

UNLEASHING THE LION'S ROAR: A GRASS-ROOTS COUNTER-CAMPAIGN AND THE MEMORIALISATION OF THE 'GLORIOUS' BRITISH EMPIRE

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2020, as statues honouring slavers and imperialists were toppled or removed in response to the Black Lives Matter movement, a fierce debate erupted among the UK public and press over whether such statues should be purged or preserved in Britain's public spaces.¹ A prominent protagonist in these discussions was Topple The Racists (TTR), whose website mapped over sixty monuments and statues around Britain with alleged historic links to "colonial violence," urging the public to "learn from, not venerate" the grim chapters in Britain's colonial past.² One of the monuments cited by TTR was "Lendy Lion" in the public Walled Garden in Sunbury-on-Thames, erected in 1895 "as a tribute to the memory of two brave men," Captain Charles Lendy and Captain Edward Lendy. The memorial inscription to the two local brothers laments that Edward Lendy was "Killed in action 23 December 1893 at Warina West Africa aged 25" and Charles Lendy "died in Bulawayo South Africa 15 January 1894 aged 30 from the effects of the Matabele campaign throughout which he served in command of the guns with indefatigable zeal and conspicuous bravery."³ TTR contest the glorification of the Lendy brothers' military heroism in Africa, arguing instead that the affectionately named Lendy Lion is a "Memorial statue to remember two colonising brothers ... both responsible for murdering African tribes with machine gun fire."⁴

TTR's allegation sparked an immediate response from local residents in Sunbury who initiated a counter-campaign denouncing the allegations against the Lendy brothers as "incorrect and slanderous" and calling for a public petition to "Save the Lendy Memorial Lion #SaveLendy."⁵ The #SaveLendy counter-campaign is remarkable for two reasons: it is a rare (perhaps the only) example of a community-based grass roots campaign forming to

defend the reputation of British colonialists in Africa and the preservation of a memorial honouring their legacy in the UK, and to date it was successful.

The recent boom in studies on colonial statues bears witness to the global “statue wars” waged in response to the unfinished business of decolonisation and civil rights campaigns for racial and social justice. The emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2013 drew worldwide attention to the public iconography of slavery and imperialism and the enduring social and political harm encoded in such statuary narratives and ideologies. Two years later, University of Cape Town students successfully launched the #RhodesMustFall campaign to remove the statue of Cecil Rhodes from their campus, giving birth to a “radical decolonial movement,” which the student activists named Fallism, to signify the particular political impulse at the heart of this new form of twenty-first century iconoclasm, where the removal of such statues and monuments from public spaces “operates as a means of political struggle and as a form of political engagement.”⁶ Fallism rapidly became a global phenomenon as statues and monuments honouring men who defended slavery or committed violence and genocide in the name of colonial conquest and imperial gain were toppled or removed from public spaces around the world, most famously Confederate General Robert E Lee, King Leopold II of Belgium, Edward Colston, and Christopher Columbus. It is not unsurprising that the scholarship on iconoclasm and Fallism share an overwhelming focus on the triumphant toppling of controversial statues and monuments and on the groups and communities who instigated their fall. This has, however, resulted in a conspicuous absence of research into cases where Fallism has failed in the face of grass-roots campaigns to preserve colonial statues and monuments. A notable exception to this is the work of Richard Drayton on the campaigns to resist the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes from the facade of Oriel College, Oxford, and the statue of Lord Nelson in Bridgetown, Barbados.⁷ We seek to further develop the emerging scholarship on “anti-

Fallism” by exploring the aims and motives of those who defended the Lendy brothers’ memorial in 2020. The #SaveLendy counter-campaign’s defence was based on similar arguments made by other anti-Fallist counter-campaigns, including Rhodes in Oxford and Nelson in Barbados, namely: the defence of “heritage,” an opposition to the “erasure of history,” and deference to the “historical context.” However, what is unique about the #SaveLendy counter-campaign is that it not only sought to preserve the Lendy memorial, but also to *exonerate* the reputation of British colonialists in Africa, and it secured the support of local government who conspired to distort and suppress the historical record on Charles Lendy’s crime. This article therefore investigates how one campaign to debunk the myth of Britain’s “glorious” imperial past gave birth to another grass-roots counter-campaign to successfully defend it. Through the uncovering of British colonial documents preserved in *The National Archives*, the article establishes the truth behind TTR’s claims and #SaveLendy’s counterclaims about Charles Lendy’s actions in Africa, with a view to setting the public historical record straight. Past and present events are necessarily interwoven in this study as we locate the echoing motivations and ideologies of those who erected the Lendy memorial in 1895 and those who led the #SaveLendy counter-campaign in 2020. What emerges is that the Lendy memorial was as much a controversial “statement in stone”⁸ in the nineteenth century as it was to become, again, in the twenty-first century. Through the revival of same-old arguments, voiced over a century ago, advocating a gilded view of British imperialism, based on the deliberate distortion of historical evidence, we reveal how anti-Fallist campaigners have become an organ for a nationalist sentiment and ideology which opposes and ridicules progressive racial politics and social justice activism as unpatriotic and “woke.” The article thus highlights the political meaning and significance of the successful defence of contested statues as part of past-present “culture wars” and current public and political demands for racial and social justice.

