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RE-STORyING HERITAGE

Reclaiming the past and forging the future
Where is this building?
It is in Havana, Cuba

EL CAPITOLIO
Built to reflect the island’s ‘sugar boom’ prosperity in 1929

The 300-foot domed neoclassical inspired by the US Capitol building, Washington, was designed for Cuba’s Congress.

grand entrance with 12 massive granite columns, imposing Zanelli bronze sculptures, an ornate gold leaf dome, cedar and mahogany floor to ceiling panels, sixty different types of marble flooring and 25 carat diamond encased in the floor of the main hall.
Revolutionary Struggle

Fidel Castro seizes power in Cuba in 1959.

The Communists rule with decades of hostility towards the US.
Rebels arriving in Havana, January 1959
In the forging of independence from American imperialism the Communist Party in Cuba sought to *purge* itself of all symbols, artefacts, monuments and traditions connected to the old political order – the *bourgeois* past and *all Americanisms*. 
The Congress was dissolved, *El Capitolio* condemned as representative of capitalist excess, government corruption, gangsterism and the dominance of American imperialism. The Congress then relocated to a drab building in the suburbs.
The ‘Congress of the People’ relocated
Cuba and South Africa

South Africa has close historical ties with the Cuban people whose soldiers fought on the side of the liberation forces against the apartheid regime and elsewhere in Africa.

Nelson Mandela reiterated that the Cuban people thus had a...

“a special place in the heart of the African people“
A different story has unfolded in Cuba...

President Raul Castro says of *El Capitolio*

**Fastforward 2013**

*It is a jewel. It's true there was a time during the era of capitalism that's where all the bandits met, but not any longer now that it's ours.*
**Re-storying History**

The once reviled El Capitolio condemned to the ash heap of history has been reclaimed, embraced and celebrated with pride as a national treasure. The renewal has been accompanied by the re-invention of the narrative around this iconic building –

*a re-storying.*
The El Capitolio story reveals that symbols are enduring, achieving iconic status in a nations’ psyche despite attempts by governments to purge them.
The ‘Imperialist Enemy’ - the USA - is welcomed back in 2016

President Obama visits Cuba in April 2016 and is welcomed back as a hero.

What is of utmost importance for the Cuban people is the opening up of their weak and struggling economy to global trade and development.
President Raul Castro and President Obama
The global community embraces Cuba
Pop Culture invades Cuba
Why do tourists want to visit Cuba or any foreign country for that matter? History and Heritage? Nostalgia in Cuba for the Old
Havana 1958
Gangsters and Nightlife
The Mafia in Cuba
Havana 2016 frozen in time
A step - or ride - back in history
What are the lessons from the Cuban-Il Capitolio experience?
PURGING THE PAST

As was the case with the 1959 Cuban revolution, post-apartheid South Africa too, is confronting the symbols of its painful past.

Groundswell of voices from South African society fiercely rejecting the symbols and monuments that memorialise colonialism and apartheid.
#Rhodes Must fall movement.

The initial focus of this movement in 2015 was the removal of imperialist, Cecil John Rhodes’ statue, at the University of Cape Town. Student activism and demonstrations have spread throughout the country with deeper conversations around racism, social justice and inequality in post-apartheid South Africa.
Rhodes Must Fall UCT
Angry at being confronted on a daily basis by the symbols of the coloniser, students are demanding the removal of all monuments, pictures and images relating to the country’s oppressive past. Violent protests on campuses have resulted in the destruction of valuable artwork and collective archives perceived as representative of apartheid humiliation and oppression.
PARTISAN PURGING?

When any, and all, ‘offensive’ symbols, artefacts or monuments perceived as threatening are destroyed and only those perceived as reflecting the dominant ideology are sanctioned ...

We risk losing a sense of our collective history, communal memory and thus identity...
PURGE & PERISH?

A people without a communal memory or history, have no sense of a national identity...

*Without an identity...*

*No sense of a collective future.*
WE NEED TO HAVE ‘DIFFICULT’ CONVERSATIONS ...

Active, serious and participatory public engagement and debate on our cultural heritage.

This entails the difficult conversations about not only what we choose to remember and preserve, but how we choose to interpret them.

These choices are important to our identity as a people and the narratives we carry into the future.
THE WHOLE TRUTH AND
NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

“Let’s insist on telling history, ... as it really happened in all its facets. Tell the good, the bad and the ugly history...

Tell the truth. Tell it all -- the whole miserable, glorious, mixed up, fascinating and complex mess.”

Fay Voshell, Princeton University, frequent contributor to American Thinker