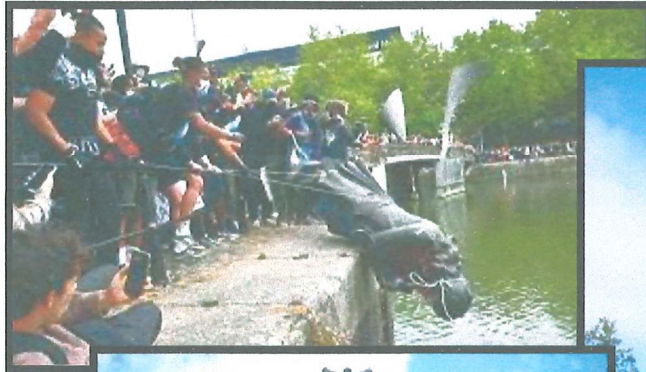


**Should Monuments honouring historical figures involved in  
slavery be displayed?**



A03 logical order (2)

## INTRODUCTION

I have chosen the topic question of 'Should monuments honouring historical figures involved in British slavery be displayed?' because of its relevance to the current social climate and its effects on global history. It is also an exciting topic ethically and philosophically as it allows me to collect a variety of arguments from different opinions, cultural views, and levels of acceptance to answer it.

A01 -  
clear  
specific  
thoughtful  
reasoning  
(2)

The belief that certain statues should be removed is one of many controversies, actions, and disputes that have rocked the world of statues, literally. Historically statues have been used to represent those, who at the time, people believed to be inspirational figures and role models for future generations, but what happens when your main profession gets outlawed and changes from a celebrated part of the national progression in foreign countries to being heavily frowned upon by the descendants of the public that supported it in the first place?

In my project, I aim to explore the impact of these statues being removed and the connotations behind said statues. I also aim to explore the morality of this situation and ask and answer questions such as; was it apparent that these people were involved in slavery to those living at the same time? Did those people support statues being erected in the shadow of such terrible acts and people? Did our moral standards change to the degree that we have to remove historical statues to ensure our comfort? What's happened to these statues and monuments in recent times? And finally, Is there a way to display these statues and monuments to educate people about their roles in history, while at the same time, ensuring that the morality of slavery is not supported?

To answer my question, I will be using mainly secondary sources of information as due to the historical nature of my project title there needs to be more preliminary information available to the public for me to use. Using secondary sources also allows me to collect a variety of views and opinions about, whether it be for or against, statues being removed due to current public distaste and judgments.

## RESEARCH

My first source is 'Why every statue should come down' by Gary Younge. It was published on the long-read portion of the culture section of the Guardian website on the 1st of June 2021, suggesting it is quite up-to-date and accurate. Gary Younge had been a writer at the guardian for 2 decades at the time the article came out which shows he knows what he is doing when it comes to writing articles. He also goes on to explain that he was invited by Ken Livingstone (London mayor 2000-2008) to a governmental committee to decide a statute for the fourth, and empty, Trafalgar square statue. This also shows he has experience with statues and their possible complications. Although Younge may not have completely dedicated his life or career to the topic, he still has the relevant experience to be reliable. The article also does not include a bibliography or any quoted sources as is it more an opinion piece than a factual piece. The focus of this piece is on all statues

A02  
credibility

A02  
relevance

being taken down and Younge's arguments for this.

My second source is an article under the name: 'the UK's plan to 'retain and explain' problem monuments is a backwards step' by Katharina Massing. The source is relevant and useful to my research due to Massing's experience as a Senior Lecturer in Museum and Heritage development at Nottingham Trent University. This piece includes quite a lot of linked articles to back up Massing's points but does not include a bibliography like most academic articles. Overall Massing seems to be quite a reliable author and her article seems to be the same. The focus of the piece is mostly on government policies and the way that has affected the progression of these statues being dealt with.

My third source is 'Robert Millgain: slave trader removed from outside London museum' written and published by the BBC. The article was published on the 9th of June 2020 and is very relevant to my research topic. It contains only a few links to BBC's articles with no external sources and does not contain a bibliography. The focus of the article is addressing the removal of the statue and interviewing the people involved.

