

Are We Erasing History?



Or is the time for racial reckoning
finally upon us?

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CEEW Wishes You to Know

By consensus, the board recognizes that a group of members decided to hold their own forum on Judaism and Current Events.

Views expressed during conversations may not necessarily be those of CEEW.

Upcoming Discussions

- ▶ 10/27. Electoral College: What is it and why is it so important? (Marcy Hotz)
- ▶ 11/3 Covid Etiquette: Reinventing the 'niceties' in a COVID world. (Pati Allen Brickman)
- ▶ 11/10 Open Discussion: Looking Forward...
- ▶ We will then take a long winter break until late spring when we will reinvent and reconvene.

Opening Prayer

A prayer for peace in times of trouble

Lord, give us peace that we may shine brightly in a dark world. Grant us the courage to live faithfully to our highest values even in the midst of hard times. Let our faith in each other be the beginning of wisdom and compassion rather than allowing fear to drive our actions.

Help us to live strongly in the midst of a world that needs to know peace. We pray for our brothers, sisters and LBGTQI siblings of the world, for we are of one family.

Show us mercy and heal those who are suffering in times of trouble and plague. Most of all, inspire us to restore the world and make all things new.

Amen.

Discussion Guidelines

1. This is a **discussion**, not a debate.
2. Everyone is encouraged to **participate** but feel free to just **listen**.
3. Try to keep your contributions **concise** and to the point.
4. **Raise** your hand to signify your wish to speak.
5. Please **fact-check** your sources.
6. **Listen** to and respect other points of view.
7. Seek first to **understand**, not to be understood.
8. **Mute** yourself if you have background noise.
9. **Be thoughtful. Be kind.**

The Jewish Perspective on Remembering

- The act of remembering recurs throughout Judaism: Our calendar is full of remembrances from our past.
- Our memories of bondage should remind us to wipe out slavery and to treat all people with dignity.
- Our memories of leaving the corners of our fields untouched should remind us to take care of “the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow” both within and outside our community.
- We do not live in a state of forgetfulness or “forgottenness” but in a state of memory and consciousness that induces us to seek to make the world a better place.

From a commentary on Parashat Ki Teitzei by Richard Abrams,
myjewishlearning.com

The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history.

“‘Who controls the past,’ ran the Party slogan, ‘controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.’”