GRASSROOTS COUNTER-CAMPAIGNING AND THE ALLEGED ERASURE OF HISTORY

Following TTR's naming of more than sixty statues and monuments honouring slavers and imperialists, dozens of local councils across the UK launched reviews into the historical backgrounds of the landmarks, memorials and monuments under their authority.⁹ On June 17, 2020, Spelthorne Borough Council (SBC) hastily boarded up the Lendy brothers' memorial, fearing it would be vandalised or toppled, and a local grass-roots counter-campaign #SaveLendy was swiftly formed by Spelthorne resident, Philip Sivy, who launched a petition attracting over two thousand signatures to protest the memorial's removal.¹⁰ To date, we have found no evidence that any group or organisation called for it to be torn down.¹¹ #SaveLendy was a locally led manifestation of a broader national political and cultural anti-Fallist trend which attracted widespread publicity and support through a newly formed nationwide counter-campaign, Save Our Statues (SOS), founded by Robert Poll, a self-styled "heritage campaigner."¹²

Spelthorne Borough Council initiated its own review of council owned monuments in July 2020, when it contacted the authors of this article, who are professional Historians based at a university local to Sunbury, with a research record in the field of British colonial and imperial histories, to conduct academic research "to establish the full facts of history" relating to the Lendy brothers (pers. comm., July 27, 2020). By August 2020, however, the council changed their mind.¹³ Council minutes suggest that SBC reversed its decision to collaborate with the authors for ideological reasons and following pressure from members of the Lower Sunbury Residents Association (LOSRA) who accused the authors of being left-wing activists.¹⁴ SBC thereafter turned to local Sunbury resident, Alan Doyle, the council's

“own investigative journalist,” to research the Lendy brothers’ history on their behalf.¹⁵

Doyle is white Zimbabwean, from where Charles Lendy is alleged to have committed murder; he is also a member and former Chairman of LOSRA, which formed part of the counter-campaign to “save” the Lendy brothers’ memorial from removal. Doyle produced two reports. The first was a detailed report for SBC that ran to eighty-eight pages on the histories of Charles and Edward Lendy.¹⁶ The second, which was co-authored with another local Sunbury resident and LOSRA chairman, Nick Pollard, was a public information booklet.¹⁷ The latter remains in the public domain as the council’s version of the Lendy brothers’ history. However, the public information booklet makes no mention of the alleged murder accusation levelled at Charles Lendy by TTR. In other words, this incident has been airbrushed from public history.

As with other anti-Fallist campaigns, the #SaveLendy counter-campaign ironically pinned its demands to preserve the memorial on a view, shared by several prominent MPs and leading public figures, that Fallism is a form of censorship. Prime Minister Boris Johnson, for example, issued the following statement on Twitter (now X), in response to the toppling of the Edward Colston statue in Bristol: “We cannot now try to edit or censor our past. We cannot pretend to have a different history.” Removing statues, he argued, would be “to lie about our history, and impoverish the education of generations to come.”¹⁸ Likewise, the Cambridge academic and media personality, Mary Beard, denounced proposals to remove the Rhodes statue from Oxford as an attempt to “erase the past.”¹⁹ This line of thinking was echoed by the counter-campaigners defending the Lendy brothers’ memorial, who wrote on social media: “you can’t airbrush your history, where do you stop;” “We should accept the whole past of our nation good and bad, not pick and choose.”²⁰ The #SaveLendy petition website also provoked a similar reaction: “History is fact. Not opinion;” “History should and MUST be preserved!”²¹ SBC also documented a range of online comments from Facebook,

Twitter and Instagram reflecting a desire among the local community to know “the full facts of history” regarding the Lendy memorial and for it not to be covered-up.²²

Establishing the full facts of history pertaining to TTR’s allegation against the Lendy brothers does not, however, appear to have been the main motivation of the counter-campaigners in Sunbury. Both SBC and those who spearheaded the #SaveLendy public petition had already made up their mind about the brothers’ history long before any rigorous historical enquiry had been conducted. Councillor Robin Sider, for example, dismissed TTR’s allegation as “hearsay and exaggeration,” a judgement which he based on Doyle’s report to SBC. Councillor Tom Lagden, on the other hand, was more judicious, warning the council when interviewed by local press, *Surrey Live*: “We need to send out a message now to say we as Spelthorne Borough Council want to know 100% what the history is and get all of the facts ... if you’re looking at the situation as somebody in central London, who’s part of Black Lives Matter and considering going on a protest, and you see that a resident of Sunbury wrote the report for the councillors to decide on this matter, I just think it’s going to scream dodgy.” “It’s not about bringing down the statue,” he added. “Public opinion changes; maybe they’ll [the Lendy brothers] be let off the hook, maybe they’ll get an apology from Black Lives Matter once the evidence comes forward. Or maybe, just maybe, the general public will be horrified by what is actually uncovered.” *Surrey Live* also interviewed Alan Doyle, author of SBC’s report and public information booklet. After thirty years of research on the Lendy family, Doyle explained, he had reached the conclusion that “The more I have dug back into the records, the more convinced I have become that Charles Frederick Lendy has been unfairly treated by history.”²³ The evidence we have uncovered suggests otherwise. Charles Lendy’s public record, comprising the Lendy memorial celebrating his heroism, memoirs lauding his achievements by his associates, and, most recently, #SaveLendy and Doyle’s

report and public pamphlet endorsed by SBC, have together conspired to launder his past and erase the dark shadow cast over his reputation during his own lifetime.

The process of historical erasure began when the Lendy brothers' memorial was first installed on the banks of the River Thames in Sunbury, following their deaths, in 1895. Funded by private donations from friends, family and the British military, it was intended to serve "As a tribute to the memory of two brave men *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*." Memorialising the brothers with a statue of a lion, famously the emblem of the British monarchy, along with a citation from Horace's *Ode to Valor*, projected a public narrative that eulogised the Lendy brothers' sacrifice and military heroism on behalf of "crown and country" in Africa.²⁴ In so doing, the memorial whitewashed the violence perpetrated by the British South Africa Company (BSAC) in territories that became part of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and the part which Charles Lendy played in this.

