



# ADMIRAL HORATIO NELSON STATUE

## Bridgetown, Barbados

13.09675, -59.61442



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### Executive Summary

Originally erected in 1813, the statue of British Colonial Admiral Horatio Nelson enjoyed 206 years of undisturbed tenure in the centre of Bridgetown. However, in recent years Barbados has undergone a journey of renewing national identity and demarcating new heroes, causing Nelson to come under scrutiny. This case raises questions about national identity and colonialism and how the legacy of the latter can both stymie and stimulate the formation of the former. Ultimately, in 2020 the statue of Nelson was removed.

## Introduction

Following the decision to remove Queen Elizabeth as its head of state in a symbolic break from its colonial past, coincidentally Barbados, conscious of the symbolism of the moment, also finally decided to execute plans for the removal of the statue of Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson on November 16, 2020, in another disengagement from its experience of British imperialism. The statue had stood there since March 22 1813, and served to commemorate the British victory at the battle of Trafalgar in 1805. The statue now resides in storage, mirroring other symbols of colonisation and slavery, following the widespread reassessment of public monuments in the wake of protests following George Floyd's death in May 2020. The removal of the statue is part of a larger and ongoing Barbadian journey of creating a national identity and new heroes and self-actualising their own future.

## Background

### *Horatio Nelson, British Colonialism and Barbados*

The statue of Lord Admiral Horatio Nelson, erected in Bridgetown, was intended to commemorate his victory over the French in the Battle of Trafalgar on October 21, 1805. The statue was unveiled in Bridgetown on the 22nd of March 1813, preceding its more famous cousin in London by 27 years. The Caribbean was then largely colonised by the major European powers: Britain, France, Spain, and The Netherlands, and was a key financier of these colonial powers and, by extension, the Napoleonic Wars. Barbados was itself a plantation economy fueling the economy of the British Empire, initially with rum and later with sugar. In order to stymie the British and finance his own empire, Napoleon sought to extend France's control in the Caribbean. His defeat in Trafalgar was celebrated by colonialist Barbadians as a victory, glorified subsequently in the history curriculum.<sup>1</sup>

In 2005 the historian John MacKenzie described the legacy of Imperialist Britain's physical commemorations as 'expressing its cultural unity through a shared history, particularly a share in the heroic icons of the past', though this only expresses the imperialist point of view and not the view of the colonised and thus might be read as increasingly naive today.<sup>2</sup> Reflecting this change, in 2019, Susan Slyomovics has described colonial monuments as 'the visible and materialised expressions of colonial power and occupation', and thus Nelson's statue was both intended as a commemoration for the heroic death of a British admiral and a reminder of the permanence and insurmountability of the British Empire.<sup>3</sup>

In light of this, the perception of Nelson has increasingly changed, coming to be viewed as symbolic

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<sup>1</sup> David Lambert, "Part of the Blood and Dream: Surrogation, Memory and the National Hero in the Postcolonial Caribbean," *Patterns of Prejudice* 41, no. 3-4 (2007): 346; Denyce Blackman, "Horatio Nelson: Barbados' Most Controversial Statue," *CBC News*, September 27, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> John MacKenzie, "Nelson Goes Global: The Nelson Myth in Britain and Beyond" in *Admiral Lord Nelson: Context and Legacy*, ed. David Cannadine (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2005), 157.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Slyomovics, "Dismantling a world: France's monumental military heritage in Sidi-Bel-Abbès, Algeria," *The Journal of North African Studies*, 25, no.5 (August 2019): 774.

of colonialism. In 2017 his statue in London became an object of protest, which reached a crescendo in June 2020, following calls from the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement to remove ten of London's statues. However, this was also met with fierce resistance from other segments in society, and the statue remains standing as of April 2021.<sup>4</sup>

## *The Monument*

Following Nelson's death in the Battle of Trafalgar, a memorial service was held on January 5 1806, at the St. Michael's Parish Church, now a cathedral.<sup>5</sup> Calls soon began for a commemorative statue that were published in *The Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette* on January 14 and directed towards members of the Barbados Assembly.<sup>6</sup> One such call stated:

