



JAN PIETERSZOOM COEN STATUE

Hoorn, the Netherlands

52.639294, 5.059247



Image by Eintacht4ever via Wikimedia Commons [CC Public Domain](#)

Executive Summary

Nicknamed the 'Slaughterer of Banda,' the figure of Jan Pieterszoon Coen has become increasingly contested in recent years. The statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen in Hoorn has been a disputed monument since its unveiling in 1893. The statue has been smeared with red paint and graffiti numerous times in the last six decades. In 2010 a citizens' initiative expressed critiques regarding the statue of Coen, and in response, a contextualising plaque was added in 2012. Nevertheless, the debate over the monument has not abated. During the 2020 George Floyd protests, the statue rose to a focal point of discussion in the Netherlands. Critics continue to call for the statue's removal, but local authorities and museums are reluctant to take a moral position in the debate.

Introduction

Jan Pieterszoon Coen (1587-1629) has been a controversial figure in Dutch history for his role as the fourth Governor-General of the Dutch East India Company. During his tenure, Coen founded the basis for the Dutch colonial enterprise in South-East Asia. Throughout the nineteenth century, he was considered a national hero for his contributions to the 'Golden Age' of the young Dutch Republic. During this time, a statue of him was erected on the national square of Hoorn, his hometown. This statue has been subject to debate since its unveiling. Two other sites in the Netherlands have dealt with the controversy surrounding Coen's name, the Coen Tunnel¹ and the J.P. Coen School.²

Background

Jan Pieterszoon Coen's career

Jan Pieterszoon Coen was born in 1587 in Hoorn, the Netherlands. At the age of thirteen, he was sent to study the art of commerce in Rome, and in 1607 he returned to the Netherlands educated with the latest management techniques.³ Coen began his career with the Dutch East India Company (VOC)⁴ and as the assistant merchant to Pieter Verhoeff's fleet later that year.⁵ The main objective of this expedition was to establish a monopoly in the nutmeg trade in the East Indies. Because of increased competition from English and Portuguese traders, Verhoeff planned to build a fort on one of the Bandese islands. The local Bandese did not favour this plan, and when captain Verhoeff and fifty of his men went ashore to negotiate, forty-six Dutch, including Verhoeff, were killed.⁶ Coen's star rapidly rose as a result of this power shift. He returned to the Netherlands with his report on trade possibilities in Southeast Asia, a project that awarded him chief merchant status. In 1613, he was appointed head of the company's post in Java and, in 1614, he was named director-general of Asian commerce.⁷

¹ The Coen Tunnel is named after the nearby Coen Port, which had been established in 1913. Construction was led by *Rijkswaterstaat*, a Dutch government agency. Construction of the Second Coen Tunnel started in the summer of 2009, and it was officially opened on 13 May 2013. In 2015, a name change proposal put forward by locals was rejected, as a name change was deemed too costly and confusing. Yet, the name of the tunnels continue to be subject to debate.

For further information: Monique Meijer and Gerard Minten, *Coentunnel* (Strijen: Conquest, 2014), 11; Roelf Jan Duin, "Ondanks Dubieuze Reputatie Mag J.P. Coen Zijn Tunnel Houden," *Het Parool*, January 21, 2015; Ruben Koops, "Raad wikt en weegt: moet Coentunnel andere naam krijgen?" *Het Parool*, July 1, 2020.

² The J.P. Coen Elementary School, established in 1911 in Amsterdam, decided in January 2018 that it no longer wanted to be associated with J.P. Coen's brutal colonial legacy. The school was renamed to the *Indische Buurt School* (The Indies Neighbourhood School) in 2018.

For further information: Wes Holleman, "Coenschool wil een andere naam," Weblog Onderwijs, January 22, 2018; Tom Kieft, "J.P. Coenschool Verandert Naam Om Koloniaal Verleden," *Het Parool*, January 16, 2018.

³ Merel Rademakers, *Revisiting the Golden Age and its heroes A historical comparative research into the changes in the public representation of the Dutch Golden Age and its heroes: Michiel de Ruyter and Jan Pieterszoon Coen* (MA Thesis, Utrecht University, 2020), 34-35.

⁴ In Dutch: 'Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie'.

⁵ Willem Phillipus Coolhaas, "Jan Pieterszoon Coen," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, January 4, 2020.

⁶ Victor Enthoven, "Jan Pietersz Coen: a man they love to hate. The first Governor General of the Dutch East Indies as an imperial site of memory," In *Sites of Imperial Memory. Commemorating colonial rule in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, ed. Dominik Geppert and Frank Muller (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 115-135.

⁷ Willem Phillipus Coolhaas, "Jan Pieterszoon Coen," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, January 4, 2020.

