

Historical Revision in Church: Re-examining the “Saint” Edward Colston

BY SAMUEL J. RICHARDS

In April 2015, the governing body of the University of Cape Town voted to remove a bronze statue that had stood at the center of its campus since 1934. Prior to the decision, the monument honoring British imperialist and mining magnate Cecil John Rhodes (1853-1902) was the subject of protest led by a group called Rhodes Must Fall.¹ After achieving victory in Cape Town, Rhodes Must Fall campaigners launched an appeal at Oxford University demanding the removal of a statue from the façade of Oriel College.² The university’s chancellor, Lord Patten of Barnes, defended keeping the statue. In an essay, Patten characterized campaigners as arguing, “history should be rewritten to expunge the names (though not the endowments) of those who fail to pass today’s tests of political correctness.”³ Across the Atlantic Ocean at Yale University, a similar debate regarding Calhoun

¹ For an account of the debate see, Brenda Schmahmann, “The Fall of Rhodes: The Removal of a Sculpture from the University of Cape Town,” *Public Art Dialogue* 6 (2016): 90-115.

² Kevin Rawlinson, “Cecil Rhodes statue to remain at Oxford after ‘overwhelming support,’” *The Guardian*, 29 January 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/jan/28/cecil-rhodes-statue-will-not-be-removed-oxford-university> (accessed 26 August 2018).

³ Chris Patten, “The Closing of the Academic Mind,” *Project Syndicate*, 22 February 2016, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/academic-freedom-under-threat-by-chris-patten-2016-02> (accessed 26 August 2018). The removal of the Rhodes statue from the University of Cape Town remains an ongoing debate. It inspired the play “The Fall” performed at the State Theatre

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College named for former U.S. Vice President John C. Calhoun (1782-1850) was resolved differently. Yale dropped the name of the fiery defender of slavery and Yale President Peter Salovey publicly stated, “The decision to change a college’s name is not one we take lightly, but John C. Calhoun’s legacy as a white supremacist and a national leader who passionately promoted slavery as a ‘positive good’ fundamentally conflicts with Yale’s mission and values.”⁴ Universities are not alone in re-evaluating the ways historical monuments and names fit with missions and values of today.

Historical re-appraisals have led to campaigns advocating the removal of historic tributes in many places. These campaigns require thoughtful people to take an honest look at past horrors connected to racist thinking. This is not limited to Rhodes in Cape Town and Oxford or Calhoun in New Haven. In Brussels, Adam Hochschild’s 1998 study shocked many when he argued Belgium profited while an estimated ten million Congolese died under the reign of King Leopold II.⁵ Nevertheless, Belgium’s Royal Museum for Central Africa glorified Leopold II and colonialism for another two decades. Updated exhibits finally swept away much of the imperial propaganda in December 2018 by introducing a candid narrative of Belgium’s colonial past questioning abuses in the Congo.⁶ Even so, work remains. In February 2019, United

in Pretoria and at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. One reviewer wrote that, “The play is well thought out, going even into the dialogue that happened on the periphery of the greater cause; Afrophobia, homophobia, toxic masculinity, rape culture and classism.” This summarizes aspects of what protestors consider the ongoing legacy of colonialism in South Africa’s institutions of education. Masechaba Sefularo, “‘The Fall’: A Play About When Cecil John Rhodes Fell,” *EyeWitness News*, May 2018, <https://ewn.co.za/2018/06/20/the-fall-a-play-about-when-cecil-john-rhodes-fell> (accessed 26 August 2018).

⁴ “Yale Changes Calhoun College’s name to honor Grace Murray Hopper,” *YaleNews*, 11 February 2017, <https://news.yale.edu/2017/02/11/yale-change-calhoun-college-s-name-honor-grace-murray-hopper-0> (accessed 26 August 2018).

⁵ Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1998).

⁶ Raf Casert, “Belgian Africa Museum to take a more nuanced look at colonial past,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 December 2018, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2018/1205/Belgian-Africa-Museum-to-take-a-more-nuanced-look-at-colonial-past> (accessed March 2019).

Nations observers determined racial discrimination against Africans remains “endemic” in modern Belgium.⁷ Similarly, racist legacies inform ongoing debates in Bristol, England, and in U.S. cities, such as Baltimore, New Orleans, and Richmond, regarding Confederate monuments. Conversations spurred by decolonization and Black Lives Matter movements raise questions about memorialization. Most debates reported in the news focus on universities and government properties. Nevertheless, similar debates are happening in churches.

Discussions regarding contested history and racial reconciliation in the Anglican Communion are evident in recent decisions made in the Episcopal Dioceses of Alabama, Maryland, and Southwestern Virginia.⁸ Journalists often report these events locally without considering them as part of a larger global pattern of historical revision and penance occurring in predominately white Christian communities coming to terms with complicity in the horrors of racism and slavery. Similar discussions have preceded decisions to alter or remove monuments in Grahamstown Cathedral in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa and in Washington National Cathedral in the United States.

⁷ United Nations Human Rights Commission, “Statement to the media by the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, on the conclusion of its official visit to Belgium, 4-11 February 2019,” 11 February 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24153&LangID=E>; Raf Casert, “UN: Belgium must apologize for colonialism, face its racism.” *Associated Press*, 11 February 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/ce9234aaabbd4fd5ac1aff4148cfac32> (accessed March 2019).

⁸ “Alabama Church Removes Pew Honoring Confederate President.” *U.S. News*, February 10, 2019, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/alabama/articles/2019-02-10/alabama-church-removes-pew-honoring-confederate-president> (accessed 7 March 2019); Emily Amt, “Down from the Balcony: African Americans and Episcopal Congregations in Washington County, Maryland, 1800-1864,” *Anglican and Episcopal History* 86 (2017): 1-42; David Paulsen, “Removal of Robert E. Lee from church’s name was just start of healing for Virginia congregation,” *Episcopal News Service*, 17 October 2017, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/article/removal-robert-e-lee-churchs-name-was-just-start-healing-virginia-congregation> (accessed 7 March 2019).

INTRODUCING BRISTOL AS A STUDY FOCUS

In the west of England, the work of historians, especially Madge Dresser, Roger Ball, and David Olusoga, require thoughtful people—particularly Bristolian Christians—to re-evaluate commemorations of Edward Colston (1636-1721) in light of evidence that his connections to the slave trade were for too long obscured.⁹ It is now common knowledge that much of Colston's wealth derived from the trade and labor of slaves.¹⁰ A coalition called Countering Colston is among those working to revise ways Colston is remembered. Writers now mostly describe Colston as a slave trader and philanthropist, instead of merely as a philanthropist. In April 2017, Bristol's prime music venue, Colston Hall, announced it would reopen under a new name following renovations in order to drop its "toxic" associations with the slave trader.¹¹ Countering Colston's efforts have also influenced the Diocese of Bristol, especially its cathedral.

Guidebooks and signage in Bristol Cathedral and the nearby St. Mary, Redcliffe, now acknowledge that their fabric and ministries benefitted financially from slave traders including Colston. Both churches are now included in educational pamphlets entitled

⁹ See Madge Dresser, *Slavery Obscured: The Social History of the Slave Trade in an English Provincial Port* (London, 2001). Other studies include, David Richardson, *Bristol, Africa, and the Eighteenth Century Slave Trade to America*. Vol. 4. (Bristol, 1996); Pip Jones, *Satan's Kingdom: Bristol and the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Bristol, 2007); David Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (London, 2018).

¹⁰ Historian Roger Ball's analyses of slave transports on the Royal African Company ships have been instrumental in this. See Roger Ball, "Edward Colston Research Paper #1: Calculating the number of enslaved Africans transported by the Royal African company during Edward Colston's involvement (1680-92)," *Bristol Radical History Group*, 2017, <https://www.brh.org.uk/site/articles/edward-colston-research-paper-1/>; "Edward Colston Research Paper #2: The Royal African Company and Edward Colston (1680-92)," *Bristol Radical History Group*, 2017, <https://www.brh.org.uk/site/articles/edward-colston-research-paper-2/>

¹¹ "Bristol's Colston Hall to drop 'toxic' slave trader name," *BBC News*, 26 April 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-bristol-39718149> (accessed 8 March 2019).

