


## Article

# Contested Heritage or Cancel Culture? The Case of Ivan Meštrović's Public Sculptures in Chicago

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**Abstract:** Social conflicts and political pressures represent a specific man-made hazard for heritage protection and result in contested heritage. One of the recent cases, Equestrian Indians publicly displayed in Chicago, was the subject of contestation following the Black Lives Matter protests. The aim of this paper was to critically assess heritage contestation in this case study, also demonstrating other factors influencing heritage contestation than those so far detected in theory, and to find possible coping strategies. Qualitative mixed methods were applied: desk research, critical instance case study, and unstructured interviews. Analysis was completed in line with four theories (international relations theory, collective memory theory, social movement theory and cancel culture) and the results showed: (a) that the case had no greater effect on international relations of the USA and Croatia; (b) a new type of dissonance: a reversed contestation based on a distorted narrative; (c) illusory resistance in the social movement theory; (d) a new theory termed “cancel heritage”, denoting the cancel culture features a spill-over to a collective memory. Possible coping strategies for heritage protection point to the need for a more nuanced participatory approach while forgetting, but possibly the most effective method leading to a collective psychological liberation is hardly achievable.

**Keywords:** contested heritage; social movement theory; international relations theory; collective memory theory; heritage-related legal issues; Ivan Meštrović



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## 1. Introduction

Today heritage faces different challenges. Environmental pressures due to climate change (e.g., earthquakes, carbon emission, fires, floods, invasive plants) seem to be the most pressing ones; however, of equal importance should be those ascribed to a number of human pressures affecting heritage sustainability. Examples include over-tourism and looting. However, a specific human threat to heritage sustainability is related to social conflicts and political pressures, as heritage is often used for the creation and even manipulation of identity narratives. This may result in undesirable heritage: if repulsive or mixed feelings are expressed towards heritage it may result in its poor safeguarding, preservation and maintenance activities, neglect or even damage. We often refer to such cases as difficult heritage—this topic has been drawing academic attention for some twenty-five years now. A number of academics have researched the topic; Tunbridge and Ashworth [1] termed it dissonant heritage while the term usually used today, contested heritage, was introduced by Olsen and Timothy [2]. A growing interest for the topic has been seen since then in the works of different researchers (e.g., [3–6], etc.), and a number of contested cases have been seen in practice (e.g., Captain Cook in Australia [7] or Christopher Columbus in Latin America [8]). As much as heritage contestation, being the intrinsic feature of heritage [9], can relate to any aspect of heritage (e.g., ownership, financing, management, presentation), it usually relates to its meaning and consequent interpretation. Naturally, it is in a close relationship with its stakeholders and the disagreement resulting in conflicts over

heritage [10]. This is especially accentuated in terms of tangible heritage which is publicly displayed, as these *lieux de mémoire* may be particularly difficult as it is where the memory is embodied with heritage and the place [11].

The Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 following the death of the African American Minneapolitan spilled over to the issues of heritage. In the city of Chicago, activism took place to revise the city's monuments and memorials. In the words of the newly established Chicago Monuments Project, as stated on their website as of 31 August 2021, the committee was appointed to complete such a revision with the aim "to grapple with the often unacknowledged or forgotten history". The aim of this paper is to critically assess this particular process of heritage contestation in the case study of Ivan Meštrović's monuments, The Bowman and The Spearman, publicly displayed in Chicago. The monuments represent two equestrian Native Americans, criticized by the Chicago Monuments Project on their website in August 2021 for their "romanticized and reductive images of American Indians".

The starting point of this research analysis is a seemingly reversed contestation, a distorted narrative related to the original purpose of these particular monuments by the Croatian sculptor that this social movement is trying to instill.

The analysis is backed by theoretical works through the following lenses: international relations theory, collective memory theory, social movement theory and "cancel culture" features. Due to the fact that the monuments in question are works by the Croatian sculptor displayed in the USA, the case is a subject of foreign relations policy, which is why international relations theory is introduced. Further on, as there is an obvious discordance on the meaning of the monuments in question, collective memory theory will serve in the theoretical ground analysis. Social movement theory is further introduced since the contestation started as an activist request. Finally, the case has traits of the "cancel culture" phenomenon, spilled over to heritage, due to the call for the monuments' removal. Although to our knowledge no academic theory on "cancel heritage" exists, the phenomenon of "cancel culture" is examined and compared in this particular case. A new term of "cancel heritage" is potentially introduced into theory as a phenomenon of promoting the "cancelling" of heritage assets, tangible or intangible, due to their problematic meanings.