In 1617, Coen was appointed Governor-General of the VOC. His first act was to conquer Jakarta on the island of Java. Renamed Batavia, the city came to be the foundation of Dutch imperial power, a military stronghold, and the VOC headquarters in Asia.⁸ However, it remained difficult for the Dutch to ward off Portugal, England, and Spain competition. The Dutch interests conflicted especially with England over nutmeg, a spice grown exclusively on the Banda Islands. When the islands' inhabitants had breached VOC agreements, Coen invaded the island in 1621.⁹ Bandese leaders were imprisoned and beheaded. Families were deported, some were forced into enslavement in Batavia, and others were sent to Sri Lanka. The Dutch ruthlessly pursued the islanders who had fled into the mountains.¹⁰ The invasion led to the enslavement and brutal massacre of thousands of Bandanese. In the end, only 1.000 of the initial 15.000 inhabitants remained. The massacre led to the monopolisation of Dutch interests in the nutmeg industry. Coen had laid the foundation on which the VOC would thrive for nearly 200 years.¹¹

In 1623, Coen returned to the Netherlands and was appointed the director of the VOC chamber in Hoorn. In 1624, he was asked to return to Asia to defend VOC interests.¹² He died in Batavia in 1629 due to dysentery.¹³

The unveiling of the statue in Hoorn

During the so-called Dutch Golden Age, Hoorn had been a thriving port city close to Amsterdam. By the second half of the nineteenth century, Hoorn, now only a small community, remained proud of its maritime and colonial heritage.¹⁴ In 1830, the Kingdom of the Netherlands had separated from Belgium and needed new national heroes. Coen seemed a welcome figure that could embody the achievements of the Netherlands.¹⁵ His legacy became a source of pride. In 1884, during an annual meeting of the Hoorn Association for Public Entertainment,¹⁶ a local school teacher proposed erecting a monument in Coen's honour. Two years later, a committee was formed headed by the mayor of Hoorn, people from the local elite, and two members of the Houses of Parliament. The mayor of Hoorn, Willem Karel Baron van Dedem, had also worked in the Dutch Indies as a civil servant. The Committee decided on a statue and raised money

⁸ Victor Enthoven, "Jan Pietersz Coen: a man they love to hate. The first Governor General of the Dutch East Indies as an imperial site of memory," In *Sites of Imperial Memory. Commemorating colonial rule in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, ed. Dominik Geppert and Frank Muller (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 115-135.

⁹ Lisa Johnson, "Renegotiating dissonant heritage: the statue of J. P. Coen," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 20, no. 6 (2014): 587.

¹⁰ Victor Enthoven, "Jan Pietersz Coen: a man they love to hate. The first Governor General of the Dutch East Indies as an imperial site of memory," In *Sites of Imperial Memory. Commemorating colonial rule in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, ed. Dominik Geppert and Frank Muller (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 115-135.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Lisa Johnson, "Renegotiating dissonant heritage: the statue of J. P. Coen," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 20, no. 6 (2014): 587.

¹³ Victor Enthoven, "Jan Pietersz Coen: a man they love to hate. The first Governor General of the Dutch East Indies as an imperial site of memory," In *Sites of Imperial Memory. Commemorating colonial rule in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, ed. Dominik Geppert and Frank Muller (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 115-135.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Markus Barkenhol, "Colonial Heritage and the Sacred: Contesting the Statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen in the Netherlands," In *The Secular Sacred*, ed. Markus Balkenhol, Ernst van den Hemel and Irene Stengs (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2020), 195-216.

¹⁶ In Dutch: 'Hoorn Vereeniging voor Volksvermaken'.

throughout the Netherlands. Their call was widely received. It was agreed that the statue would be placed on the historic square of Hoorn, the *Roode Steen* (the Red Stone).¹⁷

Sculptor Ferdinand K.A.C. Leenhoff (1840-1914) was commissioned to create the bronze statue. Leenhoff was an instructor at the National Academy of Visual Arts in Amsterdam and a pupil of Joseph Mezzara in Paris.¹⁸ He designed the statue with Coen standing erect, looking mightily into the distance. In 1893, the statue was unveiled during a festive ceremony. The celebration was held on May 30th, the exact date Coen conquered Jakarta in 1619. The unveiling was overseen by several government ministers, including the minister of foreign affairs and the former mayor of Hoorn, Baron van Dedem, who had become minister of the colonies in 1891. Van Dedem had spoken: 'Coen's statue is safe in the midst of his town and descendants. As long as Hoorn, West Frisia and the Netherlands do not forget their history. Then this place will be honoured as holy ground.'¹⁹ Since 1965, the statue has been a national heritage site (Rijksmonument).²⁰

History of the Contestation

Early contestation

Jan Pieterszoon Coen was already a controversial figure during his lifetime. The board of the East India Company had accepted his uncompromising rule of Batavia as governor but deemed it ruthless nonetheless.²¹ Similarly, the controversy around the statue is not a recent phenomenon. In 1886, seven years before the statue was constructed, historian J.A. van der Chijs stated that Coen had blood on his hands. One statue of him, an existing one located in Batavia, was already enough.²² This Batavia statue was unveiled in 1876.²³ The statue was taken down during the Second World War after the Japanese invaded the Dutch Indies.²⁴ In 2012, the group *Comité Vrienden van Coen* (Committee Friends of Coen) started a petition to reinstall a statue of Coen in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta, formerly known as Batavia. Their petition gained 421 papers and 23 online signatures but was ultimately withdrawn.²⁵

In Hoorn, in 1893, two days before the unveiling of the statue there, an article in the social-democratic newspaper *Recht voor Allen* (Right to All) was published which argued that although the Dutch presence in the Indies was justified as a civilising mission, it was a 'symbol of

¹⁷ Markus Barkenhol, "Colonial Heritage and the Sacred: Contesting the Statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen in the Netherlands," In *The Secular Sacred*, ed. Markus Balkenhol, Ernst van den Hemel and Irene Stengs (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2020), 195-216.