A03  
Supporting/  
Alternative  
viewpoints.  
(2)

My fourth and final source is a short form I gave out to the people in my project group. I created this form on the 26th of January and released it to the group the same day. The source is very relevant to my topic as I am asking relevant questions such as whether controversial statues should be put in museums or have plaques put on them etc. I also asked for their reasoning behind their choice to expand on the question. However, my survey is still quite a limited source due to a lack of variety in the people answering. The people that did answer may have been of different races and colours but also are 13-14 years old so would have similar opinions and awareness of certain topics.

A02 -  
Variety  
of Sources  
(2)

## DISCUSSION

There are a variety of arguments to be heard when it comes to statues about their legitimacy and legacies, including those very few but very prominent extreme views. I have summarised this topic into three sections; Statues should remain, Statues should be put in context, All statues should be removed and finally, My own opinion.

### STATUES SHOULD REMAIN

Some people argue that these statues currently in controversy were put up at a time when racism, slavery, and anything else majorly controversial now was acceptable and even encouraged in those times, however, this is rarely ever the case. Most of these statues were put up with 'considerable opposition', as Younge states in his 2021 article regarding the subject, to the action(s) that made them rich, famous, and respectable enough to be put on a pedestal. For example, Edward Colston's statue in Bristol was put up 60 years after slavery had been abolished in Britain only allowing the opinion that these statues are not about the history of the matter to become more prevalent, but about the person and their wealth and status and anything else that excludes their morals or their past.

A02 relevant  
in  
research  
(2)

The second argument for this point is that if we remove or do anything to these statues we would be removing and tainting history for future historians. I agree with this, to a degree. Yes, it will be changing history, but it will also be adding to it by showing that we did something about these representations of hate and suffering with good motivations.

A03 - Clear  
under  
standing  
(2)

## STATUES IN CONTEXT

Other people think that these statues should be contextualized, instead of being removed entirely. Those fighting for these statues to be contextualized have supported their arguments using decolonization, the 'long-term process that seeks to recognize the integral role of the empire in British museums from their creation to the present day.' (Massing, 2021) As Massing states in his piece about the statues. To put it simply, decolonization's main focus is on putting statues into context and more specifically into museums with context.

The UK government also appears to agree with this stance, as proven by their 'retain and explain' policy for museums and other institutions, but this policy also causes problems. For museums and other institutions, it is very simple to just add a plaque and mark it as explained, it is their job after all, but for public monuments not yet put in or planned to be in museums, it causes problems. And how does that solve the problems that these statues cause? It doesn't. It blankets these discussions and hides them from public view and also ignores that these statues and monuments are giant displays of power that last for decades from when they are conceived. And why would you put a plaque on a statue that's just going to be taken down by protesters?

Another problem this causes is forcing museums to attempt to add context to these statues with scarce information on them and their past. An example of a lack of information when it comes to displays in museums is the 'Treatment of dead enemies' display at the Pitt-Rivers museum in Oxford. This display, created in the 1940s, contained various shrunken skulls and historical remains. The removal of this exhibit was prompted by qualitative research on visitors' opinions about the display and its accuracy. This example could be the fate of most of these statues after placement, possibly even decades after being moved.

The third and final problem this causes is equality. If you think of a random statue or plaque the likelihood is that it is of a white man who was likely involved in some kind of slavery or now illegal act. In fact, out of the 50 people represented most frequently across the country, 88% of statues are of white, cisgender, men (Small, 2021). But that's not all. Only 4% of London's Blue plaques commemorate Black and Asian people, Out of 610 named statues recorded by the public monuments and sculpture association and only three of these 3 are black individuals (Massing, 2021). This may hint at a wider problem within our society, but for now, it may be a better solution to add more diversity in statues and plaques around the country as a quick and simple solution.

## ALL STATUES SHOULD BE REMOVED

An alternative view is that all statues should be removed, regardless of a positive or negative past. People with the view argue yes, take down Colston and the other controversial statues, but also take down statues of people like Seacole or Dame Holmes. As Young states in his 2021 article about the topic, the argument of 'we shouldn't judge people of the past to our own, modern standards' is a very good reason for not erecting statues at all, since there is no guarantee that any consensus will persist.' and that 'just because there is a sense of closure now doesn't mean those issues won't one day be reopened.'