WITH a view of testifying the high regard and veneration which the people of this ancient and loyal Colony entertain to the transcendent services rendered to the BRITISH EMPIRE by the late heroic LORD NELSON, who by his indefatigable zeal, preserved this and other British West India Islands from the grasp of a powerful enemy.<sup>7</sup>

It further proposed that lands and buildings should be purchased from the Public Treasury so that land could be cleared and a statue erected. Within several weeks Barbadians and Englishmen had raised £2,500 (£230,000 today), allowing for the land, known as 'The Green' to be bought and renamed 'Trafalgar Place' and a statue commemorating Nelson to be erected.<sup>8</sup> The 19th-century German explorer Robert Hermann Schomburgk stressed the invaluable role played by the Barbados legislature in contributing towards 'the purchase of the space, the old buildings which formerly occupied the ground that is now called Trafalgar Square.'<sup>9</sup>

The statue in bronze was sculpted by Sir Richard Westmacott, who also sculpted the Robert Milligan statue at London's West India Docks (another contested monument removed in June 2020 in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests over Milligan's complicity in the slave trade.)<sup>10</sup> Nelson is depicted in his admiral's uniform, standing erect with one hand on the bow of the ship. The figure is one of stoicism and defiance, intended to reflect how he faced both life and death (Figure 1). A second plaque on the statue reads 'this statue in honour of the hero the inhabitants of this island erected A.D. MDCCCXII,' despite the plaque, stating 1852 there is agreement - and

<sup>4</sup> Afua Hirsch, "Toppling Statues? Here's Why Nelson's Column Should Be Next," *Guardian*, August 22, 2017; Fiona Simpson, "Historian: Call to Pull down Nelson's Column 'like Destruction of Culture by Isis'," *Evening Standard*, August 23, 2017. ; Danielle Manning, "The 10 London statues that Black Lives Matter want removed - including Nelson's Column," *My London News*, June 10, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Burton, "Lord Nelson's statue – Bridgetown, Barbados," *Bajan Things*, May 13, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Patricia Mohammed, "Taking Possession: Symbols of Empire and Nationhood," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 6, no. 1 (March 2002): 46.

<sup>7</sup> Document located in the Barbados Museum and Historical Society, extract titled "The Memory of Nelson in Barbados," by David Shannon, n.d., 28.

<sup>8</sup> John MacKenzie, "Nelson Goes Global: The Nelson Myth in Britain and Beyond" in *Admiral Lord Nelson: Context and Legacy*, ed. David Cannadine (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2005), 156 ; George Alleyne, "Bajans eject Horatio Nelson's statue," *Caribbean Life News*, December 1, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Hermann Schomburgk, "Pictures of Barbados," *The Albion, A Journal of News, Politics and Literature (1822-1876)* 6 no.42, *Proquest*, 497.

<sup>10</sup> BBC News, "Robert Milligan: Slave trader statue removed from outside London museum," *BBC News*, June 9, 2020.

local newspaper articles - that indicate that this date was erroneous, given that the statue was in fact, erected in 1813.<sup>11</sup> A third biography plaque on the statue reads:

Horatio Viscount and Baron Nelson, Vice Admiral of the White K.B. Commanded and Conquered  
On the First of August MDCCXCIX at The Nile: On the Second of April MDCCCI at Copenhagen  
And at Trafalgar Where he Fell in the Moment of Victory On the Twenty First of October MDCCV.<sup>12</sup>

It was placed in a position of centrality on the island and served as Barbados' mile zero, from which other distances on the island were measured.<sup>13</sup> The centrality to the island may have been intended to signify both the importance of Nelson as an individual and the importance of the victory over the French. However, by extension, it recognised the significance of the British Empire and its centrality to Barbadian life, as intended by the legislature.