¹⁸ Victor Enthoven, "Jan Pietersz Coen: a man they love to hate. The first Governor General of the Dutch East Indies as an imperial site of memory," In *Sites of Imperial Memory. Commemorating colonial rule in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, ed. Dominik Geppert and Frank Muller (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 115-135.

¹⁹ Lisa Johnson, "Renegotiating dissonant heritage: the statue of J. P. Coen," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 20, no. 6 (2014): 587.

²⁰ Erfgoed Hoorn, "Standbeeld van Jan Pieterszoon Coen," Gemeente Hoorn, no date.

²¹ Markus Barkenhol, "Colonial Heritage and the Sacred: Contesting the Statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen in the Netherlands," In *The Secular Sacred*, ed. Markus Balkenhol, Ernst van den Hemel and Irene Stengs (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2020), 195-216.

²² NOS, "De meningen over het beeld van Coen in Hoorn waren altijd al verdeeld," NOS, June 19, 2020.

²³ Victor Enthoven, "Jan Pietersz Coen: a man they love to hate. The first Governor General of the Dutch East Indies as an imperial site of memory," In *Sites of Imperial Memory. Commemorating colonial rule in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, ed. Dominik Geppert and Frank Muller (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 115-135.

²⁴ Historiek, "'Geef Jan Pieterszoon Coen standbeeld en staatsbegrafenis,'" Historiek, September 2, 2017.

²⁵ Petities.nl, "Coen terug in Jakarta," petities.nl, no date.

robbery, murder and bloodthirst.”²⁶ In the second half of the 20th century, in the 1960s, the statue was vandalised with red paint. This happened again in 1987 when several protests celebrated Coen’s 400th birthday. These protestors were mainly people with ancestry from the Maluku Islands of Indonesia, of which the Banda Islands are part. In the same year, Moluccan artist Willy Nanlohy presented Prince Claus of the Netherlands with a book containing a collection of the misdeeds of J.P. Coen.²⁷ Protestors, who also handed out pamphlets during the memorial ceremony for J. P. Coen in the Hoorn Oosterkerk, were removed by the police.²⁸

2010 citizens initiative

In 2010, controversy arose in Hoorn over the value of the J.P. Coen statue – located in their central square – on a local online discussion forum for public concerns. For some, the monument is a spatial anchor and removing it would cause a feeling of disorientation.²⁹ It may be for this reason that some opposed the relocation. For others, the call for removing it was linked to whether a historical figure responsible for murdering thousands of people should be honoured with a statue so prominently displayed in their city.

On this platform, journalist Eric van de Beek suggested honouring P.J. Liorne (inventor of the flute ship used for trading during the Golden Age) in place of J.P. Coen to memorialise a creative contribution to Dutch history rather than a man responsible for ‘genocide on the Banda islands.’³⁰ Van de Beek and Bob Entius, a retired history teacher, submitted a citizens’ initiative to the City Council. The point of view of the citizens’ initiative was articulated several times in Dutch media. On July 12 2011, Van de Beek wrote the following in the national newspaper *de Volkskrant*:

You should not honour a mass killer with a statue in the heart of your city. It seems peculiar to have to explain this. The advocates of the status quo have to twist in strange turns to support their point of view. [...] It is remarkable to tone down the deadly acts of Coen by referring to fellow contemporaries who also exceeded using violence. [...] And if we do put Coen in a historical context: It was not particularly common to commit genocide in the Golden Age either.³¹

In July 2011, adding a plaque with a contextualising text did not rest the debate surrounding the statue, as a discussion regarding the exact formulation of this text arose. It did not help that the statue was accidentally pushed off its pedestal during the construction of the yearly fair in the summer of 2011.³² Not taking down a statue of a contested figure is one thing, but putting a contested figure back on its pedestal is quite another. Nevertheless, the statue was placed back in 2012. A plaque was added, but some of the protesting citizens were disappointed as the

²⁶ NH Nieuws, “Vrijdag protest tegen standbeeld Jan Pieterszoon Coen, maar niet bij zijn sokkel,” NH Nieuws. June 15, 2020. Translated by authors.

²⁷ NOS, “De meningen over het beeld van Coen in Hoorn waren altijd al verdeeld,” NOS, June 19, 2020.

²⁸ NRC, “Groep Molukkers protesteert tegen verering Coen,” NRC, May 20, 1987.

²⁹ Maria Grever, “Historici en het oog van de beeldenstorm”, *Historici.nl*. September 17, 2020.

³⁰ Lisa Johnson, “Renegotiating dissonant heritage: the statue of J. P. Coen,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 20, no. 6 (2014): 587.