“Transatlantic Slavery and Abolition in Bristol.”¹² This was not always so nor is this uncomfortable reality limited to Colston. Similar to imperial era improvements in Brussels, Bristolians are now discussing how best to deal with the fact that their city’s Georgian era renaissance was produced largely from the exploitation and dislocation of African men, women, and children.¹³ During the eighteenth century, London, Bristol, and Liverpool were Great Britain’s leading ports. Bristol’s economy depended heavily on triangular trade of goods, such as sugar, tobacco, cotton, and slaves. Bristol ships transported an estimated five hundred thousand plus enslaved people. This will likely lead to further questions about how the city remembers its past. For now, discussions largely center on the legacy of Edward Colston whose leading role in the London-based Royal African Company’s slave trade was the primary source of his philanthropic wealth.

HISTORY TO LEGEND

On 6 November 1931, *The Church Times* published a story extolling “the many good deeds of Edward Colston.”¹⁴ The article, signed only with the initials A.T.F., chronicled the virtues of this “Bristol Saint” including his desire to live simply, give greatly, and attend church regularly. It is indisputably true that Edward Colston did good works during his lifetime and left a legacy that continues to benefit Bristolians. His benevolence helped found alms houses, clothe the needy, educate poor Bristolian boys and

¹² Church leaders at Bristol Cathedral and St. Mary, Redcliffe, have created placards and booklets that describe connections to Bristol’s slave trading merchants, but volunteer docents lack adequate training. During my visit to St. Mary, Redcliffe, the docent was surprised to learn the church had a window dedicated in memory of Colston. However, he had no problem drawing a false equivalency between white indentured servitude, white transported prisoners, and black slavery while criticizing the “johnny come latelys” who were trying to change Bristol history. Observation, October 2018.

¹³ Madge Dresser, “Squares of Distinction, Webs of Interest: Gentility, Urban Development, and the Slave Trade in Bristol c.1673-1820,” *Slavery and Abolition* 21 (2000): 40.

¹⁴ “A Bristol Saint: The Many Good Deeds of Edward Colston,” *The Church Times* (6 November 1931).

girls, and repair many churches. Both during his lifetime and in the centuries since, civic and religious leaders have pointed to Colston's exceptional giving as a role model of Christian charity worthy of emulation. Even now, the Dolphin Society, established in 1749, with its emblem and namesake inspired by Colston's coat of arms, annually provides £250,000 for needy causes in Bristol.¹⁵ The Dolphin Society marks the end of its annual fundraising appeal in early November on Colston Day.¹⁶

In recent years, members of Countering Colston have criticized and protested Colston-related events.¹⁷ This discussion would be easier if it were a simple binary issue between Colston and his contemporaries being good or evil. However, humanity is infinitely more complex. University of Bristol philosophy lecturer Joanna Burch-Brown, a member of Countering Colston, has pondered the ethics of renaming, altering, and removing contested objects.¹⁸ As part of this discussion, the Church of England's Diocese of Bristol is examining its connections to slavery. Bristol Cathedral's website now features a section entitled, "The legacy of slavery in Bristol" that specifically mentions "the debate about how the slave owner Edward Colston is memorialised."¹⁹ Introducing Colston as a slave trader, rather than as a philanthropist, is a significant departure from two centuries of diocesan practice. However, thus far historians evaluating Colston's legacy have primarily considered the role once played by the Society of Merchant Venturers (akin to a modern chamber of commerce) in promoting the trading interests of Bristolian businessmen and

¹⁵ "History / Background," The Dolphin Society, www.dolphin-society.org.uk/history (accessed 16 October 2018).

¹⁶ Tories dominated the Dolphin Society. The exclusive nature of the Dolphin Society led Liberals to establish the Grateful Society (1759) and the Whigs to establish the Anchor Society (1769). Together with the Parent Society, these form the four Colston Societies that continue in contemporary Bristol.

¹⁷ Tristan Cork, "Buns, sermons, and slave songs - how slave trader Edward Colston was awkwardly commemorated on Anti-Slavery Day," *The Bristol Post*, 23 October 2017, www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/buns-sermons-slave-songs-how-652628 (accessed 16 October 2018).

¹⁸ Joanna Burch-Brown, "Is it Wrong to Topple Statues and Rename Schools?" *Journal of Political Theory and Philosophy* 1 (2017): 59-87.

¹⁹ "The legacy of slavery in Bristol," Bristol Cathedral, <https://bristol-cathedral.co.uk/social-justice/the-legacy-of-slavery-in-bristol/> (accessed 17 October 2018).

the philanthropic Colston Societies while paying less attention to ways clerics and the church historically contributed to Bristol's cult of Colston.²⁰

In November 2014, Michael Arthur "Mike" Hill, then Lord Bishop of Bristol, came under intense scrutiny for comments made while addressing hundreds of Bristolians during an annual Society of Merchant Venturers' Charter Day service. Hill reportedly said there was "speculation" regarding Colston's business roots. Tony Gosling, the radio host of *A Bristol Angle* on World Politics on BCfm, was in attendance at the service that day and recounted that "the bishop said he thought Edward Colston had 'lived a life of significance' and there 'may be still some speculation on some of the circumstances around his business roots right here [in Bristol].'" Gosling interpreted Hill's comments on "speculation" as obscuring Colston's role in slave trading leading to what BBC Radio Bristol host Steve Le Fevre later described as a "social media storm."²¹ As a result of criticism, Hill issued a clarifying statement to his diocese:

Some of my words about Bristol Merchant Edward Colston have been seized upon, particularly regarding the morality of Colston's business dealings. I stand by what I *actually* said at the Merchant Venturers [*sic.*] Charter Day service yesterday, but not by what some have inferred from what I said. I am equally clear that I am against all forms of slavery, both at the time Edward Colston made his money and today. To suggest otherwise is both untrue and unkind.²²

A day after his public statement, BBC News published a story noting the bishop's defensive posture. He was quoted as saying, "Colston, despite his ill-gotten gains, did some things that were significant and the children and elderly in our city have

²⁰ "Cult of Colston" is a phrase first used by the Rev. Dr. H. J. Wilkins in 1920.

²¹ Steve and Laura at Breakfast, Radio Bristol, 13 November 2014, www.radio4all.net/files/tony@cultureshop.org.uk/2149-1-BishopMikeColstonMV7am-Wednesday.mp3 (accessed 30 July 2020).

²² The Rt. Rev. Michael Hill, "Edward Colston, slavery and moral ambiguities," Diocese of Bristol, 11 November 2014, www.bristol.anglican.org/news/2014/11/11/edward-colston-slavery-and-moral-ambiguities/ (accessed 1 September 2018).

benefitted from his benefaction but at the same time it does not in any way justify his attachment to the Royal African Company.”²³ The bishop’s nuanced view included a radical departure from the diocese’s traditional portrayal of Edward Colston.

Hill’s statement, nonetheless, defended the well-known positive philanthropic elements of Colston’s legacy in accord with centuries-old custom while slightly tempering long-accepted views extolling Colston as an unblemished example of Christian virtue. The bishop’s words invited rebuke and became a rallying cry for Countering Colston, including protests in 2015 at various public events. For example, members of Countering Colston distributed pamphlets to Colston Day attendees in November 2015. The pamphlets focused on Bishop Hill’s usage of “speculation” and contended that he had made a “clumsy attempt to rewrite history.” In their zeal to change Colston memorialization, protesters also embarked on their own clumsy attempt to rewrite history. Their pamphlets claimed:

Colston is often portrayed as a Christ-like figure giving without prejudice to the ‘poor’ of Bristol. In fact he was a Christian fundamentalist who hated Catholics and non-conformists; in fact anyone who wasn’t part of the High Anglican church.²⁴

It is true that the cult of Colston invited comparisons between Colston and the biblical Good Samaritan, but incorrect to describe him as a fundamentalist. Critics also conveniently ignored ways the killing of over 200,000 people during the English Civil War (1642-1651) coincided with Colston’s childhood shaping his political and religious views favoring order and stability in the form of monarchy and High Anglicanism. Even so, as recently as 2017, Roger Ball, writing for the Bristol Radical History Group, likely alluded to the bishop’s remarks when he wrote:

²³ “Bristol bishop says slave trader remarks ‘misinterpreted’,” *BBC News*, 12 November 2014, www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-30016789 (accessed 15 September 2018).

