

BLOG: Colston's Fall, Bristol's Civic Identity and the Memory of Empire [Imperial & Global Forum]

Discussion published by Marc-William Palen on Sunday, June 21, 2020



Protest highlighting modern slavery, Colston Statue, Bristol, October 2018

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Citation: Marc-William Palen. *BLOG: Colston's Fall, Bristol's Civic Identity and the Memory of Empire [Imperial & Global Forum]*. H-Empire. 06-21-2020.
<https://networks.h-net.org/node/5293/discussions/6205466/blog-colston%E2%80%99s-fall-bristol%E2%80%99s-civic-identity-and-memory-empire>

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The toppling of Edward Colston's statue and its hauling into Bristol harbour on 7 June as part of global Black Lives Matter protests has provoked a long overdue public debate about the place of memorials of Britain's imperial past and particularly its key role in the Atlantic slave trade. However, with some important exceptions, the history of creative protest within Bristol against Colston's statue (as well as the numerous public buildings named after him in the city) is often overlooked in this coverage. Nor is there much discussion of the material significance of where Colston's plinth was situated and the idea of civic identity its creators sought to impose on Bristol.

This oversight may be accidental in many cases; these debates have generated a great deal of controversy locally, but received little national coverage. However, the effect obscures how the toppling of Colston fits into a longer history of creative protest on the site of the statue.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has stated that removing the statues of controversial figures is 'to lie about *our* history'. But Colston's statue has not sat in aspic from 1895 until its unceremonious dunking earlier this month. Instead it has been a site for people to engage with the city's history and challenge the sanitised narratives of Bristol's past that the statue's creators sought to impose. [\[continue reading at the Imperial & Global Forum\]](#)