International relations theory, specifically the English School of International Relations, is a starting point for understanding normative issues related to heritage. The two concepts that this theory promotes are pluralism and solidarism. The first one claims that human values are ubiquitous which is why this theory accepts the plurality of states. It means that the sovereign states operate in mutual recognition and cooperate based on multilateral agreements. The other theory, solidarism, is broader and relates to shared norms, rules and institutions reaching agreement about moral standards in general [12]. This theory is the basis of some international organizations' operations, usually involving a multilateral perspective, e.g., UNESCO World Heritage follows a solidarist approach in heritage safeguarding [12]. The pluralist approach can also be applied in bilateral agreements as it follows the same principles of mutual recognition of the sovereign states, which is then operationalized through bilateral cooperation agreements. At the policy-level, heritage is also often a subject of legal agreements. They are, however, often specific for different countries but generally refer to the safeguarding and protection of heritage. So usually, bilateral agreements imply that the country in which the cultural asset is located will seek to protect and preserve it, and the other party may be invited to cooperate. Usually, the national laws in force are applied in practice, while the agreements are generally seen as contributing to the enhancement of the contacts, understanding, tolerance and friendship between the signatory countries.

In the United States, monument preservation exists within a national legal framework, where the power of the federal government is limited and powers not granted to the federal government are left to the states. Since the United States' Constitution does not give the federal government authority to control monuments on property not owned by the federal government, a bilateral agreement with another country on the mutual respect of the cultural heritage of the parties would not give the federal government the legal right

to control the decisions of a state or local government in regard to monuments. Among the powers traditionally reserved to the states is the so-called “police power”, a concept derived from Anglo-Saxon law. This is the inherent authority of the state to regulate, protect and promote public health, safety, morals and general welfare. Exercising this power, states have enacted laws regulating the use of land, buildings and objects and have delegated some of their authority to local governments. Many local governments, in turn, have enacted local planning, zoning and historic preservation laws.

The U.S. Supreme Court has held that the power to protect buildings and areas with special historic, architectural or cultural significance is a legitimate use of police power. Therefore, unless prohibited by state law, local governments have the power to regulate monuments, particularly in regard to those that are located on local government property. The only involvement by the federal government would be in cases where federally licensed or funded projects would impact properties listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. In which case, the federal agency responsible for the project would be required to conduct a review under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Such a review would be procedural only and the preservation of the property would not be assured.

Further on, the collective memory theory also provides grounds for the research. It was developed in the works of French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs [13] but is also a topic in more recent works related to heritage and tourism (e.g., [14]). According to Halbwachs, the contestation stems from different and opposing notions of the past and how the opposing groups remember that past. The fact that there are opposing groups involved makes it extremely difficult to come up with a unanimous interpretation. Usually, “memories of the dominant sub-group ultimately become the ‘official’ memory of the collective” [14], p. 237. According to Tunbridge and Ashworth [1], several types of dissonance are recorded: a contradictory transmission, a failure in transmission, obsolete transmission and undesirable transmission. The current paper finds relevant contradictory transmission but also a partial failure in transmission. The first one refers to conflicting interpretations by different stakeholders. The second one denotes a situation when a message fails to reach its recipients for different reasons (e.g., lack of understanding, irrelevance, etc.).

Next, social movements theory is introduced since heritage contests are often the subject of social movements. Jasper [15], p. 2 defines social movements as “sustained, intentional efforts to foster or retard broad legal and social changes, primarily outside the normal institutional channels endorsed by authorities”. The two necessary elements of social movements are players and arenas: players act in arenas which have cultural meanings. “As physical places, they are often filled with meaningful physical objects that influence action” [16], p. 4. This involves the emotional background of the actions which eventually gives tone to the narratives used in the actions. Thus, heritage contesters use specific strategies trying to persuade others to join them in claiming their own interpretations of the past but also exerting efforts to influence a group’s heritage. They are regarded as political since they go against the claims of the others [16] and drive the actions in the new political context. The social movement theory, therefore, observes heritage as a resource for social movements. They often use tactics of resistance to the official historical narratives trying to (re)create meanings, to re-tell from another perspective. This process is termed heritagization, defined as “a process to adapt use of . . . heritage to promote images favorable for the political management” [17], p. 35. It is often seen in tourism for its pragmatic purposes of telling (usually unauthentic) stories of interest to tourists but is also used by governments in the politicization of heritage. As mentioned, the same tactics can be used by social movements. While it is usually considered that social movements fight for the right cause, trying to rectify injustice, “it is important to avoid reductionist dichotomies between bad heritage (by state and capital) and good heritage (by civic committees and protest movements). Not all state interventions are necessarily misguided; many NGO-directed activities turn out to be self-serving” [18], p. 171. Social movements usually utilize an

appeal to emotions to engage a wider audience for their cause. This is also the subject of analysis in the case of the Chicago monuments in this research.

Finally, cancel culture is researched. It is defined as “collective strategies by activists using social pressures to achieve cultural ostracism of targets (someone or something) accused of offensive words or deed” [19], p. 4. It is actually a “tool for silencing marginalized people who have adapted earlier resistance strategies for effectiveness in the digital space” [20], p. 88. John Drury [21] writes that history has witnessed problematic narratives regarding collectives, crowds and people since their actions are usually extremely emotionally charged, sometimes even leading to hysteria. History abounds with cases of public shaming, for example, today, cancel culture usually uses digital tools for the easiest spread of shaming because of their large reach. Cancel culture is thus related to contested heritage, as the intentions of cancelling actions are directed towards heritage elimination.

