

Vandalized statues bring bigger issues to light in New Zealand city

By Eleanor Ainge Roy, The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff on 08.09.16

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Monument to Captain James Cook, Poverty Bay, North Island, New Zealand. Photo: Tim Graham/Getty Images

Statues of Captain Cook are being intentionally damaged in the New Zealand city of Gisborne. This vandalism has sparked a heated debate about the portrayal of the town's complicated colonial history.

Over a three-week period a statue of Captain James Cook has been smeared in paint and had a bikini and sandals painted on it. The statue was given to the city in 1969 by a beer company.

Two other statues of the English sea captain in the city have also been smeared with red paint on their faces and pockets.

Backlash Against Captain Cook

Cook, a sea captain in the late 1700s, was the first European to explore New Zealand and Australia. With the 250th anniversary of Cook's landing in New Zealand only three years away, tensions are high in Gisborne, 350 kilometers southeast of Auckland. Many residents

have taken to social media to express their opinions. They describe Cook as a “murderer” and “crooked Cook.” Other posts call for one of the statues to be pulled down, saying it is insulting to local Maori, the native people of New Zealand.

Cook and the crew of the ship Endeavour landed in Gisborne’s Poverty Bay in 1769 and the first significant meetings of Europeans and Maori took place nearby.

Nick Tupara, spokesman for the Ngati Oneone tribe, said that according to historical records, Cook’s crew shot nine Maori men of his tribe, including Tupara’s ancestors. Six of the men are believed to have died.

Vandalism Is Not The Answer

It has been debated whether the first statue is an accurate representation of Cook. But Tupara says the English explorer is an undeniable part of Gisborne’s “story.” He has urged the community to embark on a calm and measured discussion of their history instead of carrying out “wasteful” acts of vandalism. He has also made the point that he and his fellow Maori are a part of Cook’s ancestry as well.

“Defacing our city is a poor method of showing dissension with our past,” he said.

Tupara said that street names, parks and public places named after Cook and the Endeavour are found all over Gisborne. However, public references or memorials to historical Maori leaders were lacking. He said this inequality should be addressed: “It is clear from the recent vandalism and heated social media discussion that historical wounds run deep and that there is more healing that needs to happen – and I do think there should be more balance in the portrayal of our history.”

One suggestion, which appears to have strong support, is to replace the statue of Cook with one of the Maori leader of Ngati Oneone from the time of Cook’s landing, Rakaiatane. Another suggestion is to have the two statues placed side by side.

Growing Tension To Be Discussed

Gisborne mayor Meng Foon said there were no leads on who was responsible for the vandalism. The council will meet with Ngati Oneone to discuss the growing tension, he said.

“Emotions are running pretty high about Cook at the moment, especially for local Maori who lost ancestors,” said Foon.

The process of reconciliation between the government and local Maori “is still a work in progress,” Foon said. “I think the recent vandalism has shown how much work there is still to be done.”

“But it is important to acknowledge all aspects of our history, good and bad. If Ngati Oneone decide they would like a statue of Rakaiatane erected, I think that would be welcomed.”

Quiz

- 1 According to the article, there is a problematic underrepresentation of native heritage and significance in Gisborne. Which paragraph in the section "Vandalism Is Not The Answer" BEST supports this idea?

- 2 All four sentences given below help make the claim that recent events have incited controversy around the historical depiction of Captain Cook. Which of the following is the STRONGEST piece of evidence to support the claim?
 - (A) They describe Cook as a "murderer" and "crooked Cook."
 - (B) But Tupara says the English explorer is an undeniable part of Gisborne's "story."
 - (C) "Emotions are running pretty high about Cook at the moment, especially for local Maori who lost ancestors," said Foon.
 - (D) "I think the recent vandalism has shown how much work there is still to be done."

- 3 How do the viewpoints of Tupara and Foon relate to one another?
 - (A) They disagree with one another on whether a new statue of Rakaiatane should be erected in the city.
 - (B) They are in agreement with one another that the city's history should be represented in a more equal manner.
 - (C) They disagree with one another on whether public places throughout the city should be renamed in honor of Maori.
 - (D) They are in agreement with one another that the solution to the issue is to replace monuments of Cook with monuments of Maori.

- 4 Which of the following options BEST represents the author's main purpose in the article?
 - (A) to argue for a specific course of action to be taken
 - (B) to provide balanced evidence for each side of an issue
 - (C) to describe the present problem and potential solutions
 - (D) to compare and contrast differing opinions about the situation

Answer Key

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Paragraph 8:

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