²⁴ Countering Colston, “Colston and slavery still obscured?” November 2015, archived at https://network23.org/thebristolian/files/2015/11/colston-leaflet_adults.pdf (accessed 15 September 2018).

The reluctance to face up to the dark history of Edward Colston has led some commentators in Bristol to denigrate or even ignore his involvement in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. It is notable that where there has been a focus on this history, Colston is often portrayed as merely an investor, a beneficent share-holder, distant from both the organisations that ran the trade and its horrors. Other major public figures in Bristol have mistakenly implied that the history of his involvement is mere speculation.²⁵

Countering Colston has continued to advocate changes to Colston memorialization. Their work represents a significant change to over two-hundred years of popularized history in Bristol.

Praise for Colston's philanthropic endeavors came easily from Bristol pulpits for centuries, and the Bristol Archives hold numerous sermons extoling his virtues delivered before the Tory-affiliated Dolphin Society at their annual Colston Day services as early as 1755. During that year, the Rev. William Hawkins, a former poetry professor at Oxford University, declared, "in this Place the Name of COLSTON will be an everlasting Incitement to Christian Virtue!" for his diffusive charity.²⁶ Another example dates to November 1783 when the Rev. John Hodges preached on the text of Psalm 112:6 ("The Righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance.")²⁷ One does not have to think deeply nor read the entire sermon to know whom Hodges used as an example of the righteous. He even implied that providence granted Colston greater riches because he showered them on the poor. The preserved evidence shows that this pattern of annually praising Colston continued unabated and even escalated during nineteenth century and into the early twentieth as interpretations of Colston expanded from the exclusive domain of Anglican

²⁵ Roger Ball, "Edward Colston Research Paper #2: The Royal African Company and Edward Colston (1680-92)," Bristol Radical History Group, 17 June 2017, www.brh.org.uk/site/articles/edward-colston-research-paper-2 (accessed March 2019).

²⁶ William Hawkins, "The Nature, Extence, and Excellence of Christian Charity," Sermon (Bristol, 1755).

²⁷ John Hodges, "A Sermon Preached before the Dolphin Society at the Cathedral-Church, Bristol, on Thursday, November 13, 1783, being the anniversary commemoration of that great benefactor and liberal founder, the late Edward Colston, Esq." (Bristol, 1784), Bristol Archives, SMV/8/1/3/3.

Tories.²⁸ A sermon delivered at Bristol Cathedral on Colston Day in November 1840 by the Rev. James Caulfeild Brown used the text of Matthew 7:20, (“By their fruits ye shall know them.”) and suggested that Colston was a hero because he viewed the Church of England as “the only certain method of merging the wild dogmas of fanaticism, and of destroying the foul deeds of anarchy” whether they be political, religious, or moral.²⁹ Four years later, artist Richard Jeffreys Lewis reimagined “The Death of Colston” in a painting at the same time that Colston’s body was exhumed.³⁰ It was a piece of artistic propaganda meant to show Colston’s deathbed coinciding with exhumation of his body that was said to be perfectly preserved a century after interment. Then, in 1852, Thomas Garrard (1787-1859) wrote his *Edward Colston, the Philanthropist, His Life and Times*. In keeping with biographical writing of the time, Garrard offered a mostly glowing account of his subject, including his description of Colston Day when “the respectable citizens of Bristol would assemble, as for years and years they have done, on the birth day of the infant whose enrolment as a servant of Christ was that day celebrated.”³¹ Praise for Colston was continuous.

In 1866, the Rev. Henry Goldney Randall used Colston’s memory to make a fundraising pitch for repairing the steeple or installing a memorial window in the ornate Gothic church of Bristol merchants,

²⁸ Spencer Kenneth Jordan, “The Development and Implementation of Authority in a Regional Capital: A Study of Bristol’s Élites, 1835-1939,” (Ph.D. diss.: University of the West of England, 1999): chapter 6.

²⁹ The Rev. James Caulfeild Browne, “A Sermon Preached before the Right Rev. Lord Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol, John Taylor, Esq., the President, and the members of the Dolphin Society on the 13 of November 1840 being the Anniversary of the Pious and Benevolent Edward Colston,” (Bristol, 1840). Bristol Archives, SMV/8/1/3/3/9.

³⁰ For an excellent analysis of this painting see Madge Dresser, *Slavery Obscured*, 3. The painting by Richard Jeffreys Lewis formed a part of the 1999 exhibition “Bristol and the Transatlantic Slavery” at Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery. A copy of the painting is included the exhibition catalogue. See, Madge Dresser and Sue Giles, eds., *Bristol and Transatlantic Slavery: Catalogue of the Exhibition ‘A Respectable Trade? Bristol and Transatlantic Slavery,’* (Bristol, 2000).

³¹ Thomas Garrard, *Edward Colston, The Philanthropist, His Life and Times: Including A Memoir of His Father*, ed. Samuel Griffiths Tovey (Bristol, 1852), 27.

St. Mary, Redcliffe.³² Randall was successful in quickly raising the money for an intricate, large-scale window. Just four years later, on Whitsunday 1870 subscribers witnessed the dedication of the window in the north transept. The window given in memory of Colston depicts Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan.³³ This illustrates the parable recorded in the Gospel of St. Luke, but it also reflects the Colston family motto, "Go and do thou likewise," from St. Luke 10:37, the concluding line of the Good Samaritan parable. In the nineteenth century, it also encouraged views that Colston was a Good Samaritan. This ignored Colston's refusal to help "the other," especially religious dissenters who did not conform to his Tory politics and High Anglicanism, rendering the Good Samaritan comparison applicable only if one views him as either the priest or Levite. He was not the Good Samaritan. Today, even beneficiaries of Colston endowments acknowledge his heavy-handed approach to promoting order via the Church of England.³⁴ Nevertheless, Victorian Era donors interpreted Colston as the Good Samaritan and no space existed for criticism as the tributes continued. Twenty years after the Redcliffe parish installed its Good Samaritan window, Bristol Cathedral followed suit. The Dolphin Society paid for and later helped maintain the north transept window that once again reminded Bristolians of their very own Good Samaritan.³⁵ Five years

³² The window in St. Mary's, Redcliffe, was installed in 1870. Its only connection to Colston is a small banner noting that it was given in memory of Colston along with his dolphin insignia. Peter G. Cobb, "The Stained Glass of St. Mary Redcliffe, Bristol," *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* CXII (1994): 150; Observation, October 2018.

³³ During a 17 October 2018 visit to St. Mary, Redcliffe, I inquired about the Good Samaritan window. The three docents on duty were perplexed to learn a window related to Colston existed. After consulting the verger, two of the docents guided me to the window while sharing their views regarding the Colston debate. See also, Cobb, "The Stained Glass of St. Mary Redcliffe, Bristol," 150.

³⁴ John Wroughton, *Mr. Colston's Hospital: The History of Colston's School, Bristol, 1710-2002* (Bristol, 2002), 4-5.

³⁵ This window suffered damage from the German *Luftwaffe* during World War II. Most passers-by will easily overlook the Colston elements in the massive window. Surviving Colston elements include his initials and symbol, the dolphin, that also honors donors from the Dolphin Society. As late as November 1920, the cathedral chapter asked the Dolphin Society to help clean and repaint the ironwork for the "Colston windows." "Bristol Cathedral Chapter Minutes, 1920-1930," Bristol Archives, DC/A/8/10.

later civic officials paraded to dedicate a statue of Edward Colston near the newly designed Colston Avenue on 13 November 1895.