The British military also contributed to laundering Charles Lendy's legacy. Captain C.H. Donovan of the Army Service Corps, and Frederick Selous, a prolific hunter, both of whom were involved in British military expansion in southern Africa, were zealous defenders of the BSAC, its expansion, and the actions of colonists in the face of criticism and "constant denunciation" by "Little Englanders."²⁵ The term "Little Englander" was a popular slur in nineteenth-century Britain for those who opposed further imperial expansion and was used to dismiss those who had spoken out against Charles Lendy and the BSAC as unpatriotic, much like critics today deride Fallists as unpatriotic and woke.²⁶ Captain Donovan described Lendy as a "gallant comrade" in Matabeleland and a "splendid specimen of mankind."²⁷ He was also a "general favourite" among the officers, who had triumphantly joined the BSAC to "take command of Maxim guns."²⁸ To Selous and Donovan, only those with first-hand knowledge and experience of life on the frontiers of the British empire were equipped to judge the conduct of those who had acted in service of its pacification.²⁹

Underlying the defence of Charles Lendy and the conduct of British imperialists in the memoirs of his associates was a deeply held belief in the supremacy of the white race and in the righteousness, however violent, of the civilizing mission. Captain Donovan wrote of the “moral effect” of the maxim gun, and of the inevitability of death in the “forward-sweeping wave of civilization.”³⁰ It was necessary, according to Selous “to assert the supremacy of the white race once and for all.”³¹ It was also “natural” to want to retaliate against “savages” and simply a matter of fact that “several natives” might come to their end in the process of “supressing a disturbance,” a chilling exoneration of Charles Lendy’s actions in southern Africa, as we show below.³² Such views were further reinforced at the time by mythologies emanating from Southern Rhodesia, where in the early days of white settlement notions of white superiority and the fetishization of the “pioneers” were used to create a sense of unity and strength among the white population. Lendy and his compatriots were venerated as “true patriots and brave soldiers.” They were “heroes” who had sacrificed their lives for “peace and prosperity.”³³ Both military and pioneer memoirs published after Charles Lendy’s death thus contrived a public narrative which simultaneously justified and absolved his behaviour in the name of risking and sacrificing his life for the glory of the British empire (“*dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*”).

The myths and rhetoric of British imperialism used to celebrate Charles Lendy in the nineteenth century found a new mouthpiece over one hundred and twenty years later in #SaveLendy. Far from reckoning with the past and rejecting the ideologies of slavers and colonialists, as Fallism urged, the #SaveLendy counter-campaign unashamedly sought to resurrect it. Grass-roots counter-campaigners spoke euphemistically of the “benefit and protection of “native people” that resulted from “Lendy’s action.”³⁴ Any military excess on the part of Lendy and his associates was justified by his nineteenth century defenders by weighing the supposedly noble aims of British violence with the irrationality of African

violence, and by presenting Africans as dangerous antagonists standing in the way of civilisation and progress. Doyle's report to SBC gives new voice to such views, describing African "looting and pillaging," and Chief N'gomo, the man who TTR allege Charles Lendy murdered, as a troublemaker.³⁵ In contrast, Charles Lendy's actions are described by counter-campaigners as "heroic and valiant."³⁶ The public information booklet also followed the well-worn path of Charles Lendy's nineteenth century propagandists by erasing the accusation of murder levelled against him.³⁷ Rather than reveal the 1892 murder allegation, the authors refer instead to another controversy involving Charles Lendy, the so-called "Victoria Incident," that took place a year later in July 1893, which also raised questions about Lendy's conduct following the deaths of thirty Ndebele soldiers, but for which he was posthumously exonerated of wrongdoing.³⁸ Focusing on the 1893 Victoria Incident rather than that of 1892 was no accident. Doyle knew about the alleged 1892 murder because he discusses it in his earlier report to SBC.³⁹ In other words, he deliberately chose to exclude this information from the public pamphlet.

Lendy's online defenders further condemned calls for an investigation into the Lendy memorial as "political correctness."⁴⁰ Use of the pejorative and reactionary terms "snowflake" and "virtue signalling" by other members of the grass-roots counter-campaign reflects the strong emotional attachment to the idea of empire that exists among some sections of British society, as well as empire's place in long running ideological wars over history and culture.⁴¹ Attacks on imperial iconography by movements such as TTR play into fears of cultural and racial dilution by white British conservatives.⁴² As one #SaveLendy counter-campaigner suggested on Facebook, "I do not want *our* history eradicated [emphasis added]." "Perhaps," suggested another, "anyone who doesn't like *our* statues here should go and live somewhere else [emphasis added]." Other individuals commenting on Facebook accused a "small minority" on a "hysterical bandwagon" of seeking to "undermine and

destroy *our* heritage [emphasis added].” In contrast, the counter-campaigners were defended as “people who love where they live, the history of the borough, being English.” Such rhetoric mirrors the language and ideas promoted by Save Our Statues (@statues_our) on X, which is linked to the British Democratic Party, a self-proclaimed nationalist “Party of British Identity” whose “Core Beliefs” include the “restoration of the ethnocultural unity of the British nation.” The British Democratic Party make no mention on their website of saving statues and yet the alliance of a nationalist party with the Save Our Statues counter-campaign is symbolic of how debates about toppling statues have become a mouthpiece, and arguably a dog whistle, for right-wing views about British identity and national sovereignty.⁴³

The #SaveLendy campaign resulted in a successful defence of Charles Lendy, supported by the local council. On 19 January 2021, SBC declared Doyle’s report to be “thorough, impartial and considered” and it also endorsed the co-authored public pamphlet on the Lendy brothers which followed.⁴⁴ #SaveLendy counter-campaigners furthermore confidently asserted that “the heroic and valiant efforts of Charles Frederick Lendy” and his brother “will not be marred with a plaque or sign bringing into disrepute their upstanding moral integrity.” When SBC removed the protective boards from the Lendy brothers’ memorial, #SaveLendy activists welcomed it as a sign that “common sense has prevailed.”⁴⁵ An accurate account of Charles Lendy’s actions in Africa has yet to prevail.