This is as legislators sought to underscore the importance of Barbados for the Empire and the monument represented 'an opportunity to demonstrate the importance of the colony to the British Empire, especially as Barbados had served as the base for military operations in the eastern Caribbean during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars.'<sup>14</sup> There was a final, racial element to the statue, as it physically substantiated 'the articulation of a loyal, white Barbadian identity'.<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 1:** "Close-up of the Nelson Statue" Image by Anne & David via Flickr CC PDM 1.0

### *The Unveiling*

The statue was unveiled on March 22, 1813, erected at 'early an hour as two o'clock', eight years after the Battle of Trafalgar, and was announced in *The Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette* the following day. Archival information on the ceremony outlines that at 10.30 am, 100 marines and officers, accompanied by artillery, surrounded the monument, with garrison troops stationed around the square. At 11.30, the accompanying procession for the erection of the statue,

<sup>11</sup> "Lord Nelson Statue", *Barbados Pocket Guide*, accessed on March 3, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> "Admiral Horatio Nelson Statue", *Waymarking*, accessed on March 12, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Sean Carrington, *A-Z of Barbados Heritage* (Macmillan Caribbean, 2003), 135.

<sup>14</sup> Catherine Hall and David Lambert, David, *White Creole Culture, Politics, and Identity during the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 346.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

composed of the most prominent officials, high-ranking military personnel, and leading citizens, marched from the King's House, the Military Headquarters, to the square:

The Governor of the island, Sir George Beckwith, along with two sailors who had fought in the Battle of Trafalgar approached the statue and after the collective saluting of the statue delivered a speech extending the respect and gratitude of the Inhabitants of Barbados to the memory of Lord Viscount Nelson.<sup>16</sup>

Three cheers ensued, followed by a salute. The statue was then circled before those attending departed, and a festive ball was thrown that evening in celebration.<sup>17</sup>

## History of the Contestation

### *Pan-Africanism, Nelson and Bussa*

Alissandra Cummins, director of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society, notes that at least since the 1930s, there had always been a subtly rising opposition to the statue, it figured prominently as a central rallying point and a site of protest. Most notably, during the labour riots in 1937, when workers protested the low wages, which had barely changed since 1838, and during calls for independence in the 1950's.<sup>18</sup> In 1993 The University of the West Indies and the National Cultural Foundation started an annual lecture series that focused on emancipation. While the older generation was disinterested, it sparked an interest in the younger audience and revealed an interest to know more about African heritage and history.<sup>19</sup>

Opposition to the statue grew in tandem with the growing pan-Africanism movement in Barbados. Already in 1985, a counter monument was erected, which stood in stark contrast and opposition to Nelson. The Emancipation Statue, depicting an enslaved man broken free from his chains, was unveiled on March 28, commemorating the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Barbados.<sup>20</sup> This statue is popularly known in Barbados as the 'Bussa Statue,' named for the enslaved man who in 1816 led the largest slave revolt in the island's history. The significance of this statue in Barbados reflects the overwhelming feeling that slavery was defeated and freedom won rather than granted by abolitionists.<sup>21</sup> Indeed *Barbados.org* writes of Bussa that he 'led Barbados' largest slave revolt against the oppressive white planters in April 1816', stressing that he was born a free man.<sup>22</sup> Bussa, therefore, came to represent an early Bajan identity and nationality, and he along with other

<sup>16</sup> "Lord Nelson", *The Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette*, March 23, 1813, archived in the *Endangered Archives Programme*, <https://eap.bl.uk/archive-file/EAP1086-1-12-3-7#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=1&xywh=1113%2C864%2C2717%2C1711>.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Alissandra Cummins, personal communication, April 16, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> David Lambert, "'Part of the Blood and Dream': Surrogation, Memory and the National Hero in the Postcolonial Caribbean," *Patterns of Prejudice* 41, no. 3-4 (2007): 347.

<sup>21</sup> Laurence Brown, "Monuments to Freedom, Monuments to Nation: The Politics of Emancipation and Remembrance in the Eastern Caribbean," *Slavery and Abolition* 23, no. 3 (2002): 106.

