

From streets to front pages: The Media Stories of Contested Statues of enslavers and colonial figures since 2020

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Abstract:

News coverage in the summer of 2020 was dominated by the toppling and removal of statues of enslavers and colonial figures during the Black Lives Matter protests that followed the murder of George Floyd. This was particularly the case in the UK, France and Belgium where several monuments were attacked, forcibly taken down or officially removed.

Since then, what has happened to these contested statues and monuments? How has the public debate surrounding them evolved over time? To explore these questions, this presentation focuses on how the written press has covered contested statues of enslavers and colonial figures since 2020. It asks: which events were highlighted by the media, why were they chosen, and to what end?

Adopting a thematic and chronological approach, the presentation compares and contrasts a selection of newspapers in the UK, Belgium, and France.

The written press was selected because newspapers remain one of the most influential sources of public information. They do more than report events—they frame them, deciding what to feature, which voices to amplify, and how to present complex or controversial issues. By analysing the written press, this presentation offers insight into how public opinion is shaped over time and how certain narratives about statues, history, and identity are created, reinforced, challenged, or reimagined.