CHARLES LENDY, THE BRITISH SOUTH AFRICA COMPANY AND DEBATES OVER LATE-NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH IMPERIALISM

Charles Lendy was in many respects an improbable candidate for public veneration. He was guilty of murder and he incurred considerable public and political criticism in the last few years of his life over his appalling treatment of Africans. Yet his death also coincided with

the height of the Victorian era “statue mania,” when public spaces across Britain, Europe and the wider imperial world were curated to reflect the worldview of powerful elites and their political programmes.⁴⁶ The commemoration of national “heroes” in monumental form was connected to processes of empire-state building, which was accompanied by the creation of ideologies of imperialism to explain and validate expansion, including the right to use violence against those who got in the way.⁴⁷ Processes of monument-making and imperial myth-making therefore coalesced to launder the memory of Charles Lendy and to project a changing view of empire in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century, which simultaneously defended and celebrated white supremacy.

Like many imperial incursions into Africa during the late-nineteenth century “scramble” for territory, the colonization of Southern Rhodesia involved devastating violence predicated on claims of white superiority.⁴⁸ British interest in the southern region of the continent was based on a combination of strategic and economic factors, and in 1889, Cecil Rhodes’s BSAC was granted a Royal Charter to expand British interests into areas north of the Limpopo and Zambezi Rivers.⁴⁹ Rhodes assembled a pioneer corps to colonize Mashonaland, where he had secured land and mining rights from the Ndebele king, Lobengula, a year earlier (Mashonaland was a tributary state of Matabeleland, and under the rule of the Ndebele king).⁵⁰ In the search for land and gold, the “conquistadores” engaged in land and livestock appropriation from the local African population.⁵¹

Charles Lendy was seconded to the BSAC from the Royal Artillery in 1890, and was among the European explorers, mineral prospectors, investors, and military officers that formed the pioneers of white settlement in Mashonaland, serving initially as BSAC police under its Mashonaland Administrator, Dr Leander Starr Jameson.⁵² The early days of white settlement in Mashonaland were characterised by conflicts of interest between the white settlers and the local African population, which were complicated by ambiguity over the legal

jurisdiction of the BSAC.⁵³ The BSAC was keen to more fully exploit the region's mining potential at the same time that there were suspicions about the intentions of the Company from among both the Shona and Ndebele population. In an effort to establish Company power and authority, and to allay settler anxieties that stemmed from their numerical inferiority, the "principle of deterrent" was adopted as a key method of Company administration.⁵⁴ "Deterrent" became the means by which Company officials like Lendy sought to show the local population that they intended to stamp their authority over them.

Between 1890 and the beginning of the First Matabele War in October 1893, when both Mashonaland and Matabeleland were formally incorporated within the British empire under the direct rule of the BSAC, there was a great deal of anxiety and insecurity on all sides. As such, when a local white farmer, James Bennett, reported a theft from his farm, Jameson sent Lendy to bring the accused, a local Shona chief, N'gomo, to Salisbury for trial. Lendy arrived at N'gomo's *kraal* (village) on March 17, 1892. He was armed with a seven pounder and a maxim gun and was accompanied by a patrol of sixteen other BSAC police and local volunteers.⁵⁵ When N'gomo refused to submit to Lendy, he opened fire. Chief N'gomo, his son and nineteen other village residents were killed.⁵⁶

Charles Lendy, far from covering-up this incident, confessed to the murder of N'gomo and the other villagers in a report which he authored, signed, and submitted to the magistrate at Salisbury on March 24, 1892, and which later became deposited in *The National Archives*.⁵⁷ In his confession, Lendy explains that he set out from Salisbury with a small patrol on March 8, "for the purpose of bringing in a native chief who had committed an outrage on a white man." Lendy's agenda was unmistakable: "I was determined to establish the white man's authority, and by force, if necessary." He recounts a meeting with the local paramount chief, who refused to assist him, as well as his reaction when he first arrived at N'gomo's *kraal*, which he found to be "very strongly fortified" and "well supplied with

guns.” N’gomo was not at home, so a message was sent to him that he was to accompany Lendy to Salisbury and that he had until sundown to comply. When N’gomo did not acquiesce, Lendy deemed it ill-advised “to attempt to take the place with but six men,” and returned to Salisbury for reinforcements. Lendy then details how he arrived back in Salisbury on the morning of March 13, where he recruited “more men, the 7-pounder and Maxim guns.” He went to N’gomo’s *kraal* on the morning of March 17, and placed the 7-pounder and Maxim guns “in positions facing the kraal.” In his confession he observes that someone in the *kraal* became aware of the patrol’s presence and raised the alarm, which was the signal for “a well-directed shot from the 7-pounder.”⁵⁸

Lendy showed no remorse in his confession for the massacre he inflicted. In fact, describing the “punishment” he unleashed on N’gomo as “sufficient,” he boasted how the “shells from the 7-pounder burst in amongst the huts thoroughly demoralising them” and “I counted 21 killed, among them being the Chief, Gomo, himself.” He justified his actions as the successful implementation of the BSAC’s principle of deterrent: “What I had done was to establish law and the white man’s authority in the country.” “I am sure,” he wrote, “that a very wholesome lesson has been given to all the chiefs of the district.”⁵⁹