<sup>22</sup> "Barbados National Heroes", *Go Barbados*, accessed on March 7, 2021.

rebellious slaves have been consistently described as 'patriotic, nationalistic Barbadians' and the 'earliest patriots'.<sup>23</sup>

Following the erection of the Bussa statue, the Government decided to remove and relocate the Nelson Statue on November 18, 1990. But this made only a minimal difference; the statue was moved only eight feet so that it was lowered from its high central position and no longer overlooked the nation's main thoroughfare, reflecting its diminished importance but ultimately leaving the issue unresolved.<sup>24</sup> However, other historians, such as Cummins, have suggested more pragmatic reasons for the relocation, including a necessity to slightly alter its location in light of traffic congestion in the square.<sup>25</sup> Lawrence Brown highlights the symbiosis of the two statues, Bussa and Nelson, and notes how the former was identified as an African General in opposition to the latter, a European Admiral.<sup>26</sup> This highlights an important aspect to the contestation; how new statues and a newly found, visualised, and spoken Bajan identity fueled debate over the physical monuments of an imperialist past. As Don Marshall noted, celebration over heroes such as Bussa and the removal of statues such as Nelson are a 'celebratory and defensive expression of nationalism ... communicated through displays of objects, symbols and representations.'<sup>27</sup>

## Decision-Making Processes

The year 1999 was a pivotal year in the monument's contestation. As Barbadian historian Trevor Marshall noted, 'up to 1998, no Barbadian questioned the sanctity, the relevance, the actual authenticity of the statue', attributing himself responsibility for this change.<sup>28</sup> Among Marshall's arguments for the removal of the statue were Nelson's lack of personal connection to the island, his distaste of Barbados, describing it as 'desolate' and its people 'barbarous', his actions enforcing the Navigation Acts, which stopped vital supplies reaching Barbados, leading to the deaths of 50,000 and his defence of slavery and opposition to abolitionists such as William Wilberforce.<sup>29</sup> Marshall criticised the lack of knowledge around Nelson's true character, and declared his supposed connection to and fondness of the island a 'monstrous fabrication'.<sup>30</sup>

Other factors were crucial in fueling debate over the monument. In 1998 Bussa, along with nine others, had been declared national heroes. The following year under the then Prime Minister Owen Arthur, Trafalgar Square was renamed Heroes Square, dedicated to the ten Barbadian National

<sup>23</sup> Hilary Beckles, *Bussa: The 1816 Revolution in Barbados* (Cave Hill, Barbados: Department of History, University of the West Indies, 1998), 46; Evelyn O'Callaghan, *The Earliest Patriots: Being the True Adventures of Certain Survivors of "Bussa's Rebellion" (1816), in the Island of Barbados and Abroad* (London: Karia Press, 1986).

<sup>24</sup> Denyce Blackman, "Horatio Nelson: Barbados' Most Controversial Statue," *CBC News*, September 27, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Alissandra Cummins, personal communication, April 16, 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Laurence Brown, "Monuments to Freedom, Monuments to Nation: The Politics of Emancipation and Remembrance in the Eastern Caribbean," *Slavery and Abolition* 23, no. 3 (2002): 107.

<sup>27</sup> Don Marshall, "Gathering forces: Barbados and the validity of the national option," In *The Empowering Impulse: The Nationalist Tradition of Barbados* (University of West Indies Press, 2001), 269.

<sup>28</sup> Trevor Marshall, "The Most Controversial Statue in Barbados, Horatio Nelson," *Ibuka*, May 29, 2018.

<sup>29</sup> William Wilberforce has his own contested legacy due to his use of slave labour in Sierra Leone. See: Stephen Tomkins, "William Wilberforce was complicit in slavery," *Guardian*, August 3, 2010.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

Heroes: Bussa (?-1816), Sarah Ann Gill (1795–1866), Samuel Jackman Prescod (1806–1871), Charles Duncan O'Neal (1879–1936), Sir Grantley Herbert Adams (1898–1971), Clement Osbourne Payne (1904–1941), Sir Hugh Worrell Springer (1913–1994), Sir Frank Leslie Walcott (1916–1999), Errol Barrow (1920–1987) and Sir Garfield St. Auburn Sobers (born 1936).<sup>31</sup>

This itself was not without opposition especially from the white minority of the country, with a local construction magnate offering Bds\$100,000 (approximately 40,000 euros) to set up a separate Heroes Park so that Trafalgar Square could remain as it stood, while Barbadian Senator Keith Laurie opposed the move as it could lead to the government taking people's land.<sup>32</sup> The renaming of Trafalgar Square further fueled the debate over Nelson's position alongside this pantheon of national heroes.

