

United States Senate

June 26, 2020

COMMITTEES
APPROPRIATIONS
CHAIRMAN OF
FINANCIAL SERVICES
GENERAL GOVERNMENT
BANKING, HOUSING, AND
URBAN AFFAIRS
BUDGET
JUDICIARY
SMALL BUSINESS AND
ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Honorable William Barr
Attorney General
United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Barr:

We are standing on the precipice of a new American crisis. What began as a timely conversation about how to best train law enforcement officers to police justly and effectively has devolved into rioting, looting, and calls to defund the police. Emboldened by the feeble political responses of many governors and mayors—and the explicit endorsement of a few—some have decided to make mob rule the new social order. In this brave new world, the most vocal and “politically correct” are always right, and everyone else is wrong.

The rising “cancel culture” movement is fundamentally coercive. It’s hell-bent on destroying emblems of American history and culture with little regard for or knowledge of what those emblems even represent. Given the present danger the mob poses to individual Americans, common sense, and common decency, I call upon you to vigorously prosecute all those who have appropriated the banner of peaceful protest to carry out violent illegal acts.

Protesting is a vital element of American democracy. It is not incidental that the First Amendment to the Constitution enshrines the right of free speech and the ability to assemble peacefully. The roaming violence filling our streets right now cannot be reasonably excused as protesting. In the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Washington, D.C., a statue honoring the Emancipation and paid for by freed slaves is in danger of vigilante removal. In Boston, demonstrators damaged the first civic monument honoring African-American soldiers. The statue of anti-slavery activist Hans Christian Heg found itself decapitated and thrown into a lake in Wisconsin. Protestors toppled several representations of Father Junípero Serra, a Catholic priest who conducted important missionary work in the Americas. Outside the Indian Embassy in Washington, D.C., misguided demonstrators desecrated a statue of famed social activist Mahatma Gandhi. The horde has now set their sights on depictions of Jesus.

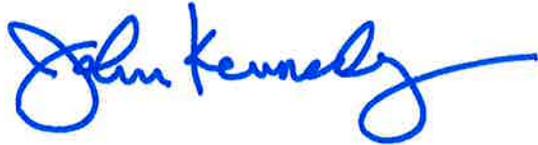
United States founder and Constitution drafter James Madison—another casualty of cancel culture—strove to build a nation too self-aware to be blown about by the winds of mob violence. Writing in the *Federalist Papers*, he noted, “in all very numerous assemblies, of whatever characters composed, passion never fails to wrest the sceptre from reason.” That is precisely why America’s system of government is wedded to various checks and balances and a broad division of power: so the impassioned few cannot override the reasonable majority. This is also why any justice system worth its salt has consequences for criminal actions.

I ask the Department of Justice to prosecute every person who defaces or dismantles statues and memorials to the fullest extent of the law. There are several laws already on the books that are relevant here. The Veterans' Memorial Preservation and Recognition Act of 2003 applies to those who injure memorials commemorating members of the United States Armed Forces. The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 allows for the prosecution of those who deface or attempt to deface any property of the United States or any agency thereof. The Anti-Riot Act of 1968 provides for the prosecution of individuals who incite or engage in a riot. The Insurrection Act of 1807 allows the president to deploy troops to quell a rebellion.

If you feel these and other laws already in existence do not provide adequate legal authority to bring justice to these criminals and their victims, I would be glad to introduce legislation to solve that problem. If we care about America's next generation, we cannot let violent criminal actions go unpunished. What we allow today is what will continue tomorrow.

Thank you for your service to our country and your commitment to protecting our communities during this difficult time. I am confident you will act swiftly and carefully in bringing violent rioters to justice.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Kennedy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

John Kennedy
United States Senator