George Orwell 1984



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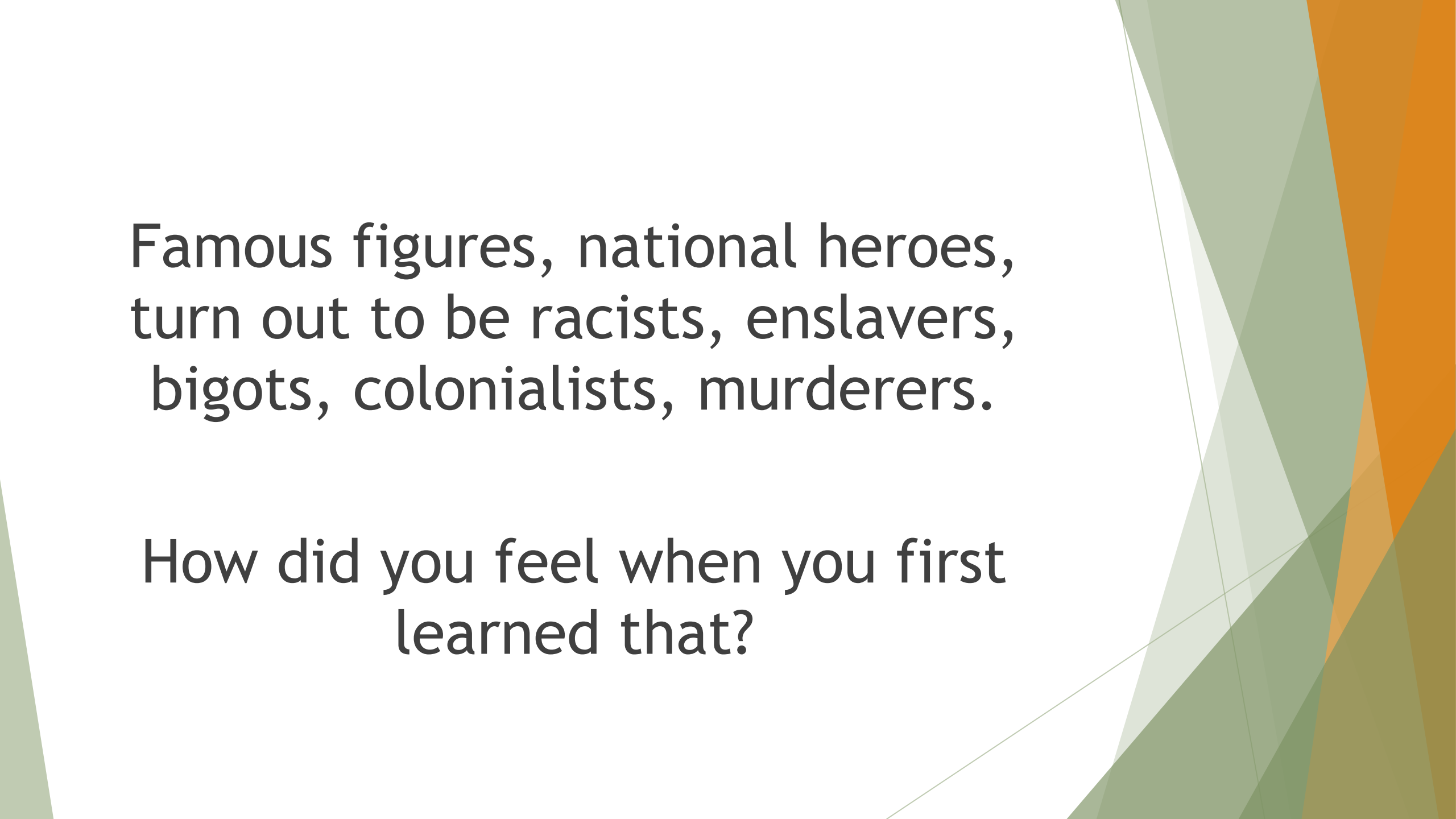
"Welcome to American History, get
out your erasers and we'll begin!"

What do remember being taught about these famous figures and symbols of American History?

- ▶ Christopher Columbus Brave explorer, discovered America
- ▶ George Washington Father of our country, could not tell a lie
- ▶ Thomas Jefferson Statesman, author of Declaration of Independence
- ▶ Abraham Lincoln Honest Abe, freed the slaves, saved the Union
- ▶ Ulysses S. Grant Led the Union Armies to victory over the Confederacy
- ▶ Teddy Roosevelt Author of the Square Deal, the great conservationist
- ▶ Woodrow Wilson Progressive reformist, architect of the League of Nations
- ▶ Henry Ford Industrialist, paid high wages for mass producing affordable cars

What we know now:

- ▶ **Christopher Columbus** Murderous, enslaving, sexual-abusing, treacherous colonizer.
- ▶ **George Washington** Dentures made of slave's teeth, advocated genocide of recalcitrant natives.
- ▶ **Thomas Jefferson** Calculated a 4% per annum profit for negroes' 'increase' (births).
- ▶ **Abraham Lincoln** Believed the slave problem should be solved by forced deportation.
- ▶ **Ulysses S. Grant** A drunk, ended the Indian treaty system making them wards of the gov't.
- ▶ **Teddy Roosevelt** A racial nationalist, America should only be for racially superior Europeans.
- ▶ **Woodrow Wilson** Racist, oversaw unprecedented re-segregation in federal offices.
- ▶ **Henry Ford** Virulently anti-Semitic, nativist, racist, anti-labor, anti-immigrant.



Famous figures, national heroes,
turn out to be racists, enslavers,
bigots, colonialists, murderers.

How did you feel when you first
learned that?

When we remove statues,
monuments, and flags, rename
buildings, streets, towns and
teams, are we erasing history or
are we remembering it?