³¹ Eric van de Beek, “‘Iemand als Coen hoor je niet te eren’,” *de Volkskrant*, July 12, 2011. Translated by authors.

³² NOS, “JP Coen van zijn sokkel gestoten,” NOS, August 16, 2011.

plaque lacked the word genocide. They continued to call for the statue's relocation to the nearby Westfries Museum.³³

In October 2016, activist group *De Grauwe Eeuw* (The Gray Century) graffitied 'genocide' and the letters VOC, with the O shaped like a noose, across the statue's pedestal.³⁴ In doing so, *De Grauwe Eeuw* pointed to a persistent sense of injustice and controversy surrounding historical figures being honoured in the modern era. In 2018, when the *Zwarte Piet* (Black Peter) discussion³⁵ was linked to the debate about J.P. Coen's legacy, the provincial newspaper, *Noordhollands Dagblad* (*Newspaper of North-Holland*), held a poll which resulted in 97% of the votes against the removal of the statue. The suggestion of transforming the statue into a fountain was unsuccessful and deemed 'absurd'.³⁶ In spring 2020, politics student Joep Sturm launched a petition favouring the preservation of the statue.³⁷ The petition was signed by more than 4500 people and claimed to represent the silent majority afraid to speak their minds in public.³⁸

2020 protests

During the George Floyd Protests in 2020, when controversial statues in other parts of the world were removed and torn down, debates and protests over the Coen statue were organised in June.³⁹ These protests were criticised: an article by *Elsevier Weekblad* warned its readers 'not to underestimate this iconoclasm'.⁴⁰ However, the protests were also met with sympathy: some political parties in the city council, such as *GroenLinks* (The Green Party), argued for removing the statue.⁴¹ On June 19, both a protest and a counter-protest took place in Hoorn. One protestor argued 'A mass murderer is not a hero. History also has a dark side. It is about time that side comes out so that our children and grandchildren know the real History, not just the pretty side,' as she was interviewed on national TV.⁴² A sign from a counter-protester read: 'Take your modern claws off our beautiful old buildings'.⁴³ It should be noted that the municipality had prohibited a protest near the statue. During one of the protests, riots erupted after a group of young protestors decided to walk to the statue despite police orders, and 12 people were arrested on that day.⁴⁴

After the events of the summer of 2020, professor doctor Gemma Blok and doctor Caroline Drieënhuizen wrote an analysis of the emotions present in the discussion surrounding the statue.

³³ Gemma Blok and Caroline Drieënhuizen, "'Coen hoort bij Hoorn'. Emoties rond een omstreten standbeeld," Open Universiteit, October 2020.

³⁴ Historiek, "Actiegroep Bekladdert Standbeeld Jan Pieterszoon Coen," Historiek, October 25, 2016.

³⁵ For more on the *Zwarte Piet* controversy, see: Library Universiteit Leiden, "History of the Black Pete debate – a reading list," Library Universiteit Leiden, December 4, 2020.

³⁶ Paul Gutter, "Huilend beeld Coen in Hoorn is 'aandachttrekkerij'," *Noordhollands Dagblad*, November 9, 2018.

³⁷ Martijn Mak, "Petitie voor behoud van standbeeld J. P. Coen om 'zwijgende meerderheid' stem te geven: 'Hoornse politiek moet statement maken'," *Noordhollands Dagblad*, June 17, 2020.

³⁸ Petities.nl, "Het behoud van Jan Pieterszoon Coen," petities.nl, no date.

³⁹ NH Nieuws, "Vrijdag protest tegen standbeeld Jan Pieterszoon Coen, maar niet bij zijn sokkel," NH Nieuws, June 15, 2020.

⁴⁰ Gertjan van Schoonhoven, "Onderschat deze beeldenstorm niet," *Elsevier Weekblad*, June 14, 2020.

⁴¹ Eric Molenaar, "Moet beeld Jan Pieterszoon Coen er nu ook aan geloven? Volgens GroenLinks in Hoorn is 'de geest uit de fles'," *Noordhollands Dagblad*, June 10, 2020.

⁴² NOS Jeugdjournaal, "Protesten en rellen bij standbeeld J.P. Coen in Hoorn," YouTube video, 2:02, posted by "NOS Jeugdjournaal," June 6, 2020. Translated by authors.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ NOS, "Opnieuw aanhoudingen voor rellen bij standbeeld JP Coen in Hoorn," NOS, November 2, 2020.

They illustrated the polarisation of the Coen statue debate during the last ten years. Blok and Drieënhuizen described that, from the perspective of locals that support the statue, a clear division between 'us' and 'them' has developed, dividing between what was sometimes referred to as the 'real' people of Hoorn and 'people from outside: 'Predominant emotions here are fear of losing one's own identity through the changing society and of the shift in dominant voices within the public debate of Hoorn and those from outside.'⁴⁵ Furthermore, Blok and Drieënhuizen argued that people of Hoorn speaking out against the statue have had to deal with increasingly more aggression. One of the original citizens' initiative leaders 'received death threats, the windows of his house were stained, and pamphlets that portrayed him as a Nazi was spread through the town.'⁴⁶