Records of the cathedral chapter between 1893 and 1895 make no mention of this event nor of any plans for fundraising or other involvement in developing the new City Center.³⁶ It is likely that Anglican clerics attended or even participated in the unveiling of the “hunched, brooding, figure” of Colston.³⁷ Today, journalists tend to describe this Colston statue in isolation instead of as part of the larger Victorian civic space created after docks were infilled.³⁸ This leads to incomplete conclusions. It was no coincidence that Bristol publisher and Anchor Society member James William Arrowsmith (1839-1913) began fundraising for the Colston statue in 1893. The Colston statue exists in tandem with a nearby statue of another member of parliament for Bristol.³⁹ A statue of Edmund Burke (1730-1797) was unveiled in 1894 by Liberal Prime Minister Archibald Primrose, the Earl of Roseberry. Douglass Merritt easily explained the erection of Burke ninety-seven years after the political leader’s death by writing: “He was proudly considered a ‘liberal’ and the Liberal Party had many powerful supporters in Bristol at the end of the nineteenth century.”⁴⁰ As a result, icons of contemporary liberal and conservative party politics in Bristol were juxtaposed in the newly developed City Center, a clear sign that Bristol history was being memorialized in a way that conveniently omitted laborers in the

³⁶ During this period, the cathedral chapter’s minutes reveal conversations about donations to the cathedral, ongoing discussion regarding the nearby development of the new road in Canon’s Marsh, and installing electric lighting in the cathedral. “Bristol Cathedral Chapter Minutes, 1879-1900,” Bristol Archives DC/A/8/8.

³⁷ Douglass Merritt, *Sculpture in Bristol* (Bristol, 2002), 30-31.

³⁸ One retired journalist provided a hint of newsroom conversations when he offered his opinion in a letter originally published in the *Bristol Post*. Mike Gardner called for the eradication of Colston memorials from Bristol and described the center city statue as “worst of all.” Gardner wrote that Colston “is one of the most evil men in English history” comparable to Adolf Hitler, Pol Pot, Atila the Hun, and Joseph Stalin. See Mike Gardner, “Edward Colston: the father of Bristol’s slave shame,” *Operation Black Vote*, 17 June 2014, www.obv.org.uk/news-blogs/edward-colston-father-bristols-slave-shame (accessed 18 October 2018).

³⁹ Ironically, both Colston and Burke were rarely resident in Bristol.

⁴⁰ Merritt, *Sculpture in Bristol*, 30-31 and 328-29.

factories and dockyards. This tempers Spencer Jordan's claim that from the 1860s Colston became a unitive symbol fitting the sensibilities of bourgeois Bristolians.⁴¹ In a politically divided city, the statues of Burke and Colston attempted to achieve this together. Statues in the new City Center attempted to elevate the bourgeois left and right by placing their respective icons on pedestals in the aftermath of labor unrest stoked by poor working conditions in Bristol.

Historical inaccuracy combined with political expediency informed Colston's 1895 elevation on a plinth. Donors honored Colston as a Tory grandee and philanthropist while ignoring his role in the slave trade. Colston was no longer a historic man; he was a legend. Connections between Colston and slavery had vanished from narratives by the late 1700s as part of a larger trend among Bristol residents to distance themselves from slavery.⁴² By 1788, there was no obvious hypocrisy when the dean of Bristol, John Hallam, served as a member of Bristol's Abolition Committee while Anglican clerics extolled the virtues of Colston.⁴³ The hypocrisy went unnoticed because the only label attached to Colston even then was "philanthropist." Bristol Anglicans were not unique in this approach. This distancing coincided with increasing calls for abolition and Bristol's shift away from slave trading. However, if Colston had become the unifying symbol some claim, Victorian Bristolians would have been satisfied with a lone statue of Colston in the new City Center. Instead,

⁴¹ Jordan, "Development and Implementation of Authority in a Regional Capital," 321. Prof. Sir David Cannadine was one of Jordan's dissertation supervisors. Cannadine's "ornamentalist" perspective heavily influenced Jordan's approach. David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford, 2001).

⁴² Dresser, *Slavery Obscured*, 108; Dresser, "Monumental folly—what Colston's statue says about Victorian Bristol," *Apollo Magazine*, 18 June 2020, www.apollo-magazine.com/colston-statue-victorian-bristol (accessed 24 July 2020).

⁴³ The committee also included the Bristol Cathedral prebendary, dean of Gloucester, and Anglican businessman Joseph Harford. There is also private correspondence between Bishop Thomas Newton of Bristol and abolitionist Granville Sharp. Outside of the hierarchy, Anglican cleric and leader of the Methodist movement John Wesley spoke out against slavery in 1774 from his New Room in Bristol's Broadmead. See Dresser, *Slavery Obscured*, 137, 139. Brychan Carey, "John Wesley's *Thoughts upon slavery* and the language of the heart", *The Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 82 (2003): 269-284.



On 18 October 2018 an artistic protester drew attention to slavery of the past and present on the U.K.'s Anti-Slavery Day. The art installation placed the 1895 statue of Edward Colston at the helm of a slave ship. One-hundred human figurines were arranged behind the title "Here and Now." Labels contained titles like sex worker, car wash attendant, domestic servant, fruit picker, and farm worker. The statue was toppled on 7 June 2020. The empty plinth remains a focal point of community debate. Photo Credit: Samuel J. Richards, October 2018.

statuary installed near the newly developed Colston Avenue in the 1890s included both Burke and Colston. Additionally, J. W. Arrowsmith found difficulty in raising funds for the Colston monument, perhaps a foreshadowing of elections that ended Tory dominance in the Bristol council chamber.⁴⁴ Bristol was and is a divided city. Divisions surrounding Colston's legacy reflect this. Bristolians have conveniently acknowledged and disregarded aspects of Colston's legacy since the very beginning and continue to do so. In January 2017, the Centre for Dynamics of Ethnicity based at the University of Manchester issued a report entitled "Bristol: a city divided?," commonly referred to in Bristol as the Runnymede Report. It concluded that ethnic minorities in Bristol are at a greater educational and employment disadvantage than any other region of England and Wales.⁴⁵ The racial and class divisions in the city inevitably influence the historiography surrounding Colston in regards to class and factionalism.

Local historians have more recently relied on the work of historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger to interpret these changes as "a Victorian re-invention" or "invented tradition" that was meant to reinforce the power of nineteenth century Bristol elites.⁴⁶ These observations related to the growing cult of Colston in the late nineteenth century might be best applied to Liberal and Whig Bristolians. Among Tories, however, these changes were not so much a reinvention as much as an escalation of what had existed for over a century. Traditions of annually honoring Colston's piety and benevolence among Tory Anglicans occurred even before Colston's death. In Britain's modern social welfare state, it is too easy to downplay the important role of charitable

⁴⁴ Merritt, *Sculpture in Bristol*, 30-31.

⁴⁵ Centre on Dynamics and Ethnicity and The Runnymede Trust, "Bristol: a city divided?," January 2017, <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/CoDE%20Briefing%20Bristol%20v2.pdf> (accessed March 2019).

⁴⁶ See Roger Ball, "Myths within myths. . . Edward Colston and that statue." (16 October 2018) Bristol Radical History Group. <https://www.brh.org.uk/site/articles/myths-within-myths> (accessed 17 October 2018); Jordan, "Development and Implementation of Authority in a Regional Capital"; Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions" in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).

works encouraged by the church and the philanthropic example of Colston.

Honoring Colston was not about documenting history nor was it about social control. Adherence to a Marxist lens of history prevents activist-historians of the Bristol Radical History Group from acknowledging this.⁴⁷ Martin Gorsky's detailed analysis of nineteenth century charitable giving in Bristol found that charitable subscriptions fell with the declining economy. This led Gorsky to caution against "easy linkages" made by proponents of the Marxist social control thesis.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, "easy linkages" are being made, thus introducing new Labor-inclined or leftist inaccuracies into Bristol historiography just as layers of Tory and Liberal narrative are finally being questioned. Regardless, the evidence is clear that praising Colston relied on inaccurate historical portrayals that encouraged good works among Bristolians. These localized efforts were crucial, albeit inadequate, to community well-being in Britain prior to 1948 and development of the modern social welfare state.