How can we contextualize these statues?

Where do we stop after the Confederate statues are all down?

As more monuments come down, what will we put in their place?



Dec 17, 2019 — SOUTHIN' OFF:
The South is full of heroes who
didn't support slavery, but you'd
never guess that by looking at our
statues.

Are sport team names offensive or just politically incorrect?

- ▶ **Kansas City Chiefs (NFL)** - will not change their name but may stop their tomahawk chop and discourage fans from wearing headdresses and face paint in the stadium.
- ▶ **Atlanta Braves (MLB)** - will not change their name but may end the tomahawk chop.
- ▶ **Cleveland Indians (MLB)** - are considering a name change for 2021.
- ▶ **Washington Redskins (NFL)** - decided in June to change their name, new name TBA.
- ▶ **Chicago Blackhawks (NHL)** - will not change their name, named in honor of the U.S. 86th Infantry Division which was named after Black Hawk, a Native American chief who was the leader of the Sauk and who sided with the British in the War of 1812. The name of the team and the Blackhawk helicopter are an example of designating certain Native Americans as 'worthy adversaries.'

How do we reconcile with our racist history?

Can we take lessons from how Germany reconciled with its Nazi past or how South Africa reconciled with its apartheid?

What would reconciliation look like?

A Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

Education initiatives?

Reparations?

Statues of civil rights heroes?

Other ideas?

Removing statues and renaming buildings: Where do we draw the line?

‘When one considers the number of American streets, municipalities, states, public buildings, public school buildings, university buildings and universities named in honor of individuals who were either slave owners during the time of slavery in the United States or who expressed racist views, one must wonder “Where will we draw the line?”

The problem is what we historians call presentism. Presentism is when we look backward in time to condemn or condone historical figures for living in their own time in history — instead of adopting today’s attitudes and norms. Rendering judgment on our predecessors is rarely cut-and-dry. Historians strive to understand what people said and did in the context of the time in which they lived, and not to criticize them for failing to live in our time. Presentism reminds us to be humble. You find yourself looking at a building or a statue and wondering, “What were they thinking back then? Why did they put up that statue or name that building in honor of that person?” **You would be well to remember that 100 years from now our successors are going to say the same thing about the buildings we named and the statues we put up.’**

History is always responding to
the history that was written
before it.



CARTOONSTOCK
Campbell.
Search ID: mcan720

"It may seem dull to you now, Harry, but at one time,
everything in that book was breaking news."

References and Resources

- ▶ Remember, Don't Forget, Commentary on Parashat Ki Teitzei, Deuteronomy 21:10-25:19: <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/remember-dont-forget/>
- ▶ Removing Statues is not Erasing History: <https://www.startribune.com/removing-statues-is-not-erasing-history/571216862/>
- ▶ We don't erase history by pulling statues down. We do it by putting them up. Washington Post, Everything Perspective by Benjamin J. Dueholm August 23, 2017
- ▶ 'The rush to remove monuments and statues around the country has become a misguided effort to remove the nation's history.' https://thetandd.com/opinion/editorial/editorial-erasing-history-is-a-mistake/article_53fd23d4-02a7-5fd9-92a7-6649c45a68fd.html
- ▶ 'Destroying Confederate monuments isn't 'erasing' history. It's learning from it.' <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/06/19/destroying-confederate-monuments-isnt-erasing-history-its-learning-it/>

References and Resources, cont.

- ▶ Chicago Blackhawks name and logo controversy: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_Blackhawks_name_and_logo_controversy
- ▶ Here's a new way to deal with Confederate monuments: Signs that explain their racist history, by Hannah Nation, The Washington Post, September 22, 2019
- ▶ Racial Equity Resource Guide pdf: <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles>
- ▶ Other Nations Could Learn From Germany's Efforts to Reconcile After WWII: <https://hub.jhu.edu/magazine/2015/summer/germany-japan-reconciliation/>
- ▶ Where do we draw the line?: <https://www.lohud.com/story/opinion/2020/06/29/removing-statues-and-renaming-buildings-where-do-we-draw-line/3277822001/>