Practical implications of the research are also put forward. In order to find possible solutions, coping strategies with dissonant heritage are studied. Thus, the existing literature has detected some strategies for coping with heritage contestation. Namely, Nauert [22] advocates a constructivist approach to the integration of diverse narratives, Weisse and Ross [23] opt for a participatory approach to contested heritage management, other authors (e.g., [24,25]) see opportunities in using new technologies as a means for diverse interpretations, while Schütz [26] draws attention to the artistic interventions having capacities to mitigate the different narratives.

The constructivist approach is focused on interpretation and communication. Three types of strategies are proposed: (a) making dissonance explicit, (b) emphasizing reuse in the present and (c) conveying dissonance through contrast. The first strategy involves the use of language and visual interpretations which are not emotionally charged towards one group/event but rather call for a more neutral and responsible critical look. The second strategy emphasizes a new use or a new meaning of the past events/heritage in the present, while the third strategy avoids evaluative language and rather makes use of contrasting terms to emphasize both the positive and negative features of the heritage in question [22].

Although introduced some three decades ago, the participatory approach has lately become a buzz word in practically all aspects of cultural heritage management. It also is advocated for mitigating heritage contestation issues, e.g., in the research by Weisse and Ross, [23] the involvement of various stakeholders and inclusion of indigenous knowledge substantially enhanced the search for meaning. This has also been confirmed by other authors (e.g., [22,27]) who see an important role of citizens in adding to a single discourse, potentially also assigning a new meaning. Multi-vocality, therefore, builds on the constructivist approach and previously elaborated communication strategies allowing for the search for (new) meaning through multiple voices.

A number of recent projects involve new technologies in heritage interpretation since they proved to be not only more adapted to new audiences but also acted as an effective tool in reaching audiences, especially in times of crisis such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic. The use of new technologies is also advocated for contested heritage since “virtual heritage applications emerge as non-physical, neutral and adaptive tools that allows different stories to appear side by side” [24], p. 161. They not only allow diverse interpretations but engage new generations which potentially resonates with them [25]. This coping strategy is, again, related to communication and interpretation, thus confirming the importance of heritage regardless of its contestation. It also fits well into the constructivist approach.

Strategies of matching heritage with contemporary arts and creative industries are usually undertaken to make past events more alive, allowing for a more interesting heritage interpretation appropriate for modern visitors. Schütz [26], in her article on the colonial heritage in Bristol and Marseille showed how contemporary artworks may support the decolonization of contested heritage by allowing a challenge to existing heritage narratives and consequently mitigating the opposed sides. The artists used different methods such as performances, installations and city walks to engage citizens and rewrite their past. This strategy is in line with the participatory approach and again builds on constructivism.

While all the mentioned strategies are related to communication/interpretation and/or heritage management, a more general, political (consequently also policy-level) strategy deserves attention. Halbwachs [28] advanced the thesis that forgetting is necessary to be able to correctly evocate the past. Since past events may be emotionally charged, they are difficult to deal with which is why forgetting may occur. Further on, “affective memory when forged at heritage sites, shatters singular readings and narratives” [29]; thus, again, affective heritage should be inclusive, which may be approached in a participatory manner. While the strategy for coping with contested heritage is certainly not to forget historical facts, a shift in forgetting to the opposed group as well as an admission of guilt may be used for the change to occur. This, however, involves both individual and collective psychology and is not easy (e.g., the German collective guilt for the events of the Holocaust).

The aim of this article is to demonstrate that there are factors other than those so far detected in the theoretical framework influencing the contestation of heritage and to reflect on the strategies which can be effectively employed in order to save the heritage and resolve dissonances.

The structure of the paper is as follows: after the Introduction, which sets the scene and provides the theoretical framework, the Materials and Methods section explains which methodologies and materials have been used in the research. Situation analysis follows, presenting the results of the research, which are the basis for the following discussion and suggestion of practical implications. In this last section, the results are placed in relation to the theory, while practical implications are focused on possible coping strategies to solve the problem.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Qualitative mixed methods were used to critically assess the process of contestation of Ivan Meštrović's monuments in Chicago, The Bowman and the Spearman. The starting point was the critical instance case study of the process related to the contestation of the mentioned monuments. The basic data on the case study were collected from the media. Both American and Croatian web articles available in the Google search free of charge were analyzed alongside a publicly available video material of an online meeting organized to discuss the case<sup>1</sup>. The search included the key words (“contested Meštrović monuments in Chicago”, “Meštrović Indians in Chicago”, “contested Chicago monuments”), which then led to other related websites. The web materials were used to collect the basic information about the case in question. This is why only the basic factual data on the case were searched for, and any, possibly biased, commentaries were not paid attention. The questions used in the search were the following: what the monuments represent?, what was the author's idea behind the monuments?, why are they contested?, what triggered the contestation?, who are the opposed sides?, what each of the opposed sides claim?, what is recommended as a solution. These served to ground the case study. In parallel, desk research analysis was applied to elaborate the theoretical basis of contested heritage and to ground the research. The case study was then put in relation to the theoretical concepts in the step-by-step analysis. In this way, each theoretical concept was paired with the situation in the case study. Apart from the case-related printed media/web material, legal documents and existing official documentation related to the case were also analyzed by way of desk research to complement the theoretical works and to enrich the publicly available case study-related information. Material was provided by the Croatian Ministry of Culture and Media and by the Croatian Embassy in Washington. As for the legal documents, the list of bilateral treaties between Croatia and the USA has been made publicly available through the Croatian Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, while the full text of the treaties is also publicly available on the Internet. Additionally, unstructured interviews with both Croatian and American distinguished stakeholders were planned in order to elaborate the course of actions taken in relation to the case as well as to complement the knowledge collected by way of desk research. Interviews were conducted with officials from the Croatian Ministry of Culture and Media and the Croatian Embassy in Washington, but those planned with



