



**massa:** On the topic of religious art, I wanted to ask you about how things like the statue of Robert E. Lee represent religious art from the standpoint of civic religion and why that might be an important way to approach this. How are the statue of Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville and statues like it religious art? What role does that play in generating the kind of emotion and energy that we have seen in all of this?

**deleeuw:** The distinction between civic and religious is useful and necessary but insufficient for our understanding of what those statues mean. Taking them down is a kind of iconoclasm, right? These are icons. These are holy objects whether they're civil or religious. The answer of course is both, especially in the United States, where the notion of American civil religion as a sociological notion goes back hundreds of years.

I think it is a very meaningful notion, especially for the American South. There was that "War of Northern Aggression" in the middle of the 19th century. It was a "lost cause." But the Robert E. Lees and Jefferson Davises – and even more the Confederate soldiers who are often depicted in those statues – those are the martyrs in that "lost cause." And the "South shall rise again." All of that – the trappings of civil religion are meaningful in the South.

I've thought as well, we Catholics have statues in our churches – inside the

down, you've ripped something from the hearts of people, because those heroes are the people about whom we tell stories, the people who we try to emulate. They are a part of our past, and they should be there where they always are.

One of my favorite stories about the taking down of the statues is told by a

the half-shell. When you take the statue

plinth itself will be considered a kind of a sacred object.

**massa:** A good friend of mine wrote a book about the “lost cause.” The “lost cause” is the invention of a southern civil religion 30 years after the end of the Civil War, in which the “lost cause” was basically that the South lost, but they were the side of the good against the aggressive, secular North, and Robert E. Lee was the savior figure. In a sense, Robert E. Lee becomes the Jesus figure of this cult of the civil religion of the “lost cause.” The removal, and even the discussion of the removal of that statue, generates the same kind of energy that was unleashed in England in the 16th century.

**deleeuw:** Exactly. England in the 16th century as an example is a very interesting one. The 16th century Protestant reformation largely worked in England. It was largely successful.

**massa:** But it took a long time.

**deleeuw:** It took a long time, and it was on-again, off-again, depending on who was in power. There may be something peculiar about the English. I think about this a lot as I think about the 16th century Protestant Reformation in England as an example of an iconoclasm that gradually, over time, worked. The English go along and get along.

**massa:** Civility is high on their list.

**deleeuw:** Civility, keep calm and carry on. There wasn't as much dissent; it wasn't widespread. There weren't very many martyrs. By and large, the statues came down because they had, in many places at least, lost the significance that they had once had. So there are successful iconoclasm.

**massa:** Those statues are replaced by the king's arms, so in place of the Virgin, over the high altar was the king's escutcheon.

**deleeuw:** Exactly. In Protestant churches, where they don't have statues, they have scripture instead of the statue, after

accepting the notion of Sola Scriptura. The Protestant Reformation in England,

**deleeuw:** There's a perfect example. People are hushed. We attach religious meaning to all kinds of things. There was a traveling show from the Victoria and Albert Museum that had many artifacts, including a dress that was worn by Princess Diana. There was the dress on a mannequin. Next to the dress, there was a photograph of Diana wearing it. A little cluster of women gathered around the dress – and it was only women. We stood around. We didn't say a thing. There was hush. You could hear a snuffle occasionally. And then people moved on. But it was like being in a church. We were visiting a shrine. We need to appreciate the fact that this is important, and all of this meaning attaches to those statues.

**massa:** Yes, which is unfortunate. I think you're right that a place like Boston College affords us the ability to take religion into the mix and say there are religious overtones here that are strangely absent from the larger discussion in *The New York Times* and other conversations.

**deleeuw:** Exactly. Maybe this is an example of an iconoclasm whose time has come. Maybe there won't be the kind of conversation or anxiety that we're hoping to allay to some extent with these kinds of conversations. Maybe the statues have already lost some of their meaning, as maybe some of the saints did in the 16th century. Time will tell, but that part of the history of the American South, of the American nation, really needs to be told because when you and I were in school, we learned that the Civil War was about states' rights. Now we know that the Civil War was about slavery. If it was about states' rights, as we, even in the North learned, then one can see that Robert E. Lee is a noble character. If the war in fact was about slavery, he becomes tainted. Either way, we need to tell the story of what happened to the extent we know, and we also need to tell the story of our understanding of what happened.

**massa:** The thing that strikes me about this whole event is that having a monu-

ment – Robert E. Lee on horseback – to the “lost cause” is fine. The problem is the meaning of the monument gets hijacked. In this case, the myth of the “lost cause” gets hijacked by people who have other purposes – and tied explicitly to a racist understanding. Statues don't have intrinsic meaning.

**deleeuw:** These statues may belong to some mythic notion of the Civil War that people in 2017 have. But, in fact, they are about slavery.

**massa:** It's like the road that goes down to Cape Cod—the Grand Army of the Republic Highway. That road was built in the 1930s. It was not built in the 1870s, but at the same time as the Robert E. Lee statue. It takes long for us to come to grips with the meaning of the civil religion. It's only later – a half-century later – that the Daughters of the Confederacy, groups that we think of as emerging directly out of the Civil War are formed, and D. W. Griffith's film, *The Birth of a Nation* is produced. What was the meaning of that for us?

**deleeuw:** Our understanding of the past changes. Archeology is giving us all kinds of new ways to think about this. I had never seen before films of the 1920s and '30s – the marches of the Ku Klux Klan in American cities. I didn't see that

stuff when I was in school. I assume you didn't either. Now we're seeing it.

**massa:** It's the use of history. The Robert E. Lee statue is representative of the uses of history by a later generation, just as the attempt to keep it there in 2017 is an even later use of history by a generation that was not involved in the erection of that statue.

**nuelle:** We use the history of Nazi Germany and the way that the German people have really taken pains to make that history known. But what are the practical ways that we can start to reevaluate our history in ways that are lasting?