Far from being a Victorian era invention, Bristolian Anglican and Tory elites were inextricably linked to incomplete narratives that annually extolled Colston as legend, a tradition that began during his lifetime. Aspiring Whig and Liberal elites in Bristol later adopted Colston's mantle as their own by establishing the Anchor and Grateful Societies, their very own Colston-inspired charities.⁴⁹ The Victorian era Colston tradition was not new, but its audience during the nineteenth century expanded due in part

⁴⁷ Local historians founded Bristol Radical History Group (BRHG) in 2006. They describe their mission as rediscovering "hidden history" with a focus on "history from 'below,'" avoiding what they describe as "establishment histories." In their words, they are "local people from Bristol and are NOT funded by universities, political parties, business or local government." They are an affiliate of the International History from Below Network of "historian-activists, artists, and agitators" that works to study 'the exploited classes in a social order.'" BRHG products are marketed for purchase at the local government's Bristol Archives.

⁴⁸ Martin Gorsky, *Patterns of Philanthropy: Charity and Society in Nineteenth-Century Bristol*. Royal Historical Society Studies in History (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK, 1999), 207.

⁴⁹ Jordan, "Development and Implementation of Authority in a Regional Center," 293-325.

to the proliferation of newspapers.⁵⁰ Jordan argued: “Through the development of this wider audience the Colston tradition remained a key aspect of élite culture within the city up to and beyond the First World War.”⁵¹ This was evident in 1918 when the cathedral invited the Liberal-affiliated Grateful and Whig-affiliated Anchor Societies to join the Tory-affiliated Dolphin Society for a joint Colston Day worship service. Divided Bristolians might be inclined to interpret this differently depending on their respective religious and political views. Those suspicious of Anglican leaders might narrate this as a ploy on behalf of the dean and chapter to promote Anglican pre-eminence. On the other hand, was it a genuine, well-intentioned way to promote unity during the Great War? Minutes of the cathedral chapter are silent on this issue. However, a related event provides a sense of the dean and chapter’s thinking around this time.

On 11 November 1918, the chapter met privately and made plans for a “Celebration of Signing of Armistice.” As a gesture of unity, the dean and chapter invited the Roman Catholic Bishop of Clifton and President of the Free Church Council of Bristol.⁵² While Roman Catholic bishop George Ambrose Burton declined the invitation, the Rev. Dr. Arnold Thomas of Highbury accepted. In 1918, this was breathtakingly inclusive, ecumenical thinking from the bishop, dean, and chapter. Soon after the bishop of Bristol led the service on 20 November, he received an objection from thirty-two clergymen who opposed inclusion of a Congregationalist minister. One newspaper gleaning carefully pasted into chapter minute book announces, “BRISTOL’S THANKSGIVING FOR PEACE: Nonconformist Participation. Clerical Protest and Bishop’s Trenchant Reply.” Diocesan officials responded that a cathedral is not just a center of religious life for the Church of England, “but a Cathedral is something more; it holds a peculiar position in civic life.”⁵³ The defiant bishop also

⁵⁰ Ibid., 311.

⁵¹ Ibid., 312.

⁵² Meeting of 11 November 1918, *Bristol Cathedral Chapter Minutes, 1901-1920*, Bristol Archives, DC/A/8/9.

⁵³ Meeting of 1 January 1919, *Bristol Cathedral Chapter Minutes, 1901-1920*, Bristol Archives, DC/A/8/9.

unnecessarily disclosed the even more provocative news that the Roman Catholic bishop was also invited. If the bishop, dean, and chapter willingly faced down objections to inviting non-establishment Anglican clergy to participate in thanksgiving worship at the cathedral, it is obvious that their work in bringing together the Colston Societies was a genuine act of community building encouraging philanthropy. Throughout history, Bristol Cathedral and Anglican clerics have maintained a prominent role in annual Colston celebrations. Their involvement in encouraging the remembrance of Colston is unsurprising.

Colston's support for hierarchy and the established church were uncompromising. The childhood crucible of the English Civil War forged Colston's beliefs. Instability during the English Civil War and the resulting protectorate influenced Colston's views of religion and government. The beheading of a king will do that. Subsequently, proponents of Colston's legacy simplified this complex historical event to promote stable government and hierarchy during the late eighteenth century—likely terrified by events in revolutionary America and France—and again when facing labor unrest during the 1800s. This is especially evident in Bristol city treasurer Thomas Garrard's 1852 biography of Colston in which many pages disparage Oliver Cromwell and other Protestant dissenters. Garrard's description of the Quakers' remembrance of their Civil War actions drips with sarcasm and contempt. One example will suffice. Garrard summarizes Quaker actions thus:

But the now inoffensive Quakers, who had been subdued from their frantic enthusiasm and singularity, —to a patient and enduring tranquillity, had never possessed power, —had never declared themselves enemies to the King's authority; they still suffered, nevertheless, from persecutions the most vile and atrocious.⁵⁴

Since the earliest days of Colston memorialization, keepers of the Colston legend have emphasized the dangers of anarchy that existed during the English Civil War. This emphasis allowed them

⁵⁴ Thomas Garrard, *Edward Colston, The Philanthropist, His Life and Times: Including A Memoir of His Father*, ed. Samuel Griffiths Tovey (Bristol, 1852), 257.

to create a Colston that fit their growing needs to reinforce hierarchy, the established church, and order in an industrializing Bristol where labor unrest was increasing. In this sense, proponents of the Marxist lens are correct. Even so, overreliance on this aspect of Colston's legacy leads to an incomplete, flawed analysis. Colston's memorialization was predominately about philanthropy and love of an idealized Bristol that never was. Garrard clearly overemphasized the English Civil War to serve his own purpose. Even in correcting this error, modern historians must still acknowledge the traumatic civil war in order to understand the inextricably linked religio-political views held by Edward Colston as an adult. If the goal really is historical accuracy, Colston narratives must consider his own context including events that preceded him and shaped his childhood. These defining events led to his using money and power to promote stability in the form of High Anglicanism in the Church of England and vehemently oppose Anglican Latitudinarians, Roman Catholics, and dissenter Protestants. This exclusive sectarianism grates against modern values of diversity and inclusiveness but was entirely consistent with Bristol's sectarian civic life before, during, and after Colston's era. In 1991, historian Mary Fissell wrote: "Both church and party divided the city, but the fracture lines created by religion probably ran deepest."⁵⁵ She speculated that Bristolian sectarianism had Lollard roots. In this divided city, Colston's support for the Church of England was unflinching and Anglican clerics in Bristol—with one notable exception—for centuries unquestioningly praised his charity as a result.

RELUCTANTLY REDISCOVERING THE HISTORICAL COLSTON SINCE 1920

The Rev. Henry J. Wilkins (1865-1941) was a scholarly vicar who served Westbury Parish in greater Bristol for forty-one years during

⁵⁵ Mary E. Fissell, *Patients, Power, and the Poor in Eighteenth-Century Bristol*, Cambridge History of Medicine, ed Charles Webster and Charles Rosenberg (Cambridge, 1991), 6-7.

the early twentieth century.⁵⁶ In 1920, he wrote *Edward Colston, a chronological account of his life and work*. The book presented a long Colston chronology including primary sources. It then concluded with Wilkins' short, damning analysis. This challenged Colston's cult-like status eleven years before *The Church Times* declared him "a Bristol saint." In his study, Wilkins wrote:

It is a thankless task to try to form a just estimate of the character of Edward Colston, when for so many years that has been distorted by fulsome adulation of his personality obscured by endless eulogies, which have little in them that has any relationship to historical accuracy. Yet this is more than necessary if we are "to see the man" as he really was.⁵⁷

Wilkins' critical pen described a heavy-handed Colston whose benevolence used the power of the purse to command deference, promote Tory politics, and cultivate sectarian High Church Anglicanism. Wilkins concluded that "Edward Colston must have been an extremely difficult man to co-operate with, owing to his temper and the obstinacy with which he asserted his own will."⁵⁸ Even so, records of Bristol Cathedral show that fawning annual celebrations of Colston continued. Yet, the vicar's book had some effect. Colston Day celebrations continued but the construction of new Colston monuments in common spaces slowed, then quietly stopped.