US stakeholders failed. E-mail communication with the Chicago Monuments Project (CMP) and with a distinguished US university professor with professional knowledge on the case resulted in silence. To mitigate this limitation, publicly available statements found in the web-based material of the CMP and US professor were taken into account. Additionally, a publicly available video of an online meeting organized to discuss the case was analyzed. Interview questions were crafted to explore the relevant theories and reach conclusions. The questions, therefore, focused on the legal positions related to the case (legal issues and international relations theory), sought the interviewees' opinion on what the monuments represent (collective memory theory), and observed the arenas in which they act alongside emotional narratives (social movement theory and cancel culture). The video material was also analyzed from the point of view of the mentioned theories focusing, where possible, on the same questions. The unstructured interview was selected as a method in order to free respondents of formal, substantive and psychological restrictions since the topic is difficult and may limit respondents in speaking freely. The video material of the online meeting shows that the meeting also allowed free expression and was therefore deemed as an appropriate complement to the interviews.

The research was completed from July 2021 to January 2022 but the research involving documentation and web material originated from an earlier period (starting from March 2021) when the contestation was made public. Additionally, at a later stage (in August 2022) the *CMP Recommendations for the Current & Future Collection* were published and considered in the analysis.

### 3. Situation Analysis and Results

To be able to fully understand the contestation of Meštrović's public sculptures in Chicago, a situation analysis is provided. Two bronze sculptures of mounted American Indians, *The Bowman* (Figure S1) and *the Spearman* (Figure S2), are works by the famous Croatian sculptor Ivan Meštrović. They were commissioned from the sculptor by the B. F. Ferguson fund in 1925, made in Zagreb, Croatia and publicly displayed in Congress Plaza, at the intersection of Ida B. Wells Drive and Michigan Avenue in Grant Park, Chicago in 1928. The sculptures stand as gatekeepers and are known as *Equestrian Indians* or *Indians*. The urban planner Daniel Burnham had the idea to put the sculptures there as a symbol of America's Indian heritage. Both sculptures are intentionally without weapons since the sculptor wanted the focus to be on the equestrians' and horses' musculature.

As mentioned in the Introduction, following the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, heritage came center-stage as a subject of revision in Chicago. The Chicago Monuments Project (CMP) was created by the Chicago Mayor, with the purpose to review the Chicago monuments and suggest some solutions. It is organized as a platform with four objectives, as published on their website: 1. to make a catalogue of monuments and public art on City or Park District property, 2. to establish an advisory committee who should determine which pieces of art are problematic, 3. to recommend new monuments to be commissioned in place of the existing ones; and 4. to come up with a platform serving as a place for civic dialogue on Chicago's history. In order to respond to activists' requests, the city established a committee, consisting of "a group of community leaders, artists, architects, scholars, curators, and city officials who are dedicating their time, experience, and expertise to lead this effort", as documented on their website.

CMP acts as a platform of professionals using a participatory approach to achieve their goals, thus engaging the public to obtain legitimization for their actions.

Participatory methods are a laudable *modus operandi*, but the essence of their version of the narrative related to *Equestrian Indians* is contested. The committee sees the monuments as "romanticized and reductive images of American Indians". On the other side, the sculptor's idea behind these works of art was to glorify the natives. The monuments are a masterpiece and testify to the American Indians' contribution to the history of the USA. Thus, they should neither in their content nor form negatively portray American Indians. Moreover, as noted by Vujanović and Prančević in the *Jutarnji list* article on 4 March 2021,

to avoid stereotypes, the sculptor, paying homage to indigeneity, gave up the concept of portraying cowboys. On the other side, Vukobratović and Hanaček, in the *Novosti* article on 19 March 2021 claimed that “the adequacy of monuments in public space cannot be effectively defended by their formal analysis, and that the context for this debate is not ‘the pinnacle of European and world art deco’, as occasionally suggested, but by a conscious political decision by Chicago authorities in the early 20th century to clearly mark the city in the key to the triumph of colonialism”. In this way, American Indians, with oversized noses and musculature in the pose reflecting strength and dynamism, are represented according to the iconographic template of the “noble savage”. This stands behind the reason for the “reductive and romanticized” narrative which developed around the monuments’ contestation. Although the sculptor’s idea behind the creation of these works of art was totally opposed from that, the fact remains that it was a political decision by the Chicago authorities at the beginning of the last century to mark the victory over the natives. Their initial idea, moreover, was to have two immigrant sculptures and two natives, thus representing a conflict, but Meštrović refused it.