Developments after 2020

In November 2021, the group *Collectief Ondeugend* (Mischievous Collective) placed a counter statue of Maria Catherina Swanenburg, better known as 'Goeie Mie' (Good Mie), next to the J. P. Coen Statue as a form of protest. Goeie Mie was a serial killer living in the nineteenth century. According to the group, the addition of her statue made the square complete.⁴⁷ Goeie Mie's statue was inscribed with the following words: 'Nurse. National hero. Praised for being a decisive person. Poisoned about 65 neighbours, of whom 23 died, over a period of six years.'⁴⁸ In January 2022, a new series of protests focussing on the Coen statue, advocating for moving the statue into a museum. *We Promise*, which stands up against racism and discrimination in the region where Hoorn is located, announced to protest near the statue throughout the year 2022. The protesters were back for their second protest at the end of February 2022.⁴⁹

Decision-Making Processes

Contextualising plaque

Before 2011, the city council of Hoorn had never entered into the discussion surrounding the J. P. Coen statue. However, the citizens' initiative argued for the removal of the statue, and so the council had to take some form of action. There were three scenarios on the table: the statue could be moved to the nearby Westfries Museum and would not be replaced; the statue could be moved to the Westfries Museum and be replaced by a statue of a different historical figure, or the statue could remain, but a more contextualising and critical text would replace its plaque.⁵⁰ In

⁴⁵ Gemma Blok and Caroline Drieënhuizen, "'Coen hoort bij Hoorn'. Emoties rond een omstreden standbeeld," Open Universiteit, October 2020. Translated by authors.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Collectief Ondeugend, "Ondeugend plannetje #2: Ondeugend Standbeeld verschijnt in Hoorn," Collectief Ondeugend, January 24, 2022.

⁴⁸ AD, "Seriemoordenaar 'Goeie Mie' vergezelt nu omstreden beeld J.P. Coen: 'Past precies bij deze tijd'," AD, November 6, 2021. Translated by authors.

⁴⁹ Jorik Simonides, "Opnieuw protest tegen beeld J.P. Coen: 'Je kunt ons het hele jaar door verwachten'," NH Nieuws, February 26, 2022.

⁵⁰ Eric van de Beek, "'Iemand als Coen hoor je niet te eren'," *de Volkskrant*, July 12, 2011.

July 2011, the council decided to select the latter scenario. The new text included the following words:

Both contemporaries and historians were critical of Coen's hard trading politics. In 1621, he took the Banda islands with much violence, because the inhabitants refused to sell their nutmeg exclusively to the VOC. Thousands of victims fell.⁵¹

However, protesting citizens were not satisfied with this new text, as they deemed it not critical enough.⁵² Some council members also expressed dissatisfaction. A working party was formed to work on a new formulation for the plaque. This group included the director of the Westfries Museum, two specialised historians, and officers from local archives, heritage and communication departments. New proposals for formulations were thoroughly discussed, focusing on using terms such as 'genocide'. There was a great deal of support for a text in several languages, although the idea for a text in Bahasa Indonesian was not adopted.⁵³ Finally, in 2012, a new plaque was added in Dutch and English, which mentioned both Coen's history of mass violence and human rights violations. The plaque did not use the term genocide, and the recent controversy among Hoorn citizens:

Coen was praised as a vigorous and visionary administrator. But he was also criticised for the violent means by which he built up trade monopolies in the East Indies. In 1621 Coen led a punitive expedition against one of the Banda Islands, as the local population was selling nutmeg to the English in disregard of a VOC ban. Thousands of Bandanese lost their lives during the assault and the survivors were deported to Batavia. [...] The statue is controversial. According to critics Coen's violent mercantilism in the East Indian archipelago does not deserve to be honoured.⁵⁴

Westfries Museum

Following the decision, the neighbouring local museum, the Westfries Museum, opened a special exhibit on Coen and the controversial statue. The exhibit, which took place from April to July 2012, focussed on the changing representation of Coen over the years and was staged as a trial where various experts expressed their vision regarding the Coen statue. The museum aimed not to take a moral position in the discussion. However, three out of the four experts interviewed argued that the statue should remain in place.⁵⁵ After hearing these experts' opinions, museum visitors were asked to state their own opinion on the issue: 63.9 per cent of visitors



Figure 2: 'J.P. Coen Statue in Hoorn with virtual reality glasses'
Image courtesy of the owner

⁵¹ Lisa Johnson, "Renegotiating dissonant heritage: the statue of J. P. Coen," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 20, no. 6 (2014): 588. Translated by Johnson.

⁵² ANP, "Opnieuw ophief over standbeeld JP Coen," *Het Parool*, February 22, 2012.

⁵³ Lisa Johnson, "Renegotiating dissonant heritage: the statue of J. P. Coen," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 20, no. 6 (2014): 590.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

voted for keeping the statue.⁵⁶ This was in line with the city council's decision regarding the statue.

