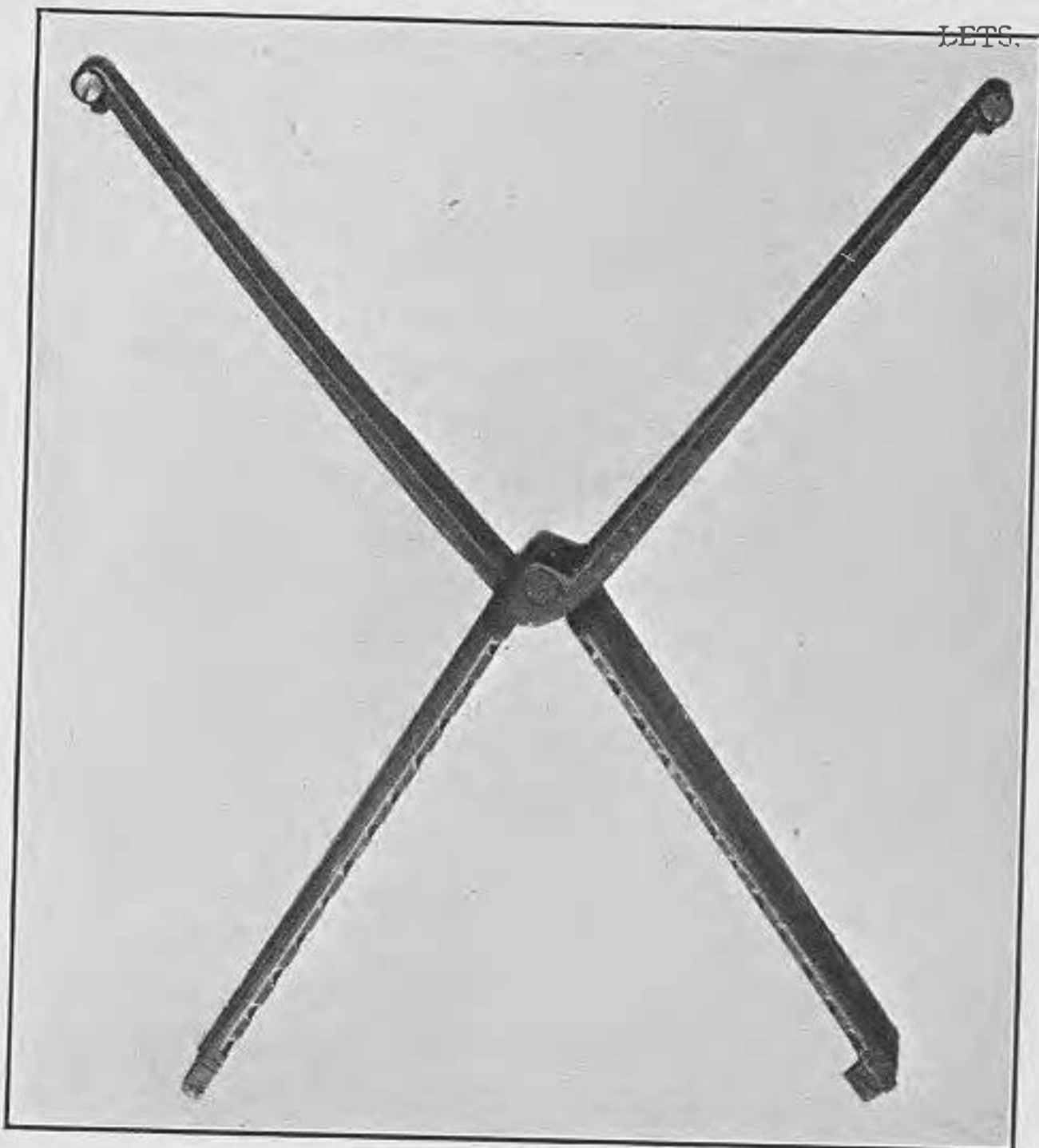


Declaration

THE FRAGMENTS OF THE EQUESTRIAN STATUE OF GEORGE III



BULLET MOULD USED FOR MAKING THE LEADEN BUL.



