hand from a statue of King Louis XIV and tag it with "ALL COPS UPHOLD WHITE SUPREMACY". A sign is left at the statue's feet, "UNTIL ALL POLICE STATES BURN WE FIGHT FOR BLACK LIVES".

May 29

At a protest outside of the police headquarters in Bakersfield, California, "BLM", "KILL MORE COPS", and "ACAB" are written on a memorial to fallen police officers.

May 30

During a demonstration in Fayetteville, North Carolina against the killing of George Floyd, protesters break into the historic Market House, which once hosted slave auctions, and light it on fire. Though the fire is put out without destroying the building, police charge two demonstrators with felonies.

In Nashville, Tennessee protesters toppled a statue of Edward W. Carmack, a U.S. senator, segregationist, and newspaper owner who championed lynchings.

A protest passing a monument to Confederate Defenders in Charleston, South Carolina defaces it with red paint and "BLM".

During a night of rioting in Grand Rapids, Michigan, someone scrawls "PIG" on a police memorial.

Demonstrators roving Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia tore down a large number of Confederate monuments, helping to catalyze scores of similar actions elsewhere around the country. Together, these efforts forced the government of Virginia to order the removal of the long-controversial statue of Robert E. Lee, just as they compelled many other politicians to make similar decisions around the country. Using direct action, demonstrators accomplished in minutes what civil complaints and reformist campaigns had failed to address for decades. In this context, even small gestures, such as scrawling a word or two on a pedestal, sufficed to incite public debate, if not the removal of monuments.

As a whole, these actions have changed our landscape and altered our sense of both the past and the present. Cheers to everyone who took matters into their own hands.*

* The following list draws heavily from the Wikipedia article “List of monuments and memorials removed during the George Floyd protests” and the Youtube video “Timeline: Statues felled and vandalised following Black Lives Matter protests”.

In neighboring North Carolina, after white supremacist Dylann Roof murdered nine Black people in 2015, the Republican-controlled state legislature prohibited the removal of “objects of remembrance” from public property. Politicians and university chancellors throughout the state cited this law to explain that it was impossible to remove statues from their towns and campuses, no matter how unpopular the statues were. In August 2017, after the murder of Heather Heyer during the fascist “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville,* demonstrators in Durham, North Carolina took matters into their own hands, toppling their local Confederate monument in open defiance of the law and the police.

In response to the action in Durham, the governor of North Carolina tweeted, “The racism and deadly violence in Charlottesville is unacceptable but there is a better way to remove these monuments.” If that were true, the statue would have been removed decades earlier. Even under a Black mayor and a majority-Black city council, the statue stood just as solidly as it had during the Jim Crow era of all-white government—until people took direct action.

Once the statue was torn down, it stayed down, even in violation of the law passed by the state legislature. The same politicians who had not dared to take it down now did not dare to put it back up. *Direct action gets the goods.* Demonstrators followed suit in nearby Chapel Hill a year later, tearing down a Confederate statue on the university campus in defiance of the chancellor’s protests that she did not have the authority to remove it, as much as she might like to.† Again,

* The Unite the Right Rally was itself planned in response to calls to remove a statue of Robert E. Lee. Along with actions in Chapel Hill and New Orleans, the clash in Charlottesville was an important precursor to this wave in 2020.

† For more on the Chapel Hill protests, see “Tearing Down the

once that statue was down, it stayed down—and politicians finally began to remove statues elsewhere, lest demonstrators continue to show up their weakness and hypocrisy.

It does a disservice to the courage of countless demonstrators around the country to frame the removal of the Lee statue and other such monuments as an act carried out by the government. A great number of these statues have been removed by grassroots direct action,* and practically all of the ones that were removed by government order were removed only for fear that demonstrators would remove them.

Likewise, the wave of statue topplings and vandalisms that has finally compelled Virginia authorities to remove the Lee statue was always about something bigger than reckoning with the shameful legacy of the Confederacy. As documented in the chronology below, throughout 2020, people vandalized a wide range of monuments, not just Confederate memorials. Far-right pundits and timid liberals sought to frame this as a “slippery slope” in which opposition to explicitly racist monuments would lead to desecrating supposed heroes of emancipation like Abraham Lincoln. But the statue topplings were not motivated by a narrow desire to defend the supposedly pristine legacy of the United States against the treasonous Confederate States of America; from the beginning, they were driven by a desire to confront structural white supremacy in all its forms, from slavery to colonialism and police violence.

This was consistent with the values of the George Floyd uprising, during which these actions proliferated. The logic that

Monuments to Thieves” and “Accounts from the Fall of Silent Sam”, both available at crimethinc.com.

* Indeed, many of the monuments attacked below had been targeted with paint and sledgehammers on and off for years. These actions reached a fever pitch in 2020.

led demonstrators to tear down monuments to Confederate soldiers was the same logic that motivated them to vandalize monuments to police departments that harass, incarcerate, and murder Black and Brown people in disproportionate numbers.*

It was the same logic that inspired some of them to tear down a statue of Abraham Lincoln in Portland, marking it with graffiti reminding everyone that Lincoln signed off on the murders of 38 Indigenous Dakota people.

As we celebrate the removal of the Lee statue, we owe it to those who took action to remember all that they accomplished and what they were fighting for. The actions—documented, in part, in the following chronology†—speak louder than words. The struggle against white supremacy is far from complete; we must not let small victories like the removal of the Lee monument offer a false sense of closure.

* * *

Summer 2020 saw a wide range of protest activity across the country in response to the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and countless other people. A few days into the uprising, as people were storming police precincts, looting shopping districts, and lighting police cars on fire, some protesters began to turn their attention towards monuments honoring centuries of racialized exploitation and violence.

* In 2020 alone, police in the United States shot to death over 1,000 people. Without including those choked and beaten to death or run off roads, police killed two to three people a day.

† Remember that these episodes against monuments were but a fraction of the protests and riots going on against police and white supremacy last summer.