In 2019 the Westfries museum launched a virtual-reality programme linked to the 400th anniversary of the founding of Batavia. During the launch event, museum director Ard Geerdink placed a pair of VR glasses on the head of the statue of Coen. However, the VR programme itself did not engage with the figure of Coen. It focused on visualising the city of Batavia in the year 1627.⁵⁷ Critics argued that the VR programme showed a romanticised view of Batavia at the time with a focus on the perspective of the coloniser.⁵⁸ However, according to the museum, the 2019 VR programme presented a 'versatile view without judgment'.⁵⁹

Over the years, the museum has continually stressed that they take a neutral position in the debate surrounding the figure of Coen. In 2020, when the idea to move the Coen statue to the museum arose again, museum director Geerdink said: 'We stay neutral in the discussion on the desirability of the statue. Its ideal placement has to be the outcome of a social debate and political decision-making processes. We are open to facilitating this as a museum.'⁶⁰

City talks

After the protests of 2020, the city council invited the citizens of Hoorn for a series of city talks where citizens could share their opinion and have a conversation with each other. The talks were recorded during the summer of 2021, amongst others, in a talk show format and were shared publicly by the city council. The city council did not want to choose a side in the talks and aimed to let both parties in the discussion have a platform. Furthermore, the aim was to not focus on the statue itself but on broader topics related to diversity and inclusion, such as symbolism and prejudice. Like anthropologist Michiel Baas, critics were disappointed in the choice not to focus on the statue. He argued that the city talks lacked informed voices, guidance in the discussion and the opportunity for a real conversation.⁶¹

Many citizens claimed that they did not dare to express their views in such a public format due to the sensitivity around the topic in Hoorn. Some of the people who did join were not very enthusiastic about the talks, as the broad issues and lack of focus on the statue were seen as a missed chance to have a constructive discussion. The statue had always been at the core of the debate in the city of Hoorn, so it seemed counterproductive to avoid this topic. Furthermore, participating citizens argued that the format of the talks was too rushed and that there was little space for a true dialogue.⁶²

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Noordhollands Dagblad, "JP Coen met VR-bril: Batavia herleeft in Westfries," *Noordhollands Dagblad*, May 28, 2019.

⁵⁸ Sander van der Horst, Sebald van der Waal and Ad Geerdink, "VR-tentoonstelling Westfries Museum: Afgewogen beeld of geschiedvervalsing?," *de Volkskrant*, June 16, 2019.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Thomas Borst, "'Onze Coen' of 'walgelijke genocidepleger': Hoorn verdeeld over betwist," *de Volkskrant*, June 17, 2020. Translated by authors.

⁶¹ DOCS, "#51 - Coen en de Kloof," NPO Radio 1 Podcast, December 22, 2021.

⁶² Ibid.

In September 2021, the city council of Hoorn announced that they would decide on what to do with the Coen statue in the summer of 2022. They will take the outcomes of the city talks into account in their decision-making process.⁶³

Summary and Conclusions

Despite the public perception of Coen as a national hero, the statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen in Hoorn has been disputed since its unveiling in 1893. It was not until 2012, after complaints by locals, that a contextualising plaque was added to the statue of Coen. Ever since the 2010 contestation, the debate related to the Coen statue has increasingly polarised and has become more aggressive. During the 2020 George Floyd Protests, the Coen statue became a focal point in the protests against controversial statues in the Dutch context.

Over the years, both the Hoorn city council and the nearby Westfries museum have aimed to neutralise the debate. However, they have continually sided with a status quo that takes a certain degree of pride in Dutch colonial history.⁶⁴ Although steps have been taken to ensure decision-making is democratised and community involvement is increased, transparency into the process itself and the rationales motivating particular decisions remains crucial. Further in-depth research into the legacy of J. P. Coen, particularly a confrontation with the more 'uncomfortable' parts of Dutch colonial history, might effectively address the calls for contextualisation and concerns over the lack of information that have previously impeded decision-making processes and can prevent future deadlocks in the negotiations on the statue. Indeed, there is much potential for both local authorities and museums to publicly engage with this research and the historiography of Coen's legacy. The critical examination can further reinvigorate public debate and cultivate an understanding of the temporal and moral considerations at stake.

Research contributed by Aivin Gast, Eva Klinkenberg, Miranda Richman, Alicia Rijlaarsdam

Last updated May 2022

References

- AD. "Seriemoordenaar 'Goeie Mie' vergezelt nu omstreden beeld J.P. Coen: 'Past precies bij deze tijd.'" AD, November 6, 2021.
<https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/seriemoordenaar-goeie-mie-vergezelt-nu-omstreden-beeld-j-p-coen-past-precies-bij-deze-tijd~a2ddb2f9/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F>.
- ANP. "Opnieuw ophef over standbeeld JP Coen." Het Parool, February 22, 2012.
<https://www.parool.nl/nieuws/opnieuw-ophef-over-standbeeld-jp-coen~b74d953f/?referr>

⁶³ RTL Nieuws, "Hoorn neemt na zomer 2022 besluit over standbeeld J.P. Coen," RTL Nieuws, September 25, 2021.

⁶⁴ Lisa Johnson, "Renegotiating dissonant heritage: the statue of J. P. Coen," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 20, no. 6 (2014): 596.