According to Charles Lendy, as well as other Company officials like Jameson, incidents like this were important for the establishment of the colonial order.⁶⁰ Within Company correspondence, N’gomo is repeatedly portrayed as unruly and unpopular, which served to underscore the argument that there was a need to teach him a lesson and assert the “ultimate authority” of the BSAC.⁶¹ “I am thundering glad you gave the Mashona a lesson” wrote one of the Company’s directors, Lord Gifford, to Jameson, “they will not be so cheeky in the future.”⁶² The Company’s chief mining expert, Charles Rolker also believed the choice Lendy faced was simple, “either enforce the law or invite rebellion.”⁶³ He added, “lamentable as a loss of human life is...we can reconcile ourselves to it when we know that through it

heavier future losses of more important lives are saved.”⁶⁴ In making these arguments, Company officials drew a distinction between what N’gomo was accused of (theft), and the implications of this for Company power and authority. Yet not all Lendy’s contemporaries condoned his actions or agreed that it was necessary or desirable to implement a policy of violent deterrence in order to maintain British imperial rule.

As news of what had happened at N’gomo’s *kraal* filtered through the sinews of imperial bureaucracy and into the public domain, Charles Lendy was widely denounced. In Cape Town, the British colonial governor, Sir Henry Loch, branded his actions as “excessive.”⁶⁵ In an irate letter to the BSAC secretary in Cape Town, he pronounced the punishment that Lendy meted out to N’gomo and his people as “utterly disproportionate to the original offence, which was the theft of some goods from Mr Bennett.”⁶⁶ In London, the British colonial secretary, Lord Knutsford, was incensed and felt “stronger remonstrance” was necessary. There was “nothing in the evidence” seen by Knutsford to justify what Lendy did. He had fired on N’gomo’s *kraal* “without warning,” and in doing so had acted with “recklessness and undue harshness.”⁶⁷ Both Knutsford and Loch were moved to remind the BSAC of the “importance of keeping within the law in all dealings with natives.”⁶⁸ Under the 1888 Rudd Concession, Lobengula had granted Rhodes exclusive rights to mine for gold and establish a township in Mashonaland, but he did not grant rights over land or people.⁶⁹ Equally, the British government had conferred the BSAC authority over the white settler population in Mashonaland, but not over the local Shona population.⁷⁰ In other words, no Company official or settler had *any* jurisdiction over the Shona, including chief N’gomo. When the BSAC came to Lendy’s defence and retrospectively claimed that there had been an “insurrection” at N’gomo’s *kraal*, the notion was, therefore, summarily dismissed by Loch and Knutsford as “entirely misleading.”⁷¹

Lendy was also roundly traduced by MPs in Parliament. In a widely reported Commons debate on September 19, 1893, Lendy was accused of a “shameful act of butchery,” a “wonton attack,” and the “slaughter of Mashona.”⁷² One Irish nationalist MP, Alfred West conceded that he had “never heard or read about a more outrageous case of cruelty,” even when accepting his own experience of the “way in which we treated savage tribes.”⁷³ While the most vicious criticism of Lendy came from within the radical wing of the Liberal Party, there was general dismay from across the Commons and in the UK press. When one Conservative politician, and a well-known hawk of late nineteenth-century British imperialism, Sir Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, attempted to defend Lendy, he was ridiculed by newspaper reporters as “an embarrassment to his party.”⁷⁴ In conclusion, MPs called for Lendy to return to the UK and face trial for murder.⁷⁵

By the time of Charles Lendy’s death in 1894, the political controversy over N’gomo’s murder and the massacre at the *kraal* had largely petered out. The events of 1892 therefore mark an important moment in British imperial history. Consternation over Lendy’s behaviour in southern Africa had come from within the Liberal Tradition, where materialist motives for empire intersected with humanitarianism and Christian moralism.⁷⁶ Lendy’s critics reflected broader uneasiness about the treatment of “native” populations, especially given the race pride, chauvinism and glorification of war that was thought to accompany imperial expansion, shaped by traders and capitalists without regard for wider interests, and there were attempts to curb what were considered to be some of the worst abuses of European colonialism.⁷⁷ According to the critics, empire could be a force for good, but only if it was conducted humanely and with respect for the rights and justice of subject populations.⁷⁸ The problem was not empire *per se*, but the BSAC, whose officials were variously described as “filibusters and desperados,”⁷⁹ “the fighting riff raff of South Africa” whose character “may

be estimated” by the conduct of “one of them, Captain Lendy.”⁸⁰ In Charles Lendy, the Liberal critics of empire found the perfect foil for late nineteenth century imperial excess.⁸¹