LETS.

The earliest monument in the United States of America to suffer an iconoclastic gesture was an equestrian statue of King George III. “The statue was one-third larger than life, and in New York it stood on a marble pedestal eighteen-feet-high.”¹Made by Joseph Wilton, it was cast in lead and gilded in gold leaf. The statue was originally located in Bowling Green Park in New York City in 1770, then one of the 13 original colonies. In 1776 after the declaration of independence was read in New York, a group of patriots pulled the statue down, and melted it to make 42088 bullets to fight the British. They are quoted as saying, “the lead wherewith this monument was made, is to be run into bullets, to assimilate with the brain of our infatuated adversaries, who, to gain a peppercorn, have lost an empire.”²

Although images reifying a society cannot be pulled away without that society suffering a loss, recently, many American statues and monuments are being vandalized and or removed. These removals, like the one of King George III, are a part of a long tradition. That tradition is iconoclasm—“the action of attacking or assertively rejecting cherished beliefs and institutions or established values and practices.” When someone or group of people no longer held those values, their rejection and destruction was often directed at the sculptures, and artworks—all images, which celebrate or reify a set of values. Iconoclasm is, in simple terms, material-criticism.

What some are calling the “new culture wars,” are a series of iconoclastic gestures. Iconoclasm is inherently a radical tradition because it violently critiques orthodoxy. That tradition is why the noses and arms of so many sculptures of Egyptian gods and deities are broken. In that time and tradition, which is not much different from ours or anyone else’s, those sculptures were in many ways the embodiment of the some higher being. In their presence one would adhere to custom,

¹ Arthur S. Marks , *The Statue of King George III in New York and the Iconology of Regicide*, *The American Art Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Summer, 1981), pp. 61-82

² Alexander J. Wall, *The equestrian statue of George III, and the pedestrian statue of William Pitt*, *The New York Historical Society. Bulletin*. July, 1920.pg 36-57

and revere them. When there was no genuflection, and instead a direct attack on the material reification of a series of values, it was an attempt to disrupt the perceived coherence of the ideas to images, with the desire to replace one or both. Today, these gestures have been described by some as disrespectful, unpatriotic, a war against culture, or against American values.

Is the radical tradition that removed statues, melted them and made bullets to be used to remove people, the same tradition that removed the Delaware or Lenni Lenape, Erie, Iroquois, Mahican, Mohegan, Montauk, Neutral, Oneida, Onodaga, Saponi, Seneca, Tuscarora, Tutelo, Wappinger, and Wenrohronon peoples, to make the state of New York? What is to be established by changing the names of military bases, or removing statues from public spaces? How absurd would it would be to see, a military fort named after Standing Bear³, or Fredric Douglas! or to make it contemporary, some “well meaning” person might propose, Fort Toni Morrison, or Amiri Baraka Battleship. Imagine replacing the name tomahawk in tomahawk-missiles with Martin Luther King; is this not a part of a radical tradition of nomenclature which perverts or disparages? Without a fundamental change in the US military, fundamental insofar as it does not engage in “democratic missions” abroad—campaigns of aggression, these name changes would only pay the eponym the highest insult, not to mention the traumatic association the survivors on the receiving end of those MLK-missiles would now have with the late preacher.

This brand of name changes belong to another tradition, one of drugging unto inclusion, and although the intoxicated feel like they are now an integral part of the society, they are sadly mistaken. In his insightful denouement, comedian George Carlin cautions that renaming is meant to appease the masses—civilians, when he says:

...Israeli murderers are called commandos; Arab commandos are called terrorists. Contra killers are called freedom fighters. Well if crime-fighters fight crime, and fire-fighters fight fire, what do freedom fighters fight?⁴

If you know where to look, or what you are looking at you quickly flee in disgust, or fight on the side of material truth behind the words. The elites within this society know the truth, they must

³ **Standing Bear** was a civil rights leader and Ponca Chief who, after leaving the Great Sioux Reservation without federal approval, an illegal act at the time, challenged the legal framework of the 14th Amendment in court for the first time in defense of Native people.

