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The Real Reason Our Statues Are Under Attack

Is it because of our nations' history of slavery?

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Why are statues coming down across Britain and America? We're told it's because of slavery. Slavery was racist and abhorrent, so statues of anyone that profited from it must come down.

But is that the real reason?

Slavery has certainly been one of the great evils of world history. But it has also been one of the most common.

The oldest known law tablet, from ancient Sumer, has laws on slavery. The ancient Greeks boasted about their love of freedom—while owning slaves. The Roman Empire was built on the backs of millions of them.

In the Dark Ages, slave trade was rife. At the turn of the millennium A.D. 1000, about half a million slaves were being traded between Europe and Asia each year.

Slavery started to die out in Europe, but then received a massive boost with the discovery of the Americas. Growing sugar in the tropical islands became big business. So was mining in South America. But it was hard work in a climate few could survive in for long. It soon became hard to find enough laborers.

And so, the Atlantic slave trade developed. Britain became a major participant, transporting around 3 million Africans.

But it wasn't the only nation involved in the slave trade. Portugal is estimated to have transported about 5.8 million slaves. The French transported around 2 million. The Dutch and Spanish each transported about half a million.

And those sailing the boats weren't the only ones involved.

The slaves were usually bought from African rulers. One, King Gezo, who reigned from 1818 to 1858, said, "The slave trade has been the ruling principle of my people. It is the source of their glory and wealth. Their songs celebrate their victories and the mother lulls the child to sleep with notes of triumph over an enemy reduced to slavery."

And these slaves didn't travel only to America and British Caribbean colonies. Over the course of the slave trade, over 300,000 slaves were transported to the United States. Another 765,000 were taken to Cuba, 735,000 to Jamaica, and 2.7 million went elsewhere in the Caribbean. Brazil was by far the largest destination, with nearly 3.2 million slaves.

Something doesn't become less evil because everybody's doing it. But this history does raise the question: Why are only Britain's and America's statues under attack?

The truth is that Britain and America do have a unique relationship with slavery—and it has everything to do with the reason these statues are coming down.

A Change of Heart

The slave trade was incredibly profitable. A slave in the Americas would sell for about eight times the price he cost in Africa. And in 1805, Britain became the undisputed master of the world's oceans after winning the Battle of Trafalgar. The stage seemed set for Britain to profit more than ever from this evil trade.

Instead, the opposite happened. In March 1807, *Britain outlawed the slave trade*. In his book *Empire*, Niall Ferguson called it "an astonishing volte-face." "[T]owards the end of the 18th century, something changed dramatically," he writes; "it was almost as if a switch was flicked in the British psyche."

"It is not easy to explain so profound a change in the ethics of a people," he continues. "It used to be argued that slavery was abolished simply because it had ceased to be profitable, but all the evidence points the other way: In fact, it was abolished despite the fact that it was still profitable." Instead, Britain had a "collective change of heart."

But Britain did more than simply stop participating in this trade. It used its diplomatic clout to ensure *other nations* ended slavery. The British Army was protecting Portugal from Napoleonic invasion at the time, so Portugal was convinced to sign a treaty limiting the slave trade in 1810. In 1813, Sweden signed. The 1814 Treaty of Paris that ended the Napoleonic Wars (until Napoleon Bonaparte's escape one year later) forced France to renounce it. The Netherlands soon signed its own treaty, followed by Spain in 1817.

No other nation was going around the world cajoling other nations to end the slave trade. Only Denmark, hardly a major colonial power, was quicker in phasing it out. In 1794 revolutionary France agreed to abolish slavery, but Napoleon overturned that decision in 1802. Yet you don't see his statues and busts under attack.

America was moving in the same direction. President Thomas Jefferson signed America's Act Prohibiting Importation of Slaves on March 2, 1807, at almost the same time Britain outlawed the trade. This was the culmination of nearly two decades of laws that put ever-tighter restrictions on the slave trade.

But abolishing the slave trade didn't free the slaves already at work. Thus, Britain's anti-slavery campaigners pushed on. In 1833, the United Kingdom passed the Slavery Abolition Act, outlawing the practice within British colonies. When this law came into effect, 800,000 slaves were freed.

To pass this law through Parliament, it had to be "compensated emancipation," meaning slave owners were paid for the slaves they had to free. Many on the left criticize this today. But the fact is, uncompensated emancipation would have taken much longer. The reformers chose to be pragmatic and freed the slaves as soon as they could. Britain paid a huge price for this: £20 million—billions in today's money. Britain had to take out a loan so massive that it only finished paying it off in 2015.

But that wasn't the only cost. The economic effects of emancipation were "devastating." "Planters were ruined from Antigua to Mauritius. Middlemen of Ashanti, slave captains of Merseyside, overseers of Nassau, found themselves without an occupation. ... Most of the sugar colonies never really recovered" (Jan Morris, *Heaven's Command*). One Jamaican estate that had been making £11,000 a year in the 1820s was sold in the 1840s for just £1,650.