Statues also mainly give a distorted view of history, normally in the carved's favour. If a statue honours a historical moment said moment is reduced to a single person as if that person did it all by themselves. A great example of this, although it may not be British, is Rosa Parks's statue in the US

Capitol building. Park was the catalyst for the civil rights movement in America to bloom and make the government change, but did you know Park wasn't the first to plead not guilty to resisting segregation laws? It was a young girl called Claudette Colvin. Claudette was set to become everyone's inspiration when it came to the civil rights movement but she fell pregnant by a man she was not married to. Now dropped by the conservative elders at the local churches, who were the leaders of the movement, she was forgotten, dragged into obscurity by those who put her on a pedestal such a short time before.

This all circles back to the point of how most movements, conquests, and other historical events are summarised into a single moment, with a single person standing at the centre to be idolized for decades to come, and how statues worsen this by reducing said events into a bit of concrete and metal for passersby on the street to ignore and tourists to gawp at. Removing these statues doesn't cause any erasure to history, as some would worry. Further, it enriches it by allowing it to be more approachable than a life-size statue of a 'dude' from the 1800s staring at you walking down the street. This removal also would allow the people depicted in statues to be remembered, but not revered. For example, Edward Colston in Bristol. He had a massive involvement in the slave trade and also helped the Bristol ports business boom, but he should be remembered, not revered for his acts. This is as it should be for all involved in the slave trade and other cruel acts and not only them, but also those who were advocates and abolitionists and civil rights fighters. We should remember these people for what they did but not revere them for it.

## MY OPINION

My opinion is very much a mixture of all of the above opinions, with variations in certain aspects. For example, I believe that most statues should have a plaque placed on them to be contextualised in the public view, but I also believe that it may benefit to put these statues into dedicated museums to this kind of monument with proper contextualization in place. My main view, however, is that all statues should be removed, regardless of a positive or negative past affiliated with them.

A03  
colvin

I think this because, to most people, statues are chunks of metal taking up space in parks and historical grounds with no significance. However, these statues are made to commemorate those at the time they believed to be the model of the time, and with it being made in a certain time no statue can be held to current morale and societal standards, putting it in instant hot water for even existing. Who knows if the statues we put up now will become the future version of Edward Colston and Winston Churchill? Nobody does. Therefore, why would we put up or keep statues that we know will likely become irrelevant in 50 years?

A03  
clear  
understanding  
(?)

In conclusion, my opinion on the statue debate is that all statues should be removed regardless of the good or bad actions those depicted have committed in the past and that statues in general are a waste of time and effort we could give to other more important issues.

A04  
clear  
conclusion  
based on  
evidence

## CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this project, I chose a different topic and changed it to my current topic "How has the media's view of black people changed throughout the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries?". I chose this topic because I have a very strong interest in media and at the time was considering taking BTEC media for GCSE. However, I struggled to find any sources for this topic and soon discovered that the subject area was too expansive for my research to be accurate. My current title

A04  
self  
reflection

is 'Should monuments honouring historical figures involved in slavery be displayed?'. I chose this topic because it genuinely interests me and it only helps that I have been able to find high-quality and a good amount of information on the topic. Whilst working on this project, I have learnt to plan my time better, how to do proper research on a topic, and how to create a bibliography. It has also made me aware of how much of a perfectionist I am and as a result, I struggle to leave a section alone until I feel it is perfect and I have had to overcome that to progress in all aspects of this project.

A04  
skills

I have achieved most of my objectives, but there is one I was unable to complete due to it being a question that was eventually irrelevant after my research was completed. All of my other objectives were completed and ticked off. Next time I would make sure to answer these questions and also manage my time better by starting my research earlier and deciding on my question earlier as well. I would like to expand my project in similar areas by including international statues in other western countries e.g America or France or countries like Saudi Arabia and how they have dealt with these statues.

A04  
Achievement  
of objectives

A04 - ideas  
on how would  
have done  
differently +  
follow up

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