A national committee was ultimately set up to discuss the changing of the square's name, although Nelson was not included in this initially, the town meetings and media debates quickly turned into a larger discussion about the appropriate place for Nelson in the larger project of nation-building and understanding the history of Barbados.<sup>33</sup> The committee consisted of civil servants and representatives from The University of the West Indies, the Barbados National Trust and the Barbados Museum and Historical Society. Of whom the latter three had spent 1995-96 on another appointed committee deciding who the ten national heroes should be.

Nelson's position became ambiguous in this changing landscape, and as a result, the Committee surveyed citizens on their opinion of the statue. Of the 800 written and verbal responses received, the majority favoured the statue's complete removal.<sup>34</sup> The reasons for removal differed across groups. Reverend Charles Morris and Pan-Africanist Martin Cadogan supported removal, and journalist Robert Best claimed Nelson could not be a hero as he was not himself Bajan.<sup>35</sup> One citizen said the decision to move the statue was politically driven and accused the Barbados Labour Party of 'white bashing'.<sup>36</sup> Author Jill Hamilton claimed colonialism was part of Bajan history and suggested removing it was akin to an ethnic cleansing of history, claiming it could set a precedent for future governments to remove any statue they disagreed with.<sup>37</sup>

As a result of the divided public opinion, two national committees were set up which discussed Nelson's removal, the National Heroes Square and Development Committee and the Committee of National Reconciliation, which supported the decision to remove him. A decision was reached by the government to move Nelson to a proposed maritime museum in 1998/9, but due to delays, the museum was ultimately never created. As a result, the decision reached to remove Nelson was indefinitely postponed and remained dormant until 20 years later.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>31</sup> See; George Alleyne, "Lord Nelson statue defaced in Barbados," *Caribbean Life News*, December 5, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Denyce Blackman, "Horatio Nelson: Barbados' Most Controversial Statue," *CBC News*, September 27, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Patricia Mohammed, "Taking Possession: Symbols of Empire and Nationhood," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 6, no. 1 (March 2002): 48.

<sup>34</sup> Alissandra Cummins, personal communication, April 16, 2021.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

The issue of the Nelson statue was largely forgotten until the 2015 #NelsonMustFall gained prominence.<sup>39</sup> The #NelsonMustFall movement was created by the African Heritage Foundation, an organisation that seeks to foster Pan-Africanism in Barbados, empower subaltern and marginalised communities, and promote Barbadian and African history in schools. The hashtag can be seen as a continuation of other global 'fallist movements' with identical hashtags arising that same year in relation to Rhodes in both South Africa and the United Kingdom. While the hashtag once again became popular in 2017, this often referred to Nelson's statue in London, making the impact #NelsonMustFall in Barbados difficult to quantify.<sup>40</sup>

On November 29, 2017, the eve before Barbados' Independence Day, blue and gold paint was thrown over Nelson's Statue symbolising the colours of the national flag. A sign left at the bottom of the statue called Nelson a white supremacist, demanding that 'Nelson must go! Fear not Barbadians have spoken, politicians have failed us.'<sup>41</sup> Despite this defacement, the Government was slow to respond.