But Britain sought to do more than merely outlaw the slave trade. It wanted to ensure the practice actually stopped.

War on the Slave Trade

The UK, alone in all nations of the world, put forth a huge effort to shut this trade down. In 1808, during the Napoleonic War, with the nation still fighting for survival, Britain set up the West Africa Squadron. It patrolled the seas of Africa's west coast looking for slave ships.

Britain's naval dominance was now assured, and so "for the first 30 years of Victoria's reign, the Royal Navy's chief task was the interception of slavers," wrote Morris.

In theory, Britain was leading a multinational effort; but in practice, no one else made any significant contributions.

It was a tough job. Slave ships were often built for speed and could outrun the slower Navy warships. Even when they did overrun them, stopping and searching ships belonging to other nations was a legal and bureaucratic nightmare. Foreign powers, persuaded only reluctantly to outlaw the trade, tried to raise as many legal obstacles as possible to prevent the prosecution of their citizens. But Britain persevered, pouring heaps of money into the endeavor. The Navy captured 1,600 slave ships between 1808 and 1860, freeing 150,000 Africans.

But Britain felt there was still more work to do. It was clear that overhauling boats on the high seas would not end the trade. So Navy commanders looked for ways to go *onshore* and shut them down. This task required men who possessed what the left today calls "toxic masculinity." One such man was Cmdr. Joseph Denman.

Denman commanded the HMS *Wanderer*. He and his men had been trying to capture slave ships off the coast of the Gallinas. But the Gallinas were an independent territory, and Britain was not at war with it. He could blockade its estuary but couldn't land.

Then the leader of Gallinas kidnapped a British subject from Sierra Leone. Denman was ordered to sort it out. This was the excuse he needed.

After he freed the kidnapped subject, Denman took over the largest island in the Gallinas estuary, freed around a thousand slaves, and burned the slavers' warehouses. The chief of the Gallinas was forced to sign a treaty renouncing the slave trade and promising to expel all traders.

The commander of a single vessel forced an entire tribe to renounce the slave trade.

This pursuit of abolition led Britain to become more active around the world. "The first monuments of Queen Victoria's empire were monuments of liberty," wrote Morris. "The fight against slavery at its source would continue throughout the Victorian era, being a prime motive as we shall see of the great mid-century explorations" (ibid).

With America out of the slave trade—officially, at least—Brazil was the world's top destination for African slaves. Brazil had signed a treaty with Britain agreeing to outlaw the slave trade in 1826. But it didn't enforce it. By 1850, Britain decided to enforce it for Brazil. The Royal Navy entered Brazil's inland waters and ports, cutting out slave ships from under the guns of forts. The show of resolve convinced Brazil to end the trade. "When a powerful nation like Great Britain is evidently in earnest, can Cuba and Brazil stand out?" Brazilian Foreign Minister Paulino Jose Soares de Sousa asked Brazil's chamber of deputies.

Meanwhile, the issue of slavery was heating up in the U.S. The American Civil War was about more than slavery, but slavery was at its heart. Thousands upon thousands of Americans fought and died because they believed that all men—including black—were created equal and "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." That war ended with about 4 million slaves freed.

That war also unified America against the slave trade and led it to help Britain in the international effort against slavery. The Atlantic slave trade was dead.

Yet still the crusade to end this practice was unfinished.

The renowned Victorian explorer Dr. David Livingstone shone a light on another holdover: the East African-Arab slave trade. His dramatic disappearance, discovery and then death gave enormous publicity to this problem.

The Royal Navy got to work. With the American Civil War effectively ending the Atlantic slave trade, the West Africa Squadron switched to the East. In 1890, Britain made a deal with Germany, swapping Heligoland in the North Sea for Zanzibar. What had been a major slave-trading station became the center of Britain's anti-slavery work in East Africa.

No other powers in the world have this kind of anti-slavery history.

Which makes Black Lives Matters and others' targeting these nations for their history of slavery so absurd.

Our False Sense of Superiority

One of the first casualties of the radicals' attack was the Elizabethan naval commander Sir John Hawkins. Plymouth had a square dedicated to Hawkins, which it has now decided to rename.

Encyclopedia Britannica calls Hawkins "the chief architect of the Elizabethan navy." He, along with men like Sir Francis Drake, were instrumental in establishing England as a naval power.

Adm. Horatio Nelson has also come under attack, with activists throwing paint at his statue. He led the Royal Navy to victory in the Napoleonic Wars.

