

Destroying Sacred Icons Is Not New.  
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A political cartoon in the Santa Cruz Sentinel showed two Islamist Muslims cheering on the dismantling of a Civil War statue. The cartoonist evidently agrees with President Trump that the destruction of these statues was no different than ISIS destroying the ancient treasures in Palmyra, or the Buddha statue in Afghanistan. Neither the cartoonist nor the President has much of a grip on history.

Winners throughout history destroy the artifacts of the losers. How strange that our president, who is so disdainful of "losers," is so protective of the "beautiful statues" of the Civil War losers that were erected by these losers to intimidate their former slaves. The Civil War generals were in rebellion against the lawful government and they were responsible for mega-deaths on both sides before their ultimate defeat. Why honor them?

Destroying "Idols" is an old pattern in Western history. Abraham, the religious father of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, destroyed the idols of his father before he left Ur with his family for the desert to begin following his own, singular one God.

Moses in anger (1,000 BC?) melted down the golden calf representing the god Baal when he came down from Mount Sinai to find his people worshipping it. Yahweh was a jealous god. They were not to worship other people's gods, who were real but not for them (henotheism).

Alexander the Great (333 BC) astonished the world by conquering the Persian Empire and becoming the new Persian Shah. What is forgotten is that he destroyed the Persian Zoroastrian temples, art, and libraries, the first step in the destruction of Zoroastrianism, a destruction finished centuries later by Islam.

In 391 AD, Roman Emperor Theodosius declared Paganism illegal and there was widespread destruction of temples, idols, and libraries, the death knell of official Paganism.

Christianity's rapid growth may well have been aided by acceptance and transformation of the polytheism of the Pagan people of the Roman Empire into the many saints of Catholicism and the Byzantine Orthodox Church. Unlike the refusal of Judaism to depict God or holy figures in arts, Christianity had no such reluctance. Iconography thrived, until the Byzantine Church during the 8th and 9th centuries AD, challenged by the new religion of Islam, rethought Icons and started destroying them. This brought about the split with the Roman Catholic Church, which never gave up their arts and Iconography. Even when the Byzantines restored their former arts, the breach never healed.

Islam's emergence in the 7th century gave rise to a new pattern of destruction of all religious structures that preceded it. Churches were destroyed, along with their arts. The Prophet Mohammad declared war on all history before him as "a time of ignorance," meaning the paganism of the Arab world. He recognized Judaism and Christianity as having valid histories, but had little knowledge of Zoroastrianism, leaving that decision to his successors. Asian religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism were beyond his experience, and were assumed by his successors as Pagan and therefore idolatrous. Muslims rampaged and destroyed.

Modern Muslims can choose to emulate later Islam as it became a more sophisticated religion with a global reach and somewhat more tolerance of diversity. Today, however, the militants seek to imitate its religion's origins, literalist and fanatical. They show us how little they care for what we love: the arts and religions of the past, including arts of rival Muslim sects. They are at war with history.

Never before in history have the losers managed to promote an imagined glorious history. Saddam Hussein's statue is gone, as is Stalin's. When the president mourns over these "beautiful statues" and commiserates with the "fine people" carrying torches only because "they wanted to protect history" he finally shows himself capable of loving "losers." He denies that these memorials are a blatant rewriting of history, an attempt to regard the southern rebellion as defending "states' rights." Which rights, we may ask? The right to keep other human beings in bondage and the desire to expand that system into the west and the Caribbean. Thank goodness they lost.

676 words

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