- er=[https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F](https://www.google.com/).
- Barkenhol, Markus. "Colonial Heritage and the Sacred: Contesting the Statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen in the Netherlands." In *The Secular Sacred*, edited by Markus Balkenhol, Ernst van den Hemel and Irene Stengs, 195-216. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-38050-2_10.
- Beek, Eric van de. "Iemand als Coen hoor je niet te eren!" de Volkskrant, July 12, 2011. <https://archive.ph/RZuvc>. (PDF 25)
- Blok, Gemma and Caroline Drieënhuizen. "Coen hoort bij Hoorn'. Emoties rond een omstreden standbeeld." Open Universiteit. October 2020. <https://www.ou.nl/-/jan-pieterszoon-coen>.
- Borst, Thomas. "'Onze Coen' of 'walgelijke genocidepleger': Hoorn verdeeld over betwist." de Volkskrant, June 17, 2020. <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/onze-coen-of-walgelijke-genocidepleger-hoorn-verdeeld-over-betwist-standbeeld~b65d17eb/>.
- Collectief Ondeugend. "Ondeugend plannetje #2: Ondeugend Standbeeld verschijnt in Hoorn." Collectief Ondeugend. January 24, 2022. https://collectiefondeugend.nl/cool_timeline/ondeugend-plannetje-2-ondeugend-standbeeld-verschijnt-in-hoorn/.
- Coolhaas, Willem Phillipus. "Jan Pieterszoon Coen." Encyclopædia Britannica. January 4, 2020. www.britannica.com/biography/Jan-Pieterszoon-Coen.
- DOCS. "#51 - Coen en de Kloof." NPO Radio 1 Podcast. December 22, 2021. <https://www.nporadio1.nl/nieuws/binnenland/c3b64bd3-f7fa-4cea-b601-99b1373aada2/discussie-in-hoorn-kan-het-beeld-van-de-omstreden-jan-pieterszoon-coen-blijven-staan>.
- Duin, Roelf Jan. "Ondanks Dubieuze Reputatie Mag J.P. Coen Zijn Tunnel Houden." Het Parool, January 21, 2015. www.parool.nl/amsterdam/ondanks-dubieuze-reputatie-mag-j-p-coen-zijn-tunnel-houden~a3834359/.
- Enthoven, Victor. "Jan Pietersz Coen: a man they love to hate. The first Governor General of the Dutch East Indies as an imperial site of memory." In *Sites of Imperial Memory. Commemorating colonial rule in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, edited by Dominik Geppert and Frank Muller, 115-135. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016.
- Erfgoed Hoorn. "Standbeeld van Jan Pieterszoon Coen." Gemeente Hoorn. no date. <https://www.erfgoedhoorn.nl/standbeeld-van-jan-pieterszoon-coen/>.
- Grever, Maria. "Historici en het oog van de beeldenstorm." Historici.nl. 17.9.2020 <https://www.historici.nl/historici-en-het-oog-van-de-beeldenstorm/?type=bijdrage>.
- Gutter, Paul. "Huilend beeld Coen in Hoorn is 'aandachttrekkerij'." Noordhollands Dagblad, November 9, 2018. https://www.noordhollandsdagblad.nl/cnt/dmf20181109_86298401/huilend-beeld-coen-in-hoorn-is-aandachttrekkerij.
- Historiek. "'Geef Jan Pieterszoon Coen standbeeld en staatsbegrafenis.'" Historiek. September 2, 2017. <https://historiek.net/geef-jan-pieterszoon-coen-standbeeld-en-staatsbegrafenis/16165/>.
- Historiek. "Actiegroep Bekladt Standbeeld Jan Pieterszoon Coen." Historiek. October 25, 2016. historiek.net/actiegroep-bekladt-standbeeld-jan-pieterszoon-coen/64841/.

