

# San Francisco Chronicle

OPINION

## Midnight in the statue storage vault

By Adam Hochschild July 12, 2020



statue of Christopher Columbus is in Washington, D.C. Photo: Andrew Harnik / Associated Press

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**Robert E. Lee:** I wish they'd leave the lights on down here! Stonewall, are you awake?

**Stonewall Jackson:** Come on, Bob, I'm tired. We all need some shut-eye.

**Jefferson Davis:** Now don't you boys start arguing about Pickett's Charge again!

**Cecil Rhodes:** Jeff, I still don't understand why they made such a fuss over you chaps — you lost your war. But us, we beat those damned Boers. These days, though, nobody's grateful.

**King Leopold II:** Talk about ungrateful! After all I did to civilize the Africans and make Belgium rich, still they stuffed me away down here. And covered me with red paint first. *Zut alors!*

**Edward Colston:** You think you had a rough time, Leo, but what about me? Before they put me here, they tossed me into Bristol harbor. The yucky stuff down on the bottom, you wouldn't believe. And after all I did for that city.

**Junípero Serra:** Stop your bellyaching, Ed. I was a *saint* before I ended up here. You'd think that would have saved me.

**Christopher Columbus:** I'm having it worst. Now it looks like I may lose my day. Which, by the way, none of the rest of you ever had. No Leopold Day, no Junípero Serra Day, no ...

**Cecil Rhodes:** Stop playing identity politics, Chris. But if you must, I had a whole country named after me ...

**Columbus:** Me too! And it still is. Got you there.

**Rhodes:** Well, I still have a few things you don't. Ever hear of a Columbus Scholarship? No way.

**Davis:** Complain, complain, complain, that's all you guys do. Look, if we were still standing up there, we'd have other problems: rain, snow, sleet, pigeons, those awful demonstrators with no masks ignoring the 6-foot rule ...

**Frank Rizzo:** If I was still up there, I'd be cracking heads together so hard they wouldn't know what hit them.

**Josef Stalin:** Me too. And I've been down here longer than any of you, so I've got a lot of cracking to do to make up for it.

**Rizzo:** You were mighty good at that in your prime, Joe.

**Stalin:** There's some talk of taking me out of here, you know. That Putin fellow sometimes says nice things about me.

**Leopold:** Fat chance of that happening to me.

**Lee:** Don't feel sorry for yourself, Leo. We all have to adjust. And you never know — our time may come round again.

**Leopold:** It's about time we got some women down here.

**Queen Marie Antoinette:** You're forgetting about me, Leo. You always do. And I've been down here longer than any of you boys. Boys — that's the trouble. If I hadn't married that idiot Louis, I never would have ended up here. *Sacré bleu!*

**King Louis XVI:** Bah! We wouldn't be here if you hadn't said, "Let them eat cake."

**Davis:** Enough, you two. Hey, why don't we play Twenty Questions again? That always makes the time go by.

**Lee:** OK, I'm thinking of something.

**Rizzo:** Animal, vegetable or mineral?

**Lee:** Animal.

**Serra:** Heathen?

**Lee:** Yes.

**Leopold:** Royal blood?

**Lee:** No.

**Stalin:** Enemy of the people?

**Lee:** Heavens, no.

**Rizzo:** Lawbreaker?

**Lee:** No.

**Rhodes:** If it's from that blasted Civil War of yours again, I'm not playing.

**Jackson:** It's your stupid horse, Bob, Traveller. You choose it every time.

**Lee:** Right!

**Stalin:** Why just 20 questions? In Russia, we asked lots more questions when we interrogated them, but whatever the answers, we shot them. Much simpler.

**Colston:** Hey! The door's opening. I think we're getting some new people.

**Serra:** No one you or I would know, Ed, I'm sure. We're the wrong vintage.

**Stalin:** Hey Woodrow, come on in!

*Adam Hochschild is a historian, journalist, author of 10 books and lecturer at the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism.*