Nonetheless, for all the debate and denunciation by British government officials, politicians and the British press over Lendy’s crimes against N’gomo and his people as well as his questionable conduct in the Victoria Incident, it was ultimately men like Lendy, Jameson and Rhodes who won the imperial argument. For them, the expansion of colonial rule was seen as a political and economic necessity, as well as a moral duty, and there was a desire to project a strong image of empire for strategic and economic reasons.⁸² For people like Jameson in southern Africa and Ashmead-Bartlett in London, “the great prospects of future development in regard alike to commerce and civilisation” were dependent upon the British government standing firmly behind the BSAC in opposing Lobengula.⁸³ War between the Ndebele and the BSAC, who were backed by British imperial forces, in October 1893, involved large-scale land alienation and livestock appropriation.⁸⁴ Two years later, Lord Salisbury led the Conservatives to power in Westminster in coalition with the Liberal Unionists, and the imperialist Joseph Chamberlain became Secretary of State for the Colonies. By the mid-1890s an older age of imperial immigration and free trade had given way to a more aggressive alternative.⁸⁵ Defending British imperialism in 1897, just a year after Jameson’s botched attempt to extend British authority into the South African Republic, and in the midst of the First Chimurenga (or Second Matabele War), when the Ndebele revolted against BSAC authority, Chamberlain was unequivocal: “You cannot have omelettes without breaking eggs, you cannot destroy the practices of barbarism, of slavery, of superstition, which for centuries have desolated the interior of Africa, without the use of force.”⁸⁶ In making this argument, Chamberlain sought to rationalise the violence and brutality of British imperialism as a routine part of the “civilizing mission,” just as Lendy, in his confession, justified the massacre of N’gomo, his son and 19 villagers. The routinization

and normalisation of violence in service of British expansion thereafter became further entrenched in massacres at Omdurman in Sudan in September 1898 and culminated in the concentration camps and “barbarism” of the Anglo-Boer war.⁸⁷ The honouring of men like Cecil Rhodes and Charles Lendy with statues and memorials in Britain’s public spaces, airbrushing their crimes from history, and publicly celebrating their heroism, served to reinforce the political righteousness of doing empire in this way.

Counter-campaigners tend to dismiss the value of historical evidence with arguments that men like Charles Lendy and Cecil Rhodes were men of their time and that their actions should not be judged by the attitudes of the present. At the core of this line of reasoning lies an assumption that these men thought and acted no differently from their peers. Scholars have shown this was not the case with Rhodes.⁸⁸ We have also shown that this was not the case with Charles Lendy. Both politicians and the press denounced Lendy’s crime as reprehensible and a smear on Britain’s reputation overseas. The only explanation for his subsequent memorialisation rests with a corresponding recognition that the Lendy memorial heralded a sea-change in the politics of British imperialism, one which saw racialised violence and exploitation as a legitimate means of establishing British rule overseas.

CONCLUSION

The grass-roots community-led counter-campaign to “save” the Lendy brothers’ memorial breathed new life into the myths of the “glorious” British empire and the defence of the racialised violence and exploitation that underpinned British rule in Africa. Spelthorne Borough Council and the #SaveLendy counter-campaign and their supporters were not concerned about ascertaining “the full facts of history” regarding TTR’s claims about Charles Lendy. The evidence presented here of Charles Lendy’s own confession (“What I had done

was to establish law and the white man's authority in the country") and the subsequent outrage and condemnation which his actions provoked among British politicians and the press (a "shameful act of butchery," a "wonton attack," "slaughter", an "outrageous case of cruelty") is ample and incontrovertible evidence that he was guilty of murdering twenty-one Africans in Mashonaland, including N'gomo and his son, in 1892. Yet SBC and #SaveLendy sought confirmation that Charles Lendy's actions in Africa were laudable and heroic and underwrote a narrative of the British Empire about which the local community and council could be proud, and they were prepared to erase and cover-up the evidence to perpetuate this myth. In other words, their goal and motivations were unambiguously rooted in reckoning with present-day politics, not with the past.

Both Fallists and anti-Fallists share a fervent belief in the power of statues and memorials to act as a mouthpiece of the past in the present. Where they differ is in the meaning of the message being conveyed. For while imperial and slaver statues became a touchpoint for campaigners and activists to challenge past and present racial and social injustice, for counter-campaigners this was never the agenda. Theirs was instead a reaction to what was seen as an attack on "our" history and "our" heritage. It is this conviction, above all else, that determines their overriding concern to defend a certain view of Britain and its history, by opposing the toppling or removing of imperial statues and monuments, and in so doing revive a rhetoric of imperial glory through erasing and distorting the historical record and dismissing and ridiculing their opponents as "woke" ("Little Englander"). The #SaveLendy counter-campaigners objected to the goals of the Fallists (racial and social justice) and reacted against such activism because they believe it threatens to undermine what it means, in their view, to be British (or "English", as one #SaveLendy supporter pointedly wrote on social media). In effect, therefore, the #SaveLendy counter-campaign and others like it operate as a channel for nationalist rhetoric; the most telling example of this is Save

Our Statues (@statues_our), which explicitly boasts an alliance with the nationalist British Democratic Party on X. These groups opportunistically tap into the debates on the toppling of statues, not to promote accurate and impartial historical enquiry into Britain's imperial past, but in order to create a public platform to project what is, in their highly politicised view, "our" history, "our" identity, "our" country. In this respect, #SaveLendy illustrates how the politics of identity lies at the heart of the statue wars in Britain, at the expense of achieving a fuller understanding of the history of which controversial statues form a part, and the values and ideologies which they were once intended to represent. The success of the #SaveLendy counter-campaign reinforces the longstanding relationship between public statuary and the reification of elitist political ideologies, despite the strides made by Fallists since the turn of the twenty-first century to align the politics of memorialisation to a new politics of racial and social justice.

¹ For an insight into some of the most recent academic debates surrounding controversial statues see, Çelik, "Colonial Statues;" Drayton, "Rhodes Must Not Fall;" and for an overview of public and political debates on controversial statues see, von Tunzelmann, *Fallen Idols*.

² Topple the Racists: A Crowdsourced Map of UK Statues and Monuments that Celebrate Slavery and Racism <https://www.toppletheracists.org/> (accessed January 2, 2024).