- Holleman, Wes. "Coenschool wil een andere naam." Weblog Onderwijs. January 22, 2018.
<http://www.onderwijsethiek.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Coenschool-wil-een-andere-naam.pdf>.
- Horst, Sander van der, Sebald van der Waal and Ad Geerdink. "VR-tentoonstelling Westfries Museum: Afgewogen beeld of geschiedvervalsing?." de Volkskrant, June 16, 2019.
<https://archive.is/zu3SL>.
- Johnson, Lisa. "Renegotiating dissonant heritage: the statue of J. P. Coen." International Journal of Heritage Studies 20, no. 6 (2014): 583-598.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2013.818571>.
- Kieft, Tom. "J.P. Coenschool Verandert Naam Om Koloniaal Verleden." Het Parool, January 16, 2018.
www.parool.nl/amsterdam/j-p-coenschool-verandert-naam-om-koloniaal-verleden~a4557269/.
- Koops, Ruben. "Raad wikt en weegt: moet Coentunnel andere naam krijgen?" Het Parool, July 1, 2020.
<https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/raad-wikt-en-weegt-moet-coentunnel-andere-naam-krijgen~bcbce6be/>.
- Library Universiteit Leiden. "History of the Black Pete debate – a reading list." Library Universiteit Leiden. December 4, 2020.
<https://www.library.universiteitleiden.nl/news/2020/12/history-of-the-black-pete-debate--a-reading-list>.
- Mak, Martijn. "Petitie voor behoud van standbeeld J. P. Coen om 'zwijgende meerderheid' stem te geven: 'Hoornse politiek moet statement maken'." Noordhollands Dagblad, June 17, 2020.
https://www.noordhollandsdagblad.nl/cnt/dmf20200617_80670655?utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic.
- Meijer, M., and Minten, G. Coentunnel. Strijen: ConQuest, 2014.
https://issuu.com/cqreclame/docs/coen_ontwerp30x30_15.
- Molenaar, Eric. "Moet beeld Jan Pieterszoon Coen er nu ook aan geloven? Volgens GroenLinks in Hoorn is 'de geest uit de fles'." Noordhollands Dagblad, June 10, 2020.
https://www.noordhollandsdagblad.nl/cnt/dmf20200610_27219225/moet-beeld-jan-pieterszoon-coen-er-nu-ook-aan-geloven-volgens-groenlinks-in-hoorn-is-de-geest-uit-de-fles.
- NH Nieuws. "Vrijdag protest tegen standbeeld Jan Pieterszoon Coen, maar niet bij zijn sokkel." NH Nieuws. June 15, 2020.
<https://www.nhnieuws.nl/nieuws/268805/vrijdag-protest-tegen-standbeeld-jan-pieterszoon-coen-maar-niet-bij-zijn-sokkel>.
- Noordhollands Dagblad. "JP Coen met VR-bril: Batavia herleeft in Westfries." Noordhollands Dagblad, May 28, 2019. Museum.
https://www.noordhollandsdagblad.nl/cnt/dmf20190528_12350489?utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic.
- NOS Jeugdjournaal. "Protesten en rellen bij standbeeld J.P. Coen in Hoorn." YouTube video, 2:02. Posted June 6, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aALGYHnwhoY>.
- NOS. "De meningen over het beeld van Coen in Hoorn waren altijd al verdeeld." NOS. June 19,

2020.
<https://nos.nl/artikel/2337797-de-meningen-over-het-beeld-van-coen-in-hoorn-waren-al-tijd-al-verdeeld.html>.
- NOS. "JP Coen van zijn sokkel gestoten." NOS. August 16, 2011.
<https://nos.nl/artikel/264763-jp-coen-van-zijn-sokkel-gestoten>.
- NOS. "Opnieuw aanhoudingen voor rellen bij standbeeld JP Coen in Hoorn." NOS. November 2, 2020.
<https://nos.nl/artikel/2355000-opnieuw-aanhoudingen-voor-rellen-bij-standbeeld-jp-coen-in-hoorn>.
- NRC. "Groep Molukkers protesteert tegen verering Coen." NRC, May 20, 1987.
<https://archive.ph/2ga9r>.
- Petities.nl. "Coen terug in Jakarta." petities.nl. no date.
<https://petities.nl/petitions/coen-terug-in-jakarta?locale=en&page=2>.
- Petities.nl. "Het behoud van Jan Pieterszoon Coen." petities.nl. no date.
<https://petities.nl/petitions/het-behoud-van-jan-pieterszoon-coen?locale=nl>.
- Rademakers, Merel. Revisiting the Golden Age and its heroes A historical comparative research into the changes in the public representation of the Dutch Golden Age and its heroes: Michiel de Ruyter and Jan Pieterszoon Coen. MA Thesis, Utrecht University, 2020.
- RTL Nieuws. "Hoorn neemt na zomer 2022 besluit over standbeeld J.P. Coen." RTL Nieuws. September 25, 2021.
<https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/nederland/artikel/5256330/hoorn-jp-coen-standbeeld-zomer-2022-omstreden>.
- Schoonhoven, Gertjan van. "Onderschat deze beeldenstorm niet." *Elsevier Weekblad*, June 14, 2020. <https://www.elsevierweekblad.nl/opinie/opinie/2020/06/onderschat-deze-beeldenstorm-niet-761358/>.
- Simonides, Jorik. "Opnieuw protest tegen beeld J.P. Coen: "Je kunt ons het hele jaar door verwachten"." NH Nieuws. February 26, 2022.
nhnieuws.nl/nieuws/300240/opnieuw-protest-tegen-beeld-jp-coen-je-kunt-ons-het-hele-jaar-door-verwachten.

Figures

- Eintacht4ever. "File: Jan Pieterszoon Coen statue.jpg" Wikimedia Commons, June 7, 2005.
https://de.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Jan_Pieterszoon_Coen_statue.jpg. (Cover Image)
- Jill Pellew. "J.P. Coen Statue in Hoorn with virtual reality glasses." 2019.

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.

Contact information

Marie-Louise Jansen
Program Director
+33 663 828327
contestedhistories@euroclio.eu
www.contestedhistories.org

EuroClio Secretariat
Riouwstraat 139
2585HP The Hague
Netherlands
secretariat@euroclio.eu
www.euroclio.eu

Published by IHJR-EuroClio in March 2022
This document is copyright © The Contested Histories Initiative 2022

Some rights reserved [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

To cite this publication:
The Contested Histories Initiative, Netherlands: Jan Pieterszoon Coen Statue in Hoorn;
Contested Histories Case Study #236 (May 2022), 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.