⁴ George Carlin, *Back in Town*, 1996.

know, for they have dressed it up with grammar; the poor know the truth, because they are too often its material composition.

Still, is it possible to participate in a radical tradition like the 18th century American patriots, is there a space for that level of radical action when those acts today have been deemed criminal by an executive order, part of which reads:

It is the policy of the United States to prosecute to the fullest extent permitted under Federal law, and as appropriate, any person or any entity that destroys, damages, vandalizes, or desecrates a monument, memorial, or statue within the United States or otherwise vandalizes government property.⁵

Perhaps the terrorists have it right; the middle class are civilians—soft targets receiving absolute concepts, and where law prohibits the unfixing of concept and image, there must be terror. There is no sense in trying to make them aware of the material realities which make their lives possible. Education has become the mere reproduction of concepts, mostly for jobbers, or agents who stifle original thinking. They, like the middle class always want to please, they want to please everyone, even if it requires the romanticization of the poor, but not the *élite povera*. they are beyond romance. The class-struggle to stay middle-class, but appear elite, will always be just class-struggle. Renaming gives civilians a feeling of being a member of the elite, insofar as they get to engage with the marquee; but, unless they change the material conditions and function of the architecture, it's nothing more than *recuperation*. They will never be like the elites, (affection aside) nor are they like the poor—perhaps the best of these two groups that have the freedom to say what they mean. They can be true to themselves, because they are their plight and have no need to dress it up. The middle class, hedging their bets, might rarely be true to themselves while jobbing like “professional artists.” They salivate at the thought of swallowing lies. One needs no receipts for that.

So, how do we deal with history, with a record of what has taken place? Justice, injustice or a mis-recognition of either of the two, compounded over time, has a real effect on how culture is read and how people perceive themselves within it, and perceive others through it.

⁵ Donald J. Trump, *Executive Order on Protecting American Monuments, Memorials, and Statues and Combating Recent Criminal Violence*, June 26, 2020, White House

Many citizens of the United States of America are contending with a sudden state of *recuperation*. That state is a precarious condition brought about by champions of equality through their will, determination and labor. Put simply, the biproduct of that determination participates in a discourse of the absence of value perceived or attributed to Black life by a discourse that intends to center the value of Black life. A result of that organized work is an increase in value. That value reproduces an equitable presence of Black people and by extension, people of color in all sectors of society, and under conditions of merit that is a good in the world. Suspending the intention of what is to be attained for a moment, the position of said people is precarious; it's tenuous. Like the state of *recuperation*, it's naturally fragile, and when Blacks or people of color only arise in conversations of oppression, which one could say is antithetical to a healthy disposition, they might inherently, though unconsciously, be associated with that which is wanting.

So, in 1776, following the reading of the 26 indictments of the king, not only did the patriots tear his statue down, they actually made bullets that would be used to permanently change the condition of their lives. In 2020, the celebration resulting from *recuperation*, equates to an “enforced humiliating subjectivation, where the... [Black person] is doubly humiliated.⁶ For instance, when Blacks are within “the discourse” as the sad object of oppression presented, they are not present as fully emancipated peoples able to produce a life, that is able to contend with the realities of the world, one of which is racism, another of which is poverty, another class, and gender, and so on... Perhaps, that subjectivity, at least one step behind the fight that it is to be human, and two steps behind a question of what it means to be human, just might not be the desired state of being one wishes to declare.

In all sincerity,

E. A. Bryant III
July 10, 2020

⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *For A Left That Dares to Speak Its Name*, Institute For Radical Imagination, Lecture, October 8, 2019