

**Building a Narrative:
Uses and Misuses of Antiquity at the Manitoba Legislature**

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Abstract:

Toppling the statue of Queen Victoria in July 2021 did not end the reign of colonialist memory on the Manitoba Legislature's grounds, but simply marked the removal of its most accessible symbol. This paper examines the sculptural programme of the Legislative Assembly and how its engagement with the classical world glorifies the role of European settlers while erasing the contributions and experiences of Indigenous people. It details the exclusionary narrative told by these statues through the lens of ancient art and modern architectural history, tying Beaux-Arts architecture and the City Beautiful movement to the White supremacist classicizing aesthetics of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. It argues that the imagery used on the Legislative Building was intended to recruit White settlers into a colonial and capitalist vision of Manitoba. More specifically, it examines the connections between images from antiquity and the idea of Manitoba as the centre of a powerful colonial enterprise, through an architectural nostalgia that distorted the realities of both the ancient past and the present. Using the ancient Roman practice of *damnatio memoriae* ("condemnation of memory"), this paper contends that statuary like that found on the Legislative Building offers a pretense of permanency and authority that has in reality been challenged as long as monuments have been used for this purpose. Ultimately it considers more dynamic forms of commemoration, such as the orange flags planted around the plinth where Queen Victoria once stood, and how communal memory can be more responsive and reflective of the people it represents.

Keywords: Manitoba Legislature, Winnipeg, Beaux-Arts, White City, City Beautiful movement, Frank Worthington Simon, neoclassical architecture, pedimental sculpture, colonial monuments