However, May 2019 saw a change of government, the new party winning in a landslide and with many expectations placed upon them. Shortly after, the new Ministry of Culture set up town hall meetings to which the public was invited, continuing the conversation about the statue.<sup>42</sup> The same year saw a petition signed by 10-15 thousand Barbadians calling for the removal of the statue.<sup>43</sup> In May and June 2020, there were renewed calls for the removal of Nelson by local activists, following the death of George Floyd, and similar movements in Europe and North America.<sup>44</sup> The government announced its desire to relocate the statue in July, the Season of Emancipation, citing continuity from the controversy over the statue in the 1990s, as part of one long and ongoing conversation concerning the history of Barbados.<sup>45</sup>

On August 8th 2020, a town hall meeting indicated that the statue should be moved to the Barbados Museum and Historical Society. The decision was ultimately made by the government cabinet, although this decision stemmed from the aforementioned consensus that the statue should be removed. Minister for Culture John King stressed the decision as part of a longer process spanning decades, citing the important preceding work of the National Heroes Square and Development Committee and the Committee of National Reconciliation.<sup>46</sup> The Prime Minister, Mia Mottley, perhaps to pacify the few who disagreed with the decision, described the statue as an 'important relic' but affirmed it has no place 'in the National Heroes' Square of a nation that has had to fight for too long to shape its destiny and to forge a positive future for its citizens.'<sup>47</sup> She also stressed the importance of national identity in a nation-state, warning that 'if we do not know who we are, if we are not clear

<sup>39</sup> African Heritage Foundation, "If Rhodes Must Fall, Why should Nelson Stand," *African Heritage Foundation*, December 9, 2015.

<sup>40</sup> Afua Hirsch, "Toppling Statues? Here's Why Nelson's Column Should Be Next," *Guardian*, August 22, 2017.

<sup>41</sup> George Alleyne, "Lord Nelson statue defaced in Barbados," *Caribbean Life News*, December 5, 2017.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Alissandra Cummins, personal communication, April 16, 2021.

<sup>44</sup> Peter Burton, "Lord Nelson's statue – Bridgetown, Barbados," *Bajan Things*, May 13, 2015.

<sup>45</sup> Paula Harper-Grant, "Nelson Statue to Find a New Home," *Government Information Service*, July 24, 2020.

<sup>46</sup> Barbados Advocate, "Nelson statue to find new home," *Barbados Advocate*, July 25, 2020.

<sup>47</sup> George Alleyne, "Bajans eject Horatio Nelson's statue," *Caribbean Life News*, December 1, 2020.

what we will fight for, then we are doomed to be exploited and to be colonised again.<sup>48</sup>

Political Economist Don Marshall has underlined the connection between nationality and colonialism, suggesting that the drive towards nationalism is a 'response to the perceived threats posed by globalisation to a small island state with a history of external domination.'<sup>49</sup> It was suspected that previous administrations were concerned that the removal of a British icon could damage the tourism-dependent economy, but the importance of identity and national identity have long since surpassed this economic consideration.<sup>50</sup> This was further reflected in the September 2020 decision to formally remove Queen Elizabeth as the country's head of state in order to, as Prime Minister Mottley outlined, 'fully leave our colonial past behind.'<sup>51</sup>

In reaction to this, the statue was vandalised again, with 'tek me down' graffitied on the monument the day after this historic announcement.<sup>52</sup> On November 16, 2020, the statue was finally removed and placed in storage, designed to coincide with the International Day of Tolerance, as designated by the United Nations.<sup>53</sup> Ultimately, the decision was taken to place the statue inside the Barbados Museum and Historical Society (BMHS), its Deputy Director Kevin Farmer provided the institution's statement in response, describing the decision for the placement of the statue, stating:

The role of a museum and in this instance the Barbados Museum is to place this statue into context, to discuss the history, to discuss the social justice issues around why it has been removed from a public space and to place it into context, so that those generations present and in the future understand not only the reasons why it has been removed, but understand the power almost implicit in public statuary and why it is so crucial in understanding how a society grows and how we seek to create national identity through public art, through public statuary.<sup>54</sup>

The decision proved to be popular, with crowds cheering the statue's removal and no vocal criticism appearing online, showing a positive development in support of removing or reevaluating other colonial symbols in the country.<sup>55</sup> Following its removal, the Nelson Statue will ultimately form part of a new BMHS exhibit, entitled 'Decolonising the Post-Colonial' and will remain in storage until this exhibition opens to the public.<sup>56</sup>

## Summary and Conclusions

The announcement of the decision to remove the statue came two months after Barbados voted to remove the Queen of England as its head of state.<sup>57</sup> While the decision to remove Nelson could be

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Don Marshall, "Gathering forces: Barbados and the validity of the national option," In *The Empowering Impulse: The Nationalist Tradition of Barbados* (University of West Indies Press, 2001), 269.