Yes, Drake and Hawkins challenged the Spanish monopoly on the slave trade by making a few voyages in slave ships. But these men also helped defeat empires that engaged in slavery and tyranny on a far larger scale. Drake and Hawkins confronted the Spanish Armada; Nelson, the French and its allies. What if these men had been wiped from history? The Spanish or French empires would have dominated the world. There is no evidence either would have had any interest in eliminating slavery.

If not for these men and others, slavery would probably remain as a mainstream institution.

Of course, slavery still exists. Thanks to the British Empire, it is almost universally outlawed. But according to the International Labor Organization, around 45 million people are enslaved today.

To the Victorians, outlawing slavery wasn't enough. They followed it up, with military force where necessary, to ensure people were actually free. Out of sight wasn't out of mind; they traveled to the ends of the Earth to wipe out the practice.

Not so today. The 45 million slaves don't weigh heavily on the world's conscience. We denounce the Victorians as slave traders—*yet they cared far more about ending slavery than we do today.*

If slavery isn't the real reason for the attack on our history, what is? Why is the world so stirred up against these figures from the past?

Why Empire?

The sudden rise of the British and American people was the result of a miracle from God. Our article “How to See God in History” (page 14) shows how God forecast even the exact timing of the rise of these two powers.

As Herbert W. Armstrong explained in his book *The United States and Britain in Prophecy* (request a free copy), Britain and America are descended from two of the ancient tribes of Israel. God promised, unconditionally, to bless these nations. But because of their sins, He delayed granting those blessings until the 19th century. Mr. Armstrong’s book fully explains the “miracle” that happened around 1800.

But God didn’t supply those blessings for Britain’s and America’s benefit only. As Mr. Armstrong wrote in his book *Mystery of the Ages*, all God’s work with Israel was for “a special purpose preparatory to the ultimate establishment of the Kingdom of God!”

Joshua 4:24 bears this out. This records a miracle God performed for Israel: drying up the Jordan so Israel could walk across. But He didn’t want only Israel to benefit. Nor was it simply for the benefit of the surrounding tribes. Instead, He did it “that all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever.” When God performs these huge miracles, He has the whole world in mind. The same is true of when God began pouring out blessings on Britain and America around the year 1800.

God gave Britain and America a chance to lead the world to Him. “God chose them not because they were better or because He wanted to give them special favor, but to use them as an example to other nations,” wrote *Trumpet* editor in chief Gerald Flurry in last month’s *Trumpet* cover story (theTrumpet.com/22513). “Their failure and our failure to be a shining city on a hill to lead people to God and to happiness hurt not just ourselves but all other nations!”

By wiping out slavery, these powers did some good for the world. But it could have been so much more. What would the world be like today if they had led the world to God? Instead, despite all their efforts, 45 million are still enslaved.

But these end-time nations of Israel have played a role in God’s plan despite themselves. Their history shows the world that if you want blessings and material greatness, God is the source. He can promise specific blessings, state exactly when those blessing will appear, and bring them about exactly as He promised. God rules in the kingdom of men! (Daniel 4:32).

Mr. Armstrong said these blessings given to Britain and America were “the strongest proof of the inspiration and authority of the Holy Bible! It is, at the same time, the strongest proof of the very active existence of the living God!”

These blessings also teach another critical lesson: The greatest of blessings, without obedience to God, ultimately count for nothing. They all dissipate. Britain has lost all those blessings and is now plagued by problems. America is rapidly losing its wealth. None of these blessings can create a stable, lasting prosperity for a nation that fails to obey God. Despite possessing the most abundant of resources, Britain and America are proving themselves incapable of solving the problems of the world.

The Real Reason for the Attack

If you believe the Bible, you must accept the existence of an evil spirit being who hates God’s plan, and who hates what God is doing through Israel. This spirit works through human beings to “blot out the name of Israel” (2 Kings 14:27). He wants to wipe it out so thoroughly the name isn’t even mentioned.

You see this in the self-hatred among the radical left in Britain and America. You see it in that hatred for Britain and America in nations around the world. And you see it today in the hatred for this history.

That is what the attacks on Nelson, Drake, Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Roosevelt and more are all about: blotting out the name of Israel.

Britain and America’s history is a massive signpost that points people to God. Thus, Satan the devil hates it and works to blot it out, pushing a new message: *God didn’t make Britain and America great. Slavery did! They only became wealthy because they stole it from everybody else.*

This is why the protesters focus on Britain and America, not Portugal and Brazil. This is why Jefferson and Nelson are attacked, not Napoleon and Simon Bolivar. An attack against the two nations that led the world to get rid of slavery is not an attack on slavery. It is an attack on God.

This agenda underscores the importance of understanding this history. And not just the Victorian era—but the history that reaches back to the patriarch Abraham. It’s a history that points you to God and what He is doing in the world today—a history that contains a hope absent from the news today.

You can learn this history by reading our free book *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*.

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