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Teaching & Learning Guide for: Objectionable Commemorations: Ethical and Political Issues

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This guide accompanies the following article(s):

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Authors' Introduction

What should we think about commemorative artefacts that honour inappropriate targets? It is often thought that such questions are best left to politics “on the ground”. This position, however, neglects the many philosophical complications surrounding commemorative artefacts. In this teaching and learning guide, we identify some key texts within the literature, and suggest some ways to integrate them into a course on objectionable commemorations.

Authors Recommend:

The field is developing, and moreover multi-faceted. There currently are no key texts that most of the existing research refers to. Please see the sample syllabus for selected works discussing different questions concerning commemorations.

Online Materials:

- <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2023/entries/ethics-cultural-heritage>
 - A survey of the ethical issues concerning cultural heritage more generally, with a section on cultural property
- <https://diversityreadinglist.org/blueprint/the-commemoration-debate/>
 - A syllabus (by Ten-Herng Lai) on the ethics and politics of commemorations, which focuses on what justice demands of us in an

imperfect world. This blueprint focuses on authors from underrepresented backgrounds.

- <https://sites.google.com/wellesley.edu/ehatmat/teaching/who-owns-the-past>
 - A syllabus (by Erich Matthes) on the moral and political questions surrounding cultural heritage.
- https://www.podbean.com/media/share/pb-jzfk-a77f09?utm_campaign=w_share_ep&utm_medium=dlink&utm_source=w_share
 - An interview with Michele Moody-Adams (by Myisha Cherry), on monuments and memorials.

Sample Syllabus:

PART I: Features of commemorations

Week 1. Speech

- Nguyen, C. T. (2019). Monuments as commitments: How art speaks to groups and how groups think in art. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 100(4), 971–994. <https://doi.org/10.1111/papq.12279>
- Friedell, D., & Liao, S.-yi (2022). How statues speak. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 80(4), 444–452. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaac/kpac040>
- Kukla, Q. R. (2022). Public artifacts and the epistemology of collective material testimony. *Philosophical Issues*, 32(1), 233–252. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phis.12224>

Week 2. Honour

- Nili, S. (2020). From Charlottesville to the Nobel: Political leaders and the morality of public honours. *Ethics*, 130(3), 415–445. <https://doi.org/10.1086/707215>
- Rossi, B. C. (2020). False Exemplars: Admiration and the Ethics of Public Monuments. *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*, 18(1), 49. <https://doi.org/10.26556/jesp.v18i1.696>
- Archer, A., & Matheson, B. (2021). *Honouring and admiring the immoral: An ethical guide*. Routledge. (Especially chapters 3 and 4).

Week 3. History

- Matthes, E. H. (2018). Who owns up to the past? Heritage and historical injustice. *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, 4(1), 87–104. <https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2018.13>
- Stemplowska, Z. (2021). The Rhodes statue: Honour, shame and responsibility. *The Political Quarterly*, 92(4), 629–637. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923x.13038>

- Abrahams, D. (2022). The importance of history to the history-erasing defence. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 39(5), 745–760. <https://doi.org/10.1111/japp.12422>

Week 4. Aesthetics

- Bacharach, S. (2023). Bearing Witness and Creative Activism. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, kpad002.
- Dixon, D. (2022). Artistic (Counter) Speech. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 80(4), 409-419.
- Shapshay, S. (2021). What Is the Monumental?. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 79(2), 145-160.

PART II: Responses to commemorations

Week 5. Removal

- Frowe, H. (2019). The duty to remove statues of wrongdoers. *Journal of Practical Ethics*, 7(3), 1–31. <https://www.jpe.ox.ac.uk/papers/the-duty-to-remove-statues-of-wrongdoers/>
- Fox, C. (2023). Down with this sort of thing: Why no public statue should stand forever. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230.2023.2218733>

Week 6. Defacement

- Lim, C.-M. (2020). Vandalizing tainted commemorations. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 48(2), 185–216. <https://doi.org/10.1111/papa.12162>
- Lai, T.-H. (2020). Political vandalism as counter-speech: A defence of defacing and destroying tainted monuments. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 28(3), 602–616. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12573>
- Lai, T.-H. (2022). Objectionable commemorations, historical value, and repudiatory honouring (online first). *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2022.2106499>
- Bell, M. (2022). Against simple removal: A defence of defacement as a response to racist monuments. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 39(5), 778–792. <https://doi.org/10.1111/japp.12525>

Week 7. Education

- Yun, S.I. (2021). Please don't destroy until it's completely destroyed': Acts of education towards democracy. *Journal of*

Philosophy of Education, 55(3), 506–515.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12580>

- Sypnowich, C. (2021). Monuments and monsters: Education, cultural heritage and sites of conscience. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 55(3), 469–483. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12578>

Week 8. Negotiations

- Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming. (2016). Report of the Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming (Yale University). Retrieved from https://president.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/CEPR_FINAL_12-2-16.pdf
- Schulz, J. (2019). Must Rhodes fall? The significance of commemoration in the struggle for relations of respect. *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 27(2), 166–186. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12176>
- Burch-Brown, J. (2022). Should slavery's statues be preserved? On transitional justice and contested heritage. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 39(5), 807–824. <https://doi.org/10.1111/japp.12485>

OPTIONAL:

Focus Questions

1. What is distinctive, if anything, about the speech of commemorative artefacts?
2. What is the problem, if anything, with publicly honouring inappropriate subjects?
3. What is the relationship between commemorative artefacts and a community's history?
4. What should we do about objectionable commemorations?
5. What guides our decisions about our treatment of objectionable commemorations?