Despite Wilkins' well-documented study, several organizations continued celebrating the Colston legend they inherited. This was especially true of the Society of Merchant Venturers, Colston's Girls' School (CGS), and the Diocese of Bristol. Sadly, the cathedral ignored the vicar's study and continued to host annual services and dedicated a window on 12 January 1922 that includes the likeness of Colston alongside three other historically

⁵⁶ For more information on Wilkins see Richard Coates, *Wilkins of Westbury and Redland: The Life and Writings of the Rev. Dr. Henry John Wilkins (1865-1941)*, Avon Local History and Archaeology No. 24 (2017).

⁵⁷ H. J. Wilkins, *Edward Colston: A Chronological Account of His Life and Work together with an Account of the Colston Societies and Memorials in Bristol* (Bristol, 1920), 91.

⁵⁸ Wilkins, *Edward Colston*, 91-92.

important Bristolians. The window offers a one-word commentary under Colston's likeness, that of "philanthropist." The cathedral chapter's minutes refer to this interchangeably as the "King memorial" and "historical window."⁵⁹ Its four lights given in memory of Samuel J. King (1849-1919) were likely already under construction by the time Wilkins' book began circulating in 1920.

Evidence of Colston Day celebrations during the interwar period are documented in Bristol Cathedral's *Register of Services*. The 1930s volume often includes the scripture that visiting clergy expounded upon. For instance, the scripture used for Colston Day in 1935 was 1 Kings 21:3 and in 1936 it was 1 Corinthians 1:2.⁶⁰ Unfortunately, one piece of valuable information that the 1930s register lacks is the number of congregants. Nevertheless, records do include collection totals for offerings that may give some indication of attendance, or at least financial wherewithal, of worshippers at Colston Day services. In most instances, Colston Day offerings were marked for the Tory-affiliated Dolphin Society Benevolence Funds and are of higher values than average Sunday cathedral services. However, they are by no means the largest offerings listed on the folios. For example, in 1936 the Colston Day service yielded £12.15s.4d., which was dwarfed by a "Civic Commemoration" on Remembrance Sunday that gathered £27.13s.4d. benefitting the Earl Haig Fund.⁶¹ Similarly, giving during the 1939 "Colston Commemoration Service" was £15.9s.6d., roughly half of the £30.5s.9d. given for the Earl Haig Fund on Remembrance Sunday.⁶² In the 1930s Colston Day was a

⁵⁹ This window was dedicated in memoriam of Samuel James King, a Port of Bristol ship owner who died in 1919. Design by G. J. Hunt, made by Arthur Saulsby. It includes standing figures of Colston, John Cabot, William Worcester, and Samuel Wesley. See, M. Q. Smith, *The Stained Glass of Bristol Cathedral* (Bristol, 1983), 86; Meetings of 8 June 1921 and 27 July 1921, *Bristol Cathedral Chapter Minutes, 1901-1920*, Bristol Archives, DC/A/8/9; Observation, October 2018.

⁶⁰ *Bristol Cathedral Register of Services* (begins 22 May 1935, ends 8 January 1939), Bristol Archives, DC/A/15/1.

⁶¹ British Field Marshal Douglas Haig established the Earl Haig Fund in 1921 to assist veterans. It is better known in the United Kingdom today as the Poppy Appeal sponsored by the British Royal Legion.

⁶² *Bristol Cathedral Register of Services* (begins 22 May 1935, ends 8 January 1939), Bristol Archives, DC/A/15/1.

normal part of the November calendar at Bristol Cathedral second in significance only to Remembrance Day. World War II changed this.

No services related to Edward Colston occurred at Bristol Cathedral between 1940 and 1943. When the cathedral resumed Colston-related events the cathedral dean, Harry Blackburne, led the “Colston’s Girls’ School Commem. Service” on 17 November 1944.⁶³ This service resumed without any recorded discussion in the cathedral chapter’s minutes. This is significant as the dean and chapter were especially fussy about approving frequent requests for special services in the nave that were disrupting the regular rhythm of worship. This suggests the cathedral chapter did not consider Colston services to be extraordinary, but rather a regular part of the liturgical life of Bristol Cathedral.

War changed Bristol significantly. The German *Luftwaffe* damaged sections of the city including cathedral precincts and the Good Samaritan window given in memory of Colston. It also changed pre-war patterns related to Colston Day. In this case, the dean himself led the 1944 service, but the offering benefitted the Cathedral Appeal Fund and prisoners of war instead of the Dolphin Society. Additionally, the offerings for Colston-related events in the post-war years tended to be noticeably higher than all other cathedral services in November save Remembrance Sunday.⁶⁴ By 1948, the Dolphin Society resumed its place in the register as beneficiary of Colston Day offerings and the close relationship between the cathedral and Colston-related events is apparent in the 1950s register. The new dean, Francis Lunt (1900-1982), presided over the 1952 service for CGS while Bishop Frederic Arthur Cockin (1888-1969) officiated at the 1953 Colston Day service.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, the sermon delivered by the bishop is not among cathedral papers in the Bristol Archives.

⁶³ *Bristol Cathedral Register of Services* (begins 19 January 1939, ends 24 April 1948), Bristol Archives, DC/A/15/2.

⁶⁴ *Bristol Cathedral Register of Services* (begins 19 January 1939, ends 24 April 1948), Bristol Archives, DC/A/15/2.

⁶⁵ *Bristol Cathedral Register of Services* (begins 26 May 1952, ends 12 August 1956), Bristol Archives, DC/A/15/4.

The annual pattern of Colston-related commemorations in early November remained firmly in place for the remainder of the twentieth century. The cathedral register frequently includes the word “commemoration” near entries related to November services held by CGS, a nod to its purpose in honoring the philanthropic narrative of the school benefactor. During 1963, the CGS service in Bristol Cathedral coincided with All Saints’ Day.⁶⁶ One noticeable change in patterns during this period is that offerings during the CGS commemorations were noticeably higher than giving during other November services. For example, the recorded offering from the CGS Matins on Friday, 3 November 1967 amounted to £64.8s. compared to the next highest collection £17.8s.6d recorded on that register page.⁶⁷ Just over ten years later, the CGS service on 2 November 1979 coinciding with All Souls’ Day collected £229. The nearest Sunday collection (October 28) gathered £197.05 for all services combined while the Remembrance Sunday collection was £154.19.⁶⁸ For over fifty years, CGS commemorations resulted in higher-than-average offerings as Bristol Cathedral and CGS annually preserved the flawed Colston narrative they inherited.

A former leader of Colston’s Girls’ School provides a glimpse of these occasions in her 1991 history of the school. Sarah Dunn, who served as headmistress between 1954 and 1980, begins her book with the school’s annual cathedral service. She described the commemoration as Matins during which “everyone” wore bronze chrysanthemums—reportedly Colston’s favorite flower—which were “laid at the foot of Colston’s statue on the Centre” after the service in Bristol Cathedral. In Dunn’s view, “A member of the school in 1954, returning to Bristol in 1991 would find the hymns, the anthems and the readings reassuringly familiar.”⁶⁹

⁶⁶ *Bristol Cathedral Service Book*, (begins 20 September 1956, ends 13 February 1966), Bristol Archives, DC/A/15/5.

⁶⁷ *Bristol Cathedral Service Book*, (begins 8 January 1966, ends 3 February 1973), Bristol Archives, DC/A/15/6.