The contestation with which we are dealing here is substantially radical as the CMP already seeks in its objectives to recommend new monuments to be commissioned in place of the existing ones without trying to employ some of the usual coping strategies of a soft nature. In the case of Equestrian Indians, in the words of experts, there is a worry for the fate of the artworks since plaster models are not to be found anymore. Thus, if the monuments are destroyed, the world of art and heritage would be deprived of a remarkable masterpiece. The sketches and studies exist, but if the monument was to be re-cast, we would still be missing the original.

The Croatian Ministry of Culture and Media through its diplomatic channels pointed to the inappropriateness of the project’s initiative. The official letter addressed to the Chicago Monuments Project members of the Advisory Committee was sent, signed by two prominent Croatian experts Barbara Vujanović, President of the Expert Committee of Ivan Meštrović Museums and Dalibor Prančević, Department of Art History, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Split. In the letter, the importance of Meštrović’ Indians was explained while quoting the contract between Ivan Meštrović and the joint Committee of the Ferguson’s Foundation and the Art Institute in Chicago by which “two bronze equestrian statues in the memory of the American Indian” were commissioned. As for the appearance of the statues, the experts explained that their hyper-dimension was related to the period (Neo-classical and Art Deco expressions) Meštrović lived and worked in, and the nudity points “not only to physical strength . . . but also to their moral virtues . . . the primary intent of Meštrović’s monument” [30]. The monuments’ reductiveness (bow and spear), further on, were explained in favor of the sculptor’s “inventiveness and departure from stereotypical, romanticized and mostly inert and passivized portrayals of American Indians and their horses” [30]. The letter also pointed to Meštrović’s work which contributed to building cultural and political bridges between his homeland and the USA and to the authors’ readiness to provide proofs which “would speak in support of the necessity of keeping this chef d’oeuvre in Chicago” [30].

Apart from this letter, the Croatian Embassy in Washington, D.C. organized an online conference in May 2021 with both Croatian and American experts knowledgeable of the topic, government officials (national and local) and native American representatives with the aim to clarify the issue. In the words of the Croatian ambassador to the US, a polite and inclusive discussion was seen among the participants. The opposed group representatives advocated the complete absence of representing American Indians in the public space as they may be “demeaning and hurtful” in the words of Erika Doss expressed at this conference, “detrimental representations of natives”, as expressed by Katrina Phillips and that “the only place these statues work in is a museum”, as expressed by Rose Miron. They all saw the statues as having potentially negative psychological effects for their supposedly stereotypical representations which erase the contemporary notion of the 21st century native people. On the other hand, such a notion was again questioned by the Croatian

representatives who claimed that the statues should be viewed in the context of time; as of today, these may seem stereotypical representations of American Indians, but the time when they were created provided a different context with a much more limited information than today. Unfortunately, the notion of “stereotypical representations” has been taken for granted as a criterion for the monuments contestation without explaining what this notion entails (what is stereotypical? what is historic and what is contemporary notion of native people? how and why “judge” the monument from the 21st century perspective and not within the historical context?). Thus, the notion is unclear and is rather arbitrarily seemingly being used to stir an emotional reaction.

Further on, information provided by the Croatian Ambassador to the US stated that a representative of the American Indian community in Chicago expressed her displeasure with the Indian community not being even consulted by the CMP.

Analysis of the case study in this research has no intention to judge between the two opposed sides; rather, it tries to provide a view on the situation through the different academic theoretical lenses, focusing, in the end, on the coping strategies. Therefore, the analysis was completed according to the four theories upon which the research has been grounded. As for the legal issues and international relations, an Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Government of the United States of America on the Protection and Preservation of Certain Cultural Properties exists. It ensures that both Croatian and American “cultural heritage is not discriminated against, either formally or in fact, as regards the scope and application of its laws or regulations relating to: (a) the protection and preservation of their cultural heritage; (b) The right to participate in the protection and preservation of their cultural heritage; and (c) public access to that heritage”, as listed on the website of the Official Gazzette of the Republic of Croatia on 29 December 2021. This agreement is one of twenty-five similar bilateral agreements currently in effect between the United States and countries in Central and Eastern Europe and adjacent parts of the former Soviet Union in elaboration of the principles and purposes of the 1972 World Heritage Convention that primarily focus on communal properties of groups that were victims of genocide during World War II and are no longer able to protect and preserve properties without assistance. The agreement between the United States and Croatia does not seem to provide a basis for legal actions but establishes a basis for relations between the two countries in the field of heritage.