³ War Memorials Online, "The Lendy Memorial," <https://www.war memorials online.org.uk/memorial/262946/> (accessed August 6, 2021).

⁴ "The Lendy Lion Memorial," <https://www.toppletheracists.org/> (accessed January 2, 2024)

⁵ Philip Sivy, "Save the Lendy Memorial Lion #SaveLendy," <https://www.change.org/p/spelthorne-borough-council-save-the-lendy-memorial-lion-savelendy> (June 10, 2020).

⁶ Mbongwa and Graham, "In the beginning;" Frank and Ristic, "Urban Fallism," 552.

⁷ Drayton, "Rhodes Must Not Fall." Lord Nelson's statue in Bridgetown, Barbados, was removed to a museum in 2020.

⁸ Drayton, "Rhodes Must Not Fall," 653.

⁹ Bridge, Wace, Elliott, Parker, and Simpson, "Controversial statues."

¹⁰ Sivy, "#SaveLendy."

¹¹ In an interview with *Surrey Live*, Cllr Jan Doerfel stated: "I'm not convinced that anyone has ever actually argued for its [the Lendy memorial] removal." Armstrong, "Spelthorne Councillors." The TTR website does not actually advocate for its removal.

¹² For further information on Save Our Statues, see [Save Our Statues | Robert Poll | Substack](#); [SOS: SAVE OUR STATUES -- SaveOurStatues.org.uk -- Subscribe / join to defend Britain's heritage \(youtube.com\)](#) (both accessed June 11, 2024). Save Our Statues has a public page on X (@statues_our) and a private members group on Facebook.

¹³ Spelthorne Borough Council, Minutes, Item 2807, <https://democracy.spelthorne.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CI=132&MID=2212> (accessed January 2, 2024).

¹⁴ The source of the accusation by Councillor Sider appears to be from comments on the LOSRA website. The LOSRA website confirms it submitted a request to SBC to overturn the majority council decision to support the authors in undertaking the research which SBC approached them to undertake. LOSRA, "The Lendy Memorial -

Further Academic Research May Be Biased” <https://losra.org/item/1285-the-lendy-memorial-further-academic-research-may-be-biased> (accessed January 25, 2021).

¹⁵ Armstrong “Spelthorne Councillors.”

¹⁶ Alan Doyle, *The Lower Sunbury Lendy Memorial*, 3 December 2020.

<https://democracy.spelthorne.gov.uk/documents/s31551/The%20Sunbury%20Lendy%20Memorial%20Submission%20to%20Spelthorne%20Council%203%20Dec%202020.pdf> (accessed July 26, 2021).

¹⁷ Alan Doyle and Nick Pollard, *The Lendy Memorial at Sunbury* n.d.

https://www.losra.org/images/Lendy_Memorial_booklet.pdf (accessed July 26, 2021).

¹⁸ Johnson, “The statue of Winston Churchill in Parliament Square is a permanent reminder of his achievement in saving this country – and the whole of Europe – from a fascist racist tyranny.”

¹⁹ Drayton, “Rhodes Must Not Fall,” 664.

²⁰ <https://democracy.spelthorne.gov.uk/documents/s31935/Online%20Comments.pdf> (accessed, January 2, 2024).

²¹ There are many more similar examples on the petition website. Sivyver, “#SaveLendy.”

²² <https://democracy.spelthorne.gov.uk/documents/s31935/Online%20Comments.pdf> (accessed, January 2, 2024).

²³ Armstrong, “Spelthorne Councillors.”

²⁴ War Memorials Online, “The Lendy Memorial,” <https://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/262946/> (accessed August 6, 2021).

²⁵ Selous, “Introductory Review,” 3; Wills and Collingridge, “In Memorium,” 239. See also Donovan, *With Wilson*, 245.

²⁶ Porter, *Critics of Empire*, 1-2.

²⁷ Donovan, *With Wilson*, 176.

²⁸ Wills and Collingridge, “In Memorium,” 250.

²⁹ Donovan, *With Wilson*, 176

³⁰ Donovan, *With Wilson*, 234, 245.

³¹ Selous, “Introductory Review”, 7.

³² Wills and Collingridge, “In Memorium”, 252.

³³ Bonello, “Early Settler Identity,” 344, 352.

³⁴ Sivyver, “#SaveLendy”.

³⁵ Doyle and Pollard, *The Lendy Memorial at Sunbury*.

³⁶ Sivyver, “#SaveLendy.” Quotes taken from online comments to Spelthorne Council, <https://democracy.spelthorne.gov.uk/documents/s31935/Online%20Comments.pdf> (accessed, January 2, 2024).

³⁷ Doyle and Pollard, *The Lendy Memorial at Sunbury*.

³⁸ F. J. Newton, “Collision Between Matabele and Forces of the British South Africa Company at Fort Victoria, July 1893, and Correspondence Connected Therewith,” August 23, 1894

<https://parlipapers.proquest.com/parlipapers/result/pqpdocumentview?accountid=14494&groupid=96147&pgId=6ec31580-19aa-45bf-8ea3-b2e637168149#0> (accessed January 2, 2024).

³⁹ Doyle, *The Lower Sunbury Lendy Memorial*.

⁴⁰ <https://democracy.spelthorne.gov.uk/documents/s31935/Online%20Comments.pdf> (accessed, January 2, 2024).

⁴¹ <https://democracy.spelthorne.gov.uk/documents/s31935/Online%20Comments.pdf> (accessed, January 2, 2024).

⁴² Mitchell, *Imperial Nostalgia*.

⁴³ British Democrats: The Party of British Identity <https://britishdems.co.uk> (accessed June 17, 2024).