⁶⁸ *Bristol Cathedral Service Register, 1979-1985*, Bristol Archives DC/A/15/8. The ledger entry reflects the decimalized British pound sterling. Decimal Day in the United Kingdom occurred on 15 February 1971.

⁶⁹ Sarah Dunn, *Colston’s Girls’ School: The First Hundred Years* (Bristol, 1991), 172.

This is hardly reassuring as it confirms Colston commemorations occurring in the context of Anglican worship continued unexamined for nearly a century after Wilkins provided ample evidence to question the propriety of the Colston cult. Dunn's book made no mention of slavery, an omission now unthinkable.

The conversation surrounding slavery in Bristol changed significantly in the late 1990s. On 6 March 1999, Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery opened its exhibition "Bristol and Transatlantic Slavery." CGS alumnae must have been among the 160,000 exhibit visitors who discovered a very different side of Edward Colston. Near John Michael Rysbrack's 1726 *Bust of Colston* a placard read, "He was also actively involved in the transatlantic slave trade as an official of the London-based Royal African Company."⁷⁰ This fact went entirely unmentioned in Headmistress Dunn's school history just eight years prior. Similarly, publications about Bristol Cathedral began to acknowledge connections to the slave trade. John Rogan's *Bristol Cathedral: History and Architecture* published in 2000 mentions cathedral memorials having "connections with the infamous slave trade."⁷¹

The Anglican Diocese of Bristol began explicitly acknowledging its connections to Bristol's slave trading past in the early 2000s as shown in John Rogan's history of the cathedral. Visitors to Bristol Cathedral today will find mention of slavery in the guidebook for sale in the bookshop. Additionally, both Bristol Cathedral and St. Mary, Redcliffe, have installed placards to contextualize monuments. In the cathedral, a maroon sign under the Good Samaritan window draws attention to the origins of Colston's wealth and invites visitors to pray "for the victims of the transatlantic slave trade, to celebrate the courage and bravery of their descendants and to give thanks for the efforts of those who opposed it." It also includes the words of Isaiah 61:1-2.⁷²

In the Diocese of Bristol, 2017 was a watershed moment in changing Colston historiography. Nearly a century after Wilkins'

⁷⁰ Dresser and Giles, *Bristol and Transatlantic Slavery*, 16.

⁷¹ John Rogan, "Monuments of the Cathedral" in *Bristol Cathedral: History and Architecture*, John Rogan, ed., (Stroud, Gloucestershire: 2000), 118.

⁷² Observation, October 2018.

1920 publication, news reports in February 2017 disclosed then-cathedral dean David Hoyle's openness to replacing the cathedral's largest window.⁷³ CGS also radically departed from its past practices and announced to alumnae that Colston would not be mentioned during the annual Matins.⁷⁴ This was not entirely true. A few days later, Dean Hoyle preached at the Colston Day service held in St. Mary, Redcliffe. Tristan Cork, a skeptical local reporter, passed by the protestors and police guards to listen to the sermon. He observed choirs singing the same spirituals once sung by slaves seeking freedom. Cork quoted Hoyle as saying: "For 100 years or more, the trade saw 2,000 ships leave Bristol and 500,000 people from Africa went on those ships. Edward Colston was involved in that slave trade." Cork wrote, "The phrase 'went on those ships' scraped across the deck of the church like rattling chains."⁷⁵ After two centuries, Colston is no longer simply a "philanthropist." University of Bristol lecturer and Countering Colston member Joanna Burch-Brown has described actions taken by the cathedral and other Bristol organizations as being "unprecedented reparatory steps."⁷⁶ Yet, work remains.

CONCLUSION

The Colston debate in Bristol is not a discussion mired in the past. The sign placed under the cathedral's Good Samaritan window in October 2017 is a reminder of this. We all want heroes. Colston is not that hero. He is a flawed human being who gave money, lots of money. But that does not make him the saint once described by *The Church Times*. In May 2018, U.K. House of Commons chaplain Rose Hudson-Wilkin, the highest-ranking black

⁷³ Patrick Sawyer, "Bristol Cathedral may remove slave trader Edward Colston's window," *The Telegraph*, 21 February 2017, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/02/21/slave-trader-edward-colston-faces-defenestration-bristol-cathedral/ (accessed March 2019).

⁷⁴ Tristan Cork, "Colston's Girls' School Commemoration Day will not mention Edward Colston - but will remember slavery," *The Bristol Post*, 17 October 2017.

⁷⁵ Tristan Cork, "Buns, sermons, and slave songs – how slave trader Edward Colston was awkwardly commemorated on Anti-Slavery Day," *The Bristol Post*, 20 October 2017.

⁷⁶ Burch-Brown, "Is it Wrong to Topple Statues," 84.

clergywoman in the Church of England, now bishop of Dover and bishop in Canterbury, read the words of American abolitionist Frederick Douglass (1818-1895) to commemorate his 1846 visit to Bristol while he was virtually exiled from the United States.⁷⁷ Standing in the cathedral pulpit gazing around the nave and at that large window given in memory of Colston, Hudson-Wilkin read:

In this great temple, at every turn I see honoured those who I cannot count as good Christians. Men who benefited from the trade in flesh, and yet thought themselves godly, as if just works outweighed the monumental evil in which they were invested.⁷⁸

These seem like perfect words to hang on the cathedral wall near the window given in memory of Colston. By the late 1700s, Bristolians simplified Colston's biography to avoid these uncomfortable truths. Reducing Colston to an example of just works was in keeping with motives to downplay slavery. This promoted a narrative about a Bristol-born businessman who made his fortune in London and showered good works on his hometown. By the late 1800s, his likeness was placed on a plinth to have a philanthropic Tory hero next to the Liberal's Burke. These actions simplified the complexities of Colston by telling conveniently incomplete narratives. This is also one potential ramification of removing his likeness from city locations. Through all of this, Bristol has remained a deeply divided city along lines of race, class, and creed.⁷⁹ Through all of this, the Anglican Diocese of Bristol played a role.

In the twenty-first century, the church should not require protestors before it reckons with the sins of slavery and racism. Bristol Cathedral's efforts to candidly address racism and historical links to slavery exist thanks to pressure from historians and local activists. This reluctance contrasts with its more progressive role regarding women clergy and even current inclusion of a Muslim

⁷⁷ For more information about Douglass' tour of Britain and Ireland see, Laurence Fenton, *"I was Transformed": Frederick Douglass, An American Slave in Victorian Britain* (Gloucestershire, 2018).

⁷⁸ Adam Becket, "African-American abolitionist Frederick Douglass celebrated in Bristol," *Church Times*, 1 June 2018.

⁷⁹ Judith Evans, "Bristol, the slave trade and a reckoning with the past," *Financial Times*, 9 August 2018.

chorister in its cathedral choir.⁸⁰ Today the all-white leadership team of Bristol Cathedral is participating in a long overdue re-examination. Initiatives have included a publicly broadcast debate in February 2017 regarding possible removal of the window memorializing Colston and a month-long *Journey to Justice* exhibition in October 2017. The October exhibition included an examination of human rights issues past and present, including the Bristol Bus Boycott of 1963 and contemporary social justice issues. The cathedral hosted an opening lecture by theologian Robert Beckford, professor of Religion and Culture in the African Diaspora at Canterbury Christ Church University. Beckford, a frequent critic of racism in the Church of England, spoke about “the politics of memory,” “dangerous memory,” “American apartheid,” “sanitization of history,” and how we can rightly remember the 1960s Civil Rights movement to inform present justice struggles related to refugees, Islamophobia, and the gay community.⁸¹ That same month leaders of Bristol Cathedral installed a sign inviting pilgrims to remember and pray for victims while standing below the large Good Samaritan window given in memory of Colston. Dean Hoyle also participated in city-wide conversations about educational and employment disadvantages faced by ethnic minorities in Bristol and the cathedral hosted a May 2018 commemoration of American abolitionist Frederick Douglass’ visit to Bristol.⁸² Perhaps even more important is what

⁸⁰ The first ordination of women as priests in the Church of England occurred on 12 March 1994, when then bishop of Bristol, Barry Rogerson, ordained thirty-two women in Bristol Cathedral. The Rt. Rev. Vivienne Faull became the first woman installed as bishop of Bristol in 2018, four years after the Church of England began ordaining women as bishops. Faull has publicly stated she sees no theological problems with blessing gay relationships. Choir and leadership demographics based on observations made in October 2018.