When it comes to researching collective memory theory, there is no doubt that two opposing groups are present in the case of Meštrović’s monuments in Chicago: social movements against the Chicago monuments (additionally formalized in the CMP) and the producer of the message (Meštrović himself as well as Croatian experts defending the monuments and Meštrović’s position). However, the results show that there are only seemingly two different and opposing notions of the past; rather, both groups share the same notion. They remember the past in the same way and have the same goal: to cherish the memory of American Indians. However, they do so through different lenses: the sculptor originally wanted to pay homage to American Natives and used artistic tools then in vogue (Neo-classical and Art Deco expressions) to depict them as strong, muscular and fearless; the opposed group, also wanting to pay homage to American Indians, interpret such an artwork as too romanticized and reductive. Additional analysis performed only recently, after the CMP published its final report *CMP Recommendations for the Current & Future Collection*, shows that the contestation in the public discourse is somewhat more pronounced. The report brings results from a survey performed as part of the CMP community outreach activity to better understand the public opinion, based on which recommendations of the monuments’ future were put forward. Out of the four options (“take the monument down”, “commission new artwork in response”, “add new signage”, “no changes are needed” and “other”), the majority of survey respondents (almost 40 per cent) opted for the radical solution of taking the monument down, somewhat over 20 per cent thought that commissioning new artwork should be completed, around 17 percent wanted to add new signage to it, and 16 per cent opted for other options. In relation to the Columbus monument (in the



case of which almost 80 per cent of respondents wanted to take the monument down), the Bowman and the Spearman were not seen as so heavily problematic. The survey, however, is not representative as it was only based on 49 responses taken in a very short period of time surveying the “views of Chicago-area American Indians” [31]. Further on, the same report’s key takeaway messages synthesized from wide range of public engagement activities involving cca. 1700 people shows divided opinions on the monument (from taking pride in the culture associated with the monument to questioning the validity of “complicated” monuments; from their importance for immigrants to their perpetuating racism; expressing the need to judge the monuments in the context of their time and acknowledging their artistic value) [31]. The contestation between the two groups, therefore, is evident but, as the document does not report any statistical data, it is impossible to judge which opinion prevails. The native community respondents contested the monuments for their stereotypical and demeaning depictions of American Indians; the Bowman and the Spearman were seen to “present stylized and unrealistic images of American Indians” [31]; however, this was not particularly explained. The final recommendation regarding the future of these monuments was rather vague and regarded “permanent/ongoing artistic interventions”, which would “help viewers reconsider the works and their subject” [31].

According to the social movements theory, in the case of Meštrović’s monuments, different players were identified: field activists (engaged in protests), members of the CMP Committee (representatives of the City of Chicago, community leaders, university professors, artists, cultural and art professionals, civil society and minority representatives) and a wider group of individuals (participating in organized professional discussions on the topic such as in the above mentioned virtual conference organized by the Croatian Embassy in Washington). The local community is represented by the CMP Committee as it involves their representatives. Arenas they act in are directly linked to public places in Chicago: first and foremost, the location of the Chicago monuments; further on, through the Chicago Monuments Project platform established as a committee, i.e., consultative body to the mayor; and through public discussions organized on the topic. All those arenas have cultural meanings, and it is especially the case with the contested monuments which occupy the public space. Emotional narratives used have their roots in the tragic event with a deadly end when due to police brutality the African American Minneapolitan George Floyd was murdered. Such an event carries a strong emotional burden which is then transferred to the narratives linked to heritage related to the dominant culture (e.g., Columbus, Presidents Washington and Lincoln) but also to minority cultures such as Meštrović’s Indians. Further on, emotional charge is also seen in the feelings elicited by the very representations of the Meštrović’s statues, which evidently do not fit the contemporary time. Along the same line, the Croatian community of Chicago feels a great deal of pride for the statues in question, using them to transfer knowledge of the Croatian history to their children. This narrative is supposedly in place to protect minorities from the dominant group interpretations; however, the results of the analysis show that the narratives are not so different but rather differently interpreted. In addition, some representatives of minority cultures were not totally in line with it but were surprised that nobody asked them how they felt about the statues in question. Moreover, reacting in favor of the monuments’ public display, one of the Indian chiefs said that the Indian community did not want to be “deleted” again, as stated in the telephone interview with Pjer Šimunović, 2 September 2021.

Finally, the results show that although CMP was established as a mitigation measure or an ad hoc coping strategy, cancel culture elements can be seen in the harsh narratives of the possible removal of the monuments. A more lenient discourse has been heard in the course of actions about the recontextualization, reimagination and repurposing of monuments, but often again they entail their removal from the public space to be exchanged with other concepts, e.g., gathering places. Public shaming of certain monuments has resulted in marking them with graffiti or pulling them down. Meštrović’s statues have not been impaired but “cancellation” voices in public discussions are present, providing no solid but rather emotional arguments for their interpretation as “romanticized and reductive

images of American Indians”, as claimed on the CMP website, 31 August 2021. The sculptor’s artistic freedom, the context and the period of his work, as well as professional explanations by experts in the field serve little in providing an argument for changing such interpretations. The emotional reaction, however, cannot be disregarded as there is the rationale for cancelling the monuments in the historical injustice towards native communities, but this leads to a greater complexity regarding possible coping strategies.

