<u>Dark Pasts: An Educational or A Valid Historical Monument?</u>

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During the time of the Soviet Union there were many different statues that were built to commemorate the figures that were important to the regime. Some examples of these important figures are: Lenin, Stalin, and Karl Marx. Each of these figures helped play an important role in the rise of communism and the Soviet Union. To commemorate these people at different times the Soviet Union built statues of them in every country that they had control over. One such country that was controlled by the Soviet Union until 1991 was Lithuania. The country of Lithuania is located on the Baltic Sea, next to the countries of Russia, Poland, Latvia, and Belarus. The reason that Lithuania is very important is because they are one of the countries that has helped promote democracy throughout the world, even though at one time they were controlled by the Soviet Union. During the Soviet occupation the Soviet government destroyed Lithuanian statues and built Soviet statues in their place. Once Lithuania gained the new government initiated taking down Soviet statues and destroying them, erasing pieces of Soviet history forever. During the destruction of Soviet statues a man by the name of Viliumas Malinauskas decided that he wanted to use private funding to save the statues and display them in a park near Druskininkai. This decision to save Soviet statues was done in an effort to preserve history and show people what Soviet statues look like. However, the idea to save Soviet statues was not just done to show people what they looked like, but to also show foreigners and other Lithuanians the Soviet ideology that hurt people from the past.

Malinauskas founded the Grūtas Soviet statue park. The park is separated into multiple different spheres that represent different periods of time during Soviet occupation in Lithuania. The totalitarian sphere shows statues of leaders and thinkers of communism. The terror sphere is

dedicated to the founders of the Communist Party of Lithuania. The Soviet sphere includes the leaders of communist Lithuania. The red sphere is dedicated to soviet partisans. The last sphere of the park is the occupation and death sphere and it is dedicated to all the people who were killed under Soviet Union control and the people who were deported to different parts of the Soviet Union during the mass deportations (Economist). Each of these spheres helps to show the history of Lithuania and the struggles that it has faced in its history. The park faced lots of scrutiny during its construction, and people questioned why these statues had to be preserved. It had evolved to include a zoo to show that the main goal of the park was not to support Soviet leaders and Soviet ideology. The zoo was used as a way to mock the Soviet Union and the leaders of the Soviet Union. When you enter the park you can see a pen of alpacas and goats, and in that pen there are Soviet statues showing that those people no longer have control over Lithuania.

An interesting comparison for this genre of statue are confederate statues in America. Both Soviet statues in Lithuania and Confederate statues in America represent adversaries in past conflicts. The main difference between the two however, is how these statues are treated. It is clear to see why Soviet statues were removed, and there was backlash to even present them at Grūtas Park. There is a clear hatred towards Soviet era figures in Lithuania among parts of the population. After the war in Ukraine started, even the WWII monuments for Soviet soldiers that were still standing in cities, have been removed or considered to be removed. In America, though Confederate statues are of figures that were traitors to America, many still want them to be displayed, as they represent history of the regions they are presented in. The other main difference between the statues is when they were erected. In Lithuania, the Soviet statues were erected during the era of the Soviet Union, but in America, many of the Confederate statues were

erected well after the civil war, during the reconstruction era. This would be like if Russians in Lithuania put up a statue of Stalin today. The main purpose for these statues was to reinforce confederate values during the Jim Crow period. Despite the support for these statutes, there is also an overwhelming amount of support to take these statues down. Specifically in the summer of 2020, after the murder of George Floyd, a total of 94 Confederate statues were removed. These statues are sometimes destroyed, but often they are put into museums. I believe that a park similar to Grūtas Park would be a great place to display Confederate statues, but it must be done very carefully. Some parks already exist that display Confederate statues, but they are displayed in a celebratory way. Grūtas Park is successful because it does a very good job of displaying the statues while not celebrating them. The main reason this works so well is because there are very few Lithuanians that would actually celebrate these statues, while in 2017, it was reported that 54% of adults in America said that Confederate statues should remain in public display. In order to display Confederate statues non-celebratory, a park would likely have to be built in the northern region of the United States by a private builder.

Grūtas Park is a site that shows the Lithanians' dark history of occupation in a very unique way. The site delicately balances history and mockery to create a very surreal experience. In America, a site like this could be created that displays the country's history, but does not celebrate the Confederate army. It is unlikely that this could ever come to be, as like many other things, the topic of Confederate statues is very divisive. Though it may never happen, Grūtas Park serves as an example of how it could be done.

Sources

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