⁸¹ Prof. Robert Beckford, “Journey to Justice Bristol Launch, October 2017, <https://soundcloud.com/user-623177219/prof-robert-beckford-at-tojbristol-launch> (accessed 20 May 2020).

⁸² The Very Rev. David Hoyle and Prof. Robert Beckford, “Should Bristol Cathedral remove a window dedicated to a seventeenth century MP, philanthropist, and slave trader?” *BBC Radio 4*, 26 February 2017, www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04v2g2c; “Journey to Justice exhibition,” *Bristol Cathedral*, October 2017, <https://bristol-cathedral.co.uk/whats-on/journey-to-justice-exhibition>; Adam Becket, “African-American abolitionist Frederick Douglass celebrated in Bristol,” *Church Times*, 1 June 2018; Tom Morris, “Bristol the most segregated

ended. Annual cathedral services for Colston's Girls' School no longer include readings from Colston's Last Will and Testament, promotions of a one-sided Colston legend, or wearing the slave trader's favorite flower.⁸³

Other churches might learn from steps taken at Bristol Cathedral. Similar dynamics exist in on-going re-appraisals regarding the ministries of former bishop of Chichester George Bell (1883-1958) and Residential Schools in Canada.⁸⁴ Likewise, the church should not ignore decolonization and Black Lives Matter movements. These movements invite humble self-reflection among Christians and further study by church historians. More work is required to understand ways lay and clerical leaders throughout the Anglican Communion are prompting, reacting to, ignoring, and participating in discussions regarding once overlooked and even buried information.

AFTERWORD

This study was awaiting publication when the chilling video of George Floyd's death in police custody sent shockwaves across the United States. The resulting protests reached across the Atlantic and re-energized the dormant debate in the west of England regarding the legacy of Colston. On 7 June 2020, Bristol became the subject of global news reports when the city's Colston statue was pulled down in a display of revolutionary, street theatre during a ten-thousand-person Black Lives Matter march. The statue was then dragged across a plaza and dumped into the River Avon. Responses

city in the UK? We're not having this," *Bristol Post*, 6 May 2018, www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/news-opinion/bristol-most-segregated-city-uk-1534458 (accessed March 2019).

⁸³ Historians will someday examine the dean and chapter's role in this debate when minute books and internal correspondence are publicly archived. One wonders what documents will reveal about candid internal discussions. Was the cathedral staff ahead of leaders at CGS and the Society of Merchant Venturers in embracing change? Actions by the dean and chapter suggest a greater willingness to discuss the complex legacy of slavery than actions by leaders at CGS and the Society of Merchant Venturers.

⁸⁴ Andrew McGowan, "Washing our Hands in Innocence: The Churches and Sexual Abuse," *Journal of Anglican Studies* 16 (May 2018): 1-6.

from leaders were divided along predictable partisan lines. Global news reports described Colston only as a slave trader with little or no mention of his philanthropy, which left readers and viewers to wonder why Bristolians would have erected a statue honoring Colston in the first place. It is important to remember that those who built Colston memorials saw him only as a philanthropist while those removing tributes view him only as an enslaver.⁸⁵

Soon after the Colston statue was toppled, I shared a pre-print of this study with leaders of the diocese and cathedral in Bristol. On 16 June Bishop Vivienne Faull announced that “prominent references” to Colston were being removed from Bristol Cathedral and St. Mary, Redcliffe. In her statement, the Lord Bishop wrote:

A cathedral or a church should be a place of sanctuary, justice and peace: a place where God’s glory is worshipped and God’s love is felt. The dedications to Colston, in two significant places of worship, has prevented many people from finding peace in these beautiful buildings. These dedications have either been removed or covered.⁸⁶

Faull also publicly committed to addressing institutional racism and to recruit and support more Black, Asian, and other minority ethnic people (BAME) to enter ordained ministry in the Diocese of Bristol.⁸⁷ This announcement came just before her predecessor, Mike Hill, withdrew from public ministry in relation to accusations of racism under investigation by a Church of England tribunal. In a statement published by the U.K. *Church Times*, Hill wrote that he had used “racial stereotypes which were unacceptable and offensive” in making staffing decisions.⁸⁸ This is the

⁸⁵ For a relevant ethics essay, partly in response to Burch-Brown, regarding objections to the honorific function of Colston memorials and recontextualization see Benjamin Cohen Rossi, “False Exemplars: Admiration and the Ethics of Public Monuments,” *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 18 (July 2020): 60-61, 67-68.

⁸⁶ The Rt. Rev. Vivienne Faull, “A Statement on Colston Windows,” *Bristol Cathedral*, 16 June 2020, <https://bristol-cathedral.co.uk/news/a-statement-on-colston-windows> (accessed 24 June 2020).

⁸⁷ “Statement of the Rt Revd Vivienne Faul, Bishop of Bristol,” *Diocese of Bristol*, 11 June 2020, www.bristol.anglican.org/news/statement-from-the-rt-revd-vivienne-faull-bishop-of-bristol-.php (accessed 24 June 2020).

⁸⁸ Mark Michael, “Retired English Bishop Steps Down in Racism Inquiry,” *The Living Church*, 15 June 2020, <https://livingchurch.org/2020/06/15/retired->

same bishop who was once criticized for suggesting Colston's ties to slavery were merely speculative. Looking ahead, the Colston legacy and lessons learned while he was dean of Bristol are now influencing David Hoyle's next steps as leader of London's Westminster Abbey. In a June 2020 reflection in which he suggested some memorials in the abbey may need to go, he wrote:

The idea that history is static, that events happen and then more events follow and we just keep a record does not work. Historians are forever reassessing the significance of a moment or an individual, things come in and out of focus. Put another way, statues tend to have a life cycle, they come and go. We remembered Colston one way, we will remember him another, and in time perhaps differently again.⁸⁹

These views may resonate with historians but likely have less traction in much of the United Kingdom where Whig historiography continues to shape popular understanding.⁹⁰ Church historians must play a role in better bridging the gap between academic history and popular history to help Christians develop a more nuanced, accurate view of history in order to make informed decisions about their church fabrics and what they communicate to worshippers and visitors alike.⁹¹

english-bishop-steps-down-in-racism-inquiry/ (accessed 24 June 2020); "Bishop Mike Hill withdraws from public ministry during racism inquiry," *The Church Times*, 12 June 2020, www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2020/19-june/news/uk/bishop-mike-hill-withdraws-from-public-ministry-during-racism-inquiry (accessed 24 June 2020).

⁸⁹ The Very Rev. David Hoyle, "A Reflection on History," *Westminster Abbey*, 12 June 2020, www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-news/reflection-history (accessed 24 June 2020).

⁹⁰ Samuel J. Richards, review of *Divided Kingdom: A History of Britain, 1900 to the Present* by Pat Thane, and *A History of the British Isles*, 4th ed., by Jeremy Black, *Anglican and Episcopal History* (forthcoming).

⁹¹ Scholarship of church historians can complement studies of post-colonial theologians. For relevant discussion see, William A. Dyrness, "Listening for Fresh Voices in the History of the Church," in *Teaching Global Theologies: Power and Praxis*, ed. Kwok Pui-lan, Cecilia González-Andrieu, and Dwight N. Hopkins (Waco, 2015): 29-44; Ian T. Douglas and Kwok Pui-lan, eds. *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism: The Anglican Communion in the Twenty-First Century* (New York, 2001); Gordon L. Heath and Steven M. Studebaker, eds., *The Globalization of Christianity: Implications for Christian Ministry and Theology*, McMaster Theological Studies Series (Eugene, 2014).