For the greater clarity of the multiple voices, the results are summarized in the following Table 1.

**Table 1.** Main arguments for contestation by the opposing sides—summary of research results.

Contested Elements	PRO	CON
Contestation narrative	glorification of natives	romanticized and reductive image of natives
Meaning of physical representation	physical strength and moral virtues	not explained but pointing to the “noble savage”
Heritage values	artistic	no value
Political context	celebration of natives	triumph of colonization
Time context	past	present
Legal context	not binding	not binding
Emotional charge	pride	negative psychological effects
Recommended solution	leave as is	remove and place in a museum

#### 4. Discussion and Practical Implications

The analysis showed that legally the case of Meštrović’s monuments in Chicago has no influence on international relations between Croatia and the USA. The sculptor of Croatian descent also held American citizenship and is, therefore regarded as a citizen of the USA. This means that there are no legal grounds which would involve the Republic of Croatia and the very fact that the sculptor is of a Croatian descent has no relevance in the case. Further on, he was commissioned the contested statues by the American institution which is their owner. Therefore, the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Government of the United States of America on the Protection and Preservation of Certain Cultural Properties is not legally binding in this case. The reactions provoked by the case were strong in Croatia and attractive for the different media due to the perception which was created that Croatian heritage is endangered. Official reactions by the Croatian political administration and professionals, in the form of the official letter and organization of virtual conference have been performed in order to mitigate the situation and protect the monuments. Legally, there was no need for that; rather it can be seen as a political act and/or professional opinion. The case is hardly going to influence international relations between the two countries: first, due to the inexistence of the legal grounds for it; second, for quite some time there has been a silence in the actions regarding the case; and third, the case has a minor importance in the overall international relations policy between the two countries. The only possibility of future legal protection would require adoption of a state law by the Illinois legislature or a local ordinance by the Chicago municipal government. Currently sculptures of this kind are not protected by either. At least six Southern states, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee have monument preservation laws, primarily designed to protect memorials to the Confederacy. However, legislation in Alabama (AL Code § 41-9-232) and Georgia (O.C.G.A. §50-3-1) apply to a broad range of monuments on public property in the state. Other states, such as Pennsylvania, have considered but failed to adopt this type of monument regulation. Similar legislation has not been passed in Illinois. However, in March 2021 a Chicago Alderman proposed an ordinance that would provide “Any decommissioning or other removal of a statue, monument, plaque or similar carved or cast artwork shall be subject to approval by the City Council”. The proposed ordinance has not been adopted. A lawsuit has been filed in the city over the removal of statues of Christopher Columbus, but should it succeed, the decision would be based on a narrow interpretation of an earlier specific agreement between the city and Italian–American residents, as stated

on the *Lewiston Morning Tribune* website as of 28 January 2022. Any solution would seem to be in the political arena rather than the courthouse.

In relation to the collective memory theory and Tunbridge and Ashworth's [1] types of dissonance, the case of Meštrović's monuments in Chicago is difficult to be categorized within any of these types of dissonance since the idea which lead the sculptor in creating those monuments was not at all conflicting, so quite the opposite of the statues are 'accused' for. The characteristics of contradictory transmission as well as a failure in transmission can partially be confirmed. The contradictory transmission is seen in the diverse interpretations by the opposing groups, while failure in transmission is also noted due to the failure in reaching the recipients due to their lack of understanding and knowledge about the sculptor, his artistic style and period. Although both of the opposing groups wanted to convey the same message, what is noted here is a rather distorted narrative related to the official memory of these particular monuments. The meaning, thus, is paradoxically trying to be rewritten by attributing the monuments a message that they never conveyed. Thus, a transformed transmission is noted here since the interpretation greatly differs from what the producer of the message had in mind. The paradox is also seen in the fact that in this particular case, there are a number of representatives of the dominant group who fight for the rights of minorities, which is inconsistent with Yankholmes and McKercher [14] who note that usually, it is memories of the dominant group which are considered as a memory of the collective. Moreover again, the sculptor's message was to cherish the minorities and not the dominant group.

Further on, the case confirms to have organized players, arenas and emotional narratives as per the Jones, Mozzafari and Jasper's [16] social movement theory. The resistance tactics to the official historical narratives, however, is only illusory since there is no greater difference in the meaning of the monuments. Actually, the case serves as a means for the political agenda, so we talk about the heritagization process, as per Nilsson [17]. Thus, both sides used the case in their political agendas demonstrating how heritage can be a source of politicization. At the same time, the case confirms De Cesari and Herzfeld's [18] view that sometimes NGO-directed activities are misguided and that official interventions are not always bad ones. Only if proofs are put forward that the monuments are a celebration of colonialism would the social movement actions be justified.