<sup>50</sup> George Alleyne, "Lord Nelson statue defaced in Barbados," *Caribbean Life News*, December 5, 2017.

<sup>51</sup> Laura Gamba, "Barbados to remove Queen Elizabeth as head of state," *Anadolu Agency*, September 17, 2020.

<sup>52</sup> George Alleyne, "Bajans eject Horatio Nelson's statue," *Caribbean Life News*, December 1, 2020.

<sup>53</sup> Barbados Advocate, "New Role for Lord Nelson at the Barbados Museum," *Barbados Advocate*, May 11, 2020.

<sup>54</sup> Barbados Advocate, "New Role for Lord Nelson at the Barbados Museum," *Barbados Advocate*, May 11, 2020.

<sup>55</sup> Stabroek News, "Cheers as Nelson's statue removed in Barbados," *Stabroek News*, November 17, 2020.

<sup>56</sup> Alissandra Cummins, personal communication, April 16, 2021.

<sup>57</sup> BBC News, "Barbados to remove Queen Elizabeth as head of state," *BBC News*, September 16, 2020.

seen as a ramification of this, it is better to view the decisions in symbiosis and as part of a conversation about national history and identity, one which is still continuing in the post-colonial era.

Removing Lord Nelson's statue from its prominent position became part of greater efforts of the Barbadian government in claiming their own history, birthright and heritage, and rejecting the Eurocentric narrative of the past. Minister for Culture John King underlined this, claiming 'it is imperative that we reexamine notable elements of our colonial past' as part of the process of forming a modern Bajan identity.<sup>58</sup> More locally, groups such as the AHF want statues to be part of a larger debate about problems such as a disproportionately white police force, and an education system they claim suffers from a 'colonial hangover.'<sup>59</sup> Transnationally, it can be viewed as part of a wider movement to address historical and contemporary racism both within and between societies, for which the death of George Floyd provided an additional accelerant too.

The fact that the statue now resides in the museum collection storage reflects the empowerment and agency of Barbadians who can now individually decide their own history, and as a nation, collectively actualise their own future. This case raises questions about national identity and colonialism and how the legacy of the latter can both stymie and stimulate the formation of the former.

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Last updated July 2021

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<sup>58</sup> Voice, "Barbados removes Nelson statue from National Heroes Square," *Voice*, November 17, 2020.

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## About Contested Histories

In recent years, there have been many contestations over memorials, street names, and other physical representations of historical legacies in public spaces. These contestations often reflect deeper societal tensions whether triggered by political transitions, demographic shifts, inter-ethnic strife, or a growing awareness of unaddressed historical injustices.

The Contested Histories project is a multi-year initiative designed to identify principles, processes, and best practices for addressing these contestations at the community or municipal level and in the classroom. Conflicts about history, heritage, and memory are a global phenomenon, and, although each case is different, comparative cases can indicate lessons learned and reflect best practices.

## About IHJR at EuroClio

The Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (IHJR) is a research centre at EuroClio - European Association for History Educators in The Hague, The Netherlands. The IHJR works with educational and public policy institutions to organise and sponsor historical discourse in pursuit of acknowledgement and the resolution of historical disputes in divided communities and societies.

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Published by IHJR-EuroClio in February 2021  
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To cite this publication:  
The Contested Histories Initiative, "Admiral Horatio Nelson Statue in Barbados", *Contested Histories Case Study #11* (July 2021), retrieved from [\[link\]](#).

The Contested Histories Initiative receives support from the Europe for Citizens Programme of the European Union. The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.