

Compare Rhodes with our African presidents

ALL MORTALS are fallible. It is also important to remember that "it is difficult to judge the past by the standards of today" (Pope Francis). It is against these twin immutable truths that I intend to reflect on the life and times of Cecil John Rhodes.

Rhodes came to South Africa in 1870 without any meaningful material possession. He died a wealthy man at a relatively early age of 49. He bequeathed all his worldly possessions to the common good and many blacks, including one Ntokozo Qwabe, have been beneficiaries of his "generosity" through the Rhodes scholarship.

Rhodes made his fortune in agriculture and mining. He never murdered any black man nor plundered the public purse. It was through his business prowess and ruthlessness that he acquired his wealth. He was a quintessential capitalist and entrepreneur.

The act of bequeathing all his wealth to the public good was an act of unparalleled philanthropy.

Let us compare Rhodes with the rapacious and kleptocratic African presidents and elite of yesterday and today. African presidents and their coterie of friends are known to pillage and plunder the fiscus.

They are known to bank their loot in Zurich, build palatial houses and buy villas overseas, some of them murder their opponents and destroy instead of building economies while their subjects wallow in poverty. South has lost billions of rand through wastage and corruption. Compared to the African elite, Rhodes is a "saint".

For Qwabe and his cohorts to come up with the amorphous and inane

allegation that Rhodes was a thief is both disingenuous and false beyond doubt. Rhodes behaved like what any capitalist, black, Indian or Chinese would have done – namely to exploit a situation to one's advantage. What a wonderful world it would be if the depredatory elite were to imitate Rhodes and construct universities with their loot.

Students should take a leaf from Rhodes's entrepreneurial spirit. Other great entrepreneurs like Bill Gates, Richard Branson and Steve Jobs have shown that it is possible to create wealth from nothing. Unfortunately, the hordes of students who

went on an orgy of destroying statutes and property lack this entrepreneurial spirit.

Needless to say, joblessness awaits them after graduation. It defies one's imagination why intelligent people

should fight against a statue while the elite of today are busy stealing from the public purse. The clarion cry should be #corruption must fall.

The statute of Rhodes was removed from Cape Town University; what next? Did the removal of Rhodes create employment for instance? The victory was at best transient and pyrrhic.

Whether one likes it or not, Rhodes made an indelible mark on the landscape of South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. He achieved what many mortals will never achieve.

For those who are bent on obliterating his legacy, my advice is that the only way to achieve this is to equal or surpass his achievements.

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