

Tearing Down the Greats and the 'Democratic Spirit'

Imagine a white male carrying an American flag, wearing a Trump t-shirt, and accessorizing with a MAGA hat. Now imagine him looking at a wall of pictures memorializing various black individuals killed by police – and imagine him doing so within Seattle's newly established autonomous zone, CHOP. If you think that sounds like a recipe for disaster, then you're right.

A video which surfaced earlier this week on "[The Daily CHOP](#)," a twitter handle showing scenes of life in the autonomous zone, gives just such a picture. The man is soon surrounded by several young women who chew him out for his presence in the CHOP, claiming that he, along with the silent expressions of his opinion were "traumatic" and "traumatizing" to them.

Subsequent videos show a fight over his flag, with members of the CHOP arguing amongst themselves. Some advocated for violence while others tried to reason with their comrades and say that he has a right to protest and not be accosted by those angry with his views.

But I don't want to focus on the video. I want to focus on that word, "trauma." After hearing it repeated over and over in the dialogue, I was reminded of one of my favorite lines from C.S. Lewis' [Screwtape Proposes a Toast](#). The line is uttered by the demon Screwtape, exulting over the devil's success in transforming the education systems of democratic societies. He notes that equality, the key characteristic of democracies, infects schools, particularly when advanced children are held back for fear of giving less advanced children "a 'trauma'—Beelzebub, what a useful word!—by being left behind."

Screwtape, I realized, is talking about democracies and their effectiveness for his cause. "'Democracy,' declares Screwtape, "is the word with which you must lead them by the nose." He continues:

It will never occur to them that 'democracy' is properly the name of a political system, even a system of voting, and that this has only the most remote and tenuous connection with what you are trying to sell them. Nor, of course, must they ever be allowed to raise Aristotle's question: whether 'democratic behavior' means the behavior that democracies like or the behavior that will preserve a democracy. For if they did, it could hardly fail to occur to them that these need not be the same.

This is curious. Truly, it seems that there is no word Americans love throwing around more so than "democracy." Yet is it possible that such devotion to democracy can lead to its undoing? As Screwtape says, democracy demands equality, and equality in turn leads to pulling others down to level the playing field. But the worst (or best, in Screwtapian language) is yet to come.

What I want to fix your attention on is the vast, over-all movement toward the discrediting, and finally the elimination, of every kind of human excellence—moral, cultural, social or intellectual. And is it not pretty to notice how democracy—in the incantatory sense—is now doing for us the work that was once done by the most ancient dictatorships, and by the same methods? ... Cut them all down to a level; all slaves, all ciphers, all nobodies. All equals. Thus tyrants could practice, in a sense, 'democracy.' But now 'democracy' can do the same work without any other tyranny than her own.

Think of the statue-toppling movement for a moment. These statues represent the great figures in our history and are now even reaching the father of our country, [George Washington](#). Were these men flawed? Of course they were, but so is everyone

currently on this earth. These men, however, accomplished great things, things that many of us can never even aspire to. In cutting them down, angry mobs are externally decrying their faults. But what if today's Americans just don't like the great deeds of Americans past? What if they don't want to be reminded of the chasm which separates their great thoughts and exploits from our own miniscule achievements today?

Screwtape continues:

For 'democracy' or the 'democratic spirit' (diabolical sense) leads to a nation without great men, a nation mainly of subliterates, morally flaccid from lack of discipline in youth, full of the cocksureness which flattery breeds on ignorance, blustering or whimpering if rebuked. And this is what Hell wishes every democratic people to be. ...

It is our function to encourage the behavior, the manners, the whole attitude of mind, which democracies naturally like and enjoy, because these are the very things which, if unchecked, will destroy democracy.

Which brings us back to those young ladies in the video I mentioned. They seemed sure of their rights to demand that such a traumatic sight be removed from their view. They seemed sure of their right to be disrespectful, and to not advance a serious argument. But is it these manners, this idea of taking everyone down a notch to promote the democratic notion of equality, the thing that will be the undoing of the society that has for so long given us the freedoms we enjoy?

There's a certain line from an old, often cast-off book [which declares](#), "Professing themselves wise, they became fools." And that, my friends, seems to summarize exactly where we are at, having adopted Screwtape's "democratic spirit."

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[Image Credit: Pexels]