

## **Cecil Rhodes, Colossus of Africa, Will Stay Up in Oxford**

*Oriel College announced that it is rejecting a student drive to remove a statue of the controversial colonialist.*



*Eddie Keogh / Reuters*

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After months of debate, Oxford University has decided a statue of Cecil Rhodes will remain in place at Oriel College. In a statement, the college affirmed that the statute will still stand, but said “the College will seek to provide a clear historical context to explain why it is there.”

Rhodes, one of the most prominent British imperialists of the 19th century, founded the nation of Rhodesia—now Zimbabwe and Zambia—as well as

the de Beers diamond company, and was prime minister of the Cape Colony from 1890 to 1896. He spoke about the supremacy of Anglo-Saxons and, as prime minister, restricted black rights. When Rhodes, an Oriel College alumnus, died in 1902, he bequeathed a portion of his estate to Oxford for the creation of the Rhodes Scholarship for international students.

“By adding context, we can help draw attention to this history, do justice to the complexity of the debate, and be true to our educational mission,” Oriel said in its statement.

The announcement is a defeat for the student movement Rhodes Must Fall In Oxford, a movement that seeks to “decolonise the institutional structures and physical space in Oxford and beyond.” The group argues that Rhodes made the fortune that funds the eponymous scholarship by exploiting black Africans. The students drew inspiration from others at the University of Cape Town who managed to get a statue of Rhodes removed from their campus last year.

Rhodes Must Fall In Oxford rejected Oriel College’s decision. “This recent move is outrageous, dishonest, and cynical. This is not over. We will be redoubling our efforts,” the group said in a post on its Facebook page.

*The Daily Telegraph* reported that leaked documents show wealthy alumni were upset that Oriel was considering removing the statue, and were threatening to cancel donations, which may have played a role in the decision. The college itself says the majority of the feedback they’ve received since opening debate in December “has been in support of the statue remaining in place, for a variety of reasons.”

Oxford Vice Chancellor Louise Richardson has argued that the statue is a distraction, but that Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford has contributed by sparking a discussion about speech on campus. One major issue in this debate is the experience and representation of minority students at Oxford. In its statement, Oriel College took pains to acknowledge that leaders are aware of these cultural problems and are “taking substantive steps to address them.” But for many students, the symbolism of the statue matters too.