

Tear it down?

by BRIAN LOCKHART

I read an interesting article a while back about a US college professor who provided details of two world leaders to his class.

The first person was a vegetarian, a decorated war hero, did not smoke and promoted an anti-smoking campaign, promoted animal rights and welfare, and never had illicit love affairs.

The second person associated with 'ward heelers' ? a corrupt political operative, consulted with astrologists, was a womanizer and had a mistress, was a chain smoker, and drinks eight to ten martinis a day.

After presenting the personal characteristic of these people, the professor asked his class which type of person they would rather have leading the country.

The vote was all-in for the non-smoking dog lover, and against the functioning alcoholic.

They were surprised to learn they just raised their hands in favour of Adolf Hitler.

The candidate they turned down was Franklin Roosevelt.

How, they wondered could they choose the characteristics of the leader of the Third Reich and turn down the man that led the country from the Great Depression with his New Deal policy?

It's interesting how you can skew an opinion about a person, institution, or ideology just by eliminating some facts and including others.

We seem to be in an era when revisionists of sorts have decided to take part of history and bring it to the forefront while ignoring other facts completely or burying them and accusing anyone who dares to bring them up to be 'anti' something.

History is history ? it's in the past and has already happened and cannot be changed. Tearing down statues won't change history or the outcome of what has already taken place.

Taken to the tenth degree, this type of thinking would pretty much eliminate every statue, every street name, and every park, ever named after a person. Taken to the tenth degree you could eliminate those streets signs with the red poppies that are named after veterans because someone remembered that war hero Jones kicked a dog when he was a kid or some other veteran flouted the law by getting a speeding ticket. Where does it stop?

It is important to note, these statues and plaques were erected by other people. They were not erected by living dictators who sought to glorify themselves.

There is a statue of Louis Riel on the grounds of the Manitoba legislature.

If you went to school in Canada you should know the Riel was a politician, leader of the Metis, and a rebel.

He is a revered figure in history to some, and a traitor to others. He was hanged in 1885. Some provinces were glad to see him swing at the end of a rope, others were vehemently opposed to the sentence.

He was a controversial figure in history.

Manitobans have seen fit to erect a statue to honour him. Nothing wrong with that.

Was he a hero? Well, Thomas Scott's family probably doesn't think he was.

Riel ordered the execution of Scott to set an example ? nothing more. Scott was opposed to Riel's provisional government and was arrested along with some of his cohorts. Apparently he was not an ideal prisoner and his guards insisted he be put on trial for insubordination.

After a secret trail, Scott was shot by a firing squad of men who were so intoxicated most missed the target and Scott was only wounded. He was placed in a coffin while still alive.

Should Riel's statue be torn down by an angry mob because he was responsible for the murder of a man whose only crime was being a political opponent?

In 2001, two giant statues of Buddha that had been carved into the cliffs in a valley in Afghanistan were destroyed by the Taliban who declared them to be idols. The statues had stood for a millennium and a half. They were completely destroyed and many people across the world were outraged that these works of art that survived for 1500 years were reduced to a pile of rubble.

Were they angry because they were Buddhists? No, they were angry because something beautiful was destroyed for no other reason than someone didn't like it.

History cannot be changed.

How about celebrating the good people did rather than dwell on the negative?