⁴⁴ Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Spelthorne Borough Council, Item 10, <https://democracy.spelthorne.gov.uk/ieIssueDetails.aspx?IIId=12470&PlanId=0&Opt=3#AI11999> (January 19, 2021).

⁴⁵ Sivyver, “#SaveLendy”.

⁴⁶ Drayton, “Rhodes Must Not Fall,” 652-3.

⁴⁷ Mitchell, *Imperial Nostalgia*, 35, 39; John, “Statues, politics.”

⁴⁸ Alexander, McGregor and Ranger, *Violence and Memory*, 1, 21; Bonello, “Early Settler Identity,” 341.

⁴⁹ Saunders and Smith, “Southern Africa,” 611.

⁵⁰ Bonello, “Early Settler Identity,” 346.

⁵¹ Saunders and Smith, “Southern Africa,” 611.

⁵² Bonello, “Early Settler Identity,” 345; Wills and Collingridge, “In Memorium,” 251.

⁵³ Hodder-Williams, *White Farmers*, 17-19.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵⁵ Doyle's commissioned report for Spelthorne Council states that machine guns were not used at N'gomo's kraal. Reports submitted by both Jameson and Charles Lendy following the incident state that Lendy did have a maxim machine gun. BNA CO 879/36, minute no. B.603, Punishment of N'Gomo's kraal, March 21, 1892; BNA CO 879/36, Captain Lendy to the Magistrate, Salisbury, March 24, 1892, enclosed in Loch to Knutsford, May 3, 1892.

⁵⁶ BNA CO 879/36, Lendy to the Magistrate, Salisbury, March 24, 1892.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ BNA CO 879/36, Lendy to the Magistrate, Salisbury, March 24, 1892; BNA, CO 879/36, Minute no. B.603, Punishment of N'Gomo's kraal, Acting Secretary of BSAC, Cape Town, March 21, 1892.

⁶¹ For example, in correspondence between the BSAC and the Colonial Office reference is repeatedly made to the "N'gomo insurrection." See, BNA CO 879/36, Secretary BSAC to Acting Imperial Secretary, Cape Town, June 30, 1892; BNA CO 879/36, Lendy to the Magistrate, Salisbury, March 24, 1892.

⁶² Hodder-Williams, *White Farmers*, 20.

⁶³ BNA, CO 879/36, Minute no. B.603, Punishment of N'Gomo's kraal, Acting Secretary of BSAC, Cape Town, March 21, 1892; BNA CO 879/36, Witness Statement by Mr Charles M. Rolker, enclosed in BSAC to Colonial Office, June 1, 1892.

⁶⁴ BNA CO 879/36, Witness Statement by Mr Charles M. Rolker, enclosed in BSAC to Colonial Office, June 1, 1892.

⁶⁵ BNA CO 879/36, Loch to Knutsford, April 27, 1892.

⁶⁶ BNA CO 879/36, Imperial Secretary Cape Town to BSAC, April 26, 1892.

⁶⁷ BNA CO 879/36, Colonial Office to BSAC, May 31, 1892.

⁶⁸ BNA CO 879/36, Imperial Secretary, Cape Town to BSAC, April 26, 1892.

⁶⁹ Burrett, "'It's mine!'", 14; Bonello, "Early Settler Identity," 346; Hodder-Williams, *White Farmers*, 17.

⁷⁰ Hodder-Williams, *White Farmers*, 17.

⁷¹ BNA CO 879/36, Statement by Jameson, June 1, 1892. Enclosed within Loch to Knutsford, July 4, 1892; BNA CO 879/36, Secretary BSAC to Acting Imperial Secretary, Cape Town, June 30, 1892; BNA, CO 879/36 Knutsford to Loch, August 10, 1892; BNA, CO 879/37, Loch to Marquess of Ripon, September 2, 1892.

⁷² Comments by Mr Webb and Mr Buxton. Hansard, House of Commons (HC) Deb., September 19, 1893, vol. 17, cols. 1606 and 1609.

⁷³ Hansard, HC Deb, September 19, 1893, vol. 17, col. 1606.

⁷⁴ Remarks by Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett in Hansard, HC Deb, September 19, 1893, vol. 17, col. 1604; The British Newspaper Archive (TBNA) "Events in Parliament," *Leicester Chronicle*, September 23 1893, 3, 5; TBNA, "Report from the Week in Parliament," *The Midlothian Journal*, September 22, 1893, 4.

⁷⁵ Hansard, HC Deb, September 19, 1893, vol. 17, col. 1614.

⁷⁶ Porter, *Critics of Empire*, 7.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 51-53.

⁷⁹ Comment by Henry Labouchere. Hansard, HC Deb, March 15, 1894, vol. 22, col. 408.

⁸⁰ TBNA, *Leicester Chronicle*, September 23, 1893; TBNA, *The Irish Daily Independent*, December 1, 1893, 6.

⁸¹ For example, see TBNA, *The Western Times*, December 2, 1893, 2; TBNA, *Leicester Chronicle*, September 23, 1893, 3, 5; Hansard, HC Deb, 15 March 1894, vol. 22, col. 425.

⁸² Porter, *Critics of Empire*, 2; Darwin, *Empire Project*, 86.

⁸³ Hansard, HC Deb, September, 19 1893, vol. 17, col. 1604, 1606.

⁸⁴ Alexander, McGregor and Ranger, *Violence and Memory*, 21.

⁸⁵ Owen, "Critics of Empire," 188.

⁸⁶ Joseph Chamberlain, speech, "The True Conception of Empire," 1897.

⁸⁷ Hyam, "British Empire," 50.

⁸⁸ Kearns, "Topple the Racists."

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