The emotional narratives confirmed by this case are further also in line with cancel culture features as well as Drury's [21] claim of crowds' extremely emotional actions. Emotions as drivers for actions may easily blur the real meaning and value of the heritage in question, which is also the case of American Indians in Chicago: it is the tragic death of George Floyd which triggered emotional reactions which then spilled over to other aspects of life, in this case on heritage. Thus, the protests grew into a political action, which again confirms Drury's [21] claim of crowds usually being colored by political ideologies. The rationale for cancelling the monuments has deep roots in historical injustice towards native communities and represents the counter hegemonic expression known also in subaltern studies and in the politics of silence [32], which reclaims the history for the oppressed. While it is understandable and should be respected, it can also blur the substance of the contestation.

To reflect on the aim of the article, therefore, this case study demonstrated that much of the contestation is related to political interpretations and has no grounds in legally binding agreements and only partially in the academic theoretical frameworks. As for the legal issues, as mentioned, no legally binding actions on the part of Croatia can be performed. Rather, the case speaks more of a general need for heritage protection but without any legal obligations. When it comes to types of dissonant heritage, although some similarities can be found in Tunbridge and Ashworth's typology [1], the case reveals a new type of dissonance: a reversed contestation, which employs a distorted narrative in order to achieve a social goal. A new moment in the social movement theory is also noted here: while this theory is based on resistance tactics to the official historical narratives, this case showed that the resistance is only illusory, since it is being based on a reversed contestation,

as mentioned before. Thus, a novel theory of “reversed contestation” can be added to the social movement theory. It can be defined as a concept using inverted and distorted heritage-related narrative with the aim of achieving social, political or some other goal. In this way, evidence-based facts are disregarded but rather a goal-driven narrative is used instead. Finally, a new concept is introduced here, which we termed as “cancel heritage”, denoting the cancel culture features spill-over to a collective memory. The term relates to a phenomenon, which simply promotes the “cancelling” of heritage assets, due to their problematic meanings. It is considered to be offensive towards certain heritage assets or towards heritage of certain groups. This entails ostracism towards these heritage assets which can range from ignoring to rejection and exclusion from a public space.

Contested or dissonant heritage is often termed as difficult heritage seeking coping strategies. While it is not always easy to find a solution for such difficult cases, the existing theoretical frameworks of coping strategies are put in relation to this particular case. First, reflecting on Nauert’s [22] constructivist approach to the integration of diverse narratives as well as the use of new technologies in heritage interpretation, as advocated by Selim et al. [24], the strategy demonstrates to be successful in the case when heritage is on display. Then, it is just a question of the use of a carefully planned language style in communicating heritage to the public. If, however, it has been removed from the public eyes, as some of the narratives advocated for in the case of these Chicago monuments, the strategy is of no use. The embodiment of heritage in a place is extremely powerful and should be respected since it elicits emotional reactions, as per Nora [11]. Still, removal from the public space may not be the best solution as “the best way to approach statues and sites which have become contested is not to remove them but to provide thoughtful, long-lasting and powerful reinterpretation, which keeps the structure’s physical context but can add new layers of meaning, allowing us all to develop a deeper understanding of . . . often difficult past”, as English Heritage stated on their website as of 1 October 2021. New technologies allow interpretation even if heritage is not on display physically, but such a strategy entails that, in this case, a highly worthy artwork would be removed from public eyes, thus depriving us from the original and eventually also decreasing interest for it.

Second, the participatory approach in finding a common meaning, advocated by Weisse and Ross [23] although seemingly promising, in this particular case showed its deficiency since it was too emotionally charged which highly affects group beliefs. While common discussions, as proved by the analysis of the virtual conference in this research, open new horizons and increase knowledge about the “other”, they tend to be a one-time event. A more nuanced and more elaborated “how-to” approach will have to be put forward in order to achieve success in using this coping strategy.

Third, a strategy of matching heritage with contemporary arts and creative industries proposed by Schütz [26] may potentially be successful but under the condition that the decision is made to leave heritage at its location. It, therefore, entails further mitigation possibly also recalling an engaged participatory approach.

Finally, building on Halbwach’s thesis [28] of the necessity of forgetting to be able to correctly evocate the past, it seems to potentially be the most effective strategy but, at the same time, the most difficult to achieve since it would involve a collective psychology approach. In this case, a forged affective memory is trying to be instilled, as per Tolia-Kelly, Waterton and Watson’s theory [29], which greatly diminishes the possibilities of a collective psychological liberation. Besides, if heritage is taken as an instrument for achieving political goals, no true forgetting and/or forgiveness is about to happen. Further work on coping strategies, therefore, is called for in future research. The complexity of the issue grasped some of the theories, which were hypothesized to have impact on the case in question and the arising coping strategies, but the article suggests that there may further be other theories and avenues which may provide a possible lens for research and could be further explored.

**Supplementary Materials:** The following supporting information can be downloaded at: <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/heritage5030142/s1>, Figure S1: The Bowman (Photo credit: Ponor/Public Domain); Figure S2: The Spearman (Photo credit: Ponor/Public Domain).

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The video material is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5n9iEziNzo> (accessed on 14 October 2021)

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