

Historical association essay competition

The individual I have chosen to be immortalised through the erection of a statue outside parliament was a key figure in challenging the merciless and brutal apartheid in South Africa, yet if you mention his name in England many will not know of him. When I contacted Mark Beacon, the current Campaign Manager for ACTSA (Action for South Africa; a campaigning organisation working against apartheid across South Africa) he summed up how important this individual is to many, by saying 'mention his name in South Africa and you will see people talk with such admiration about him'. This man is Trevor Huddleston who was born in Bedford, England yet devoted his life to aiding the black men and women of South Africa. The work he did was invaluable in the fight against the apartheid regime but he has remained relatively unrecognised across the rest of the world. I believe that he deserves to be acknowledged through a statue outside parliament because he is a strong example of an individual who chose to intervene in an appalling situation that didn't directly affect him in order to benefit others less fortunate. This is of particular importance today with the conflict in Syria and other such areas and therefore the existence of a statue of this man would encourage individuals to support areas or people that are in desperate need.

One of the particular reasons Huddleston should be remembered and honoured with this statue is his influence on two men who directly shaped the lives of those who lived under the Apartheid regime and who are widely recognised for their achievements. The more renowned of these two men, Nelson Mandela stated that 'no white person has done more for South Africa than Trevor Huddleston'. It was well known that Mandela recognised the works of Huddleston in Sophiatown and even when Huddleston was forced to return to Britain, he was continually lauded by Mandela. Archbishop Desmond Tutu also confirmed that he was inspired to take action by Huddleston himself. Firstly, he witnessed a 'white priest in a long flowing duffer, lifting his hat to my mother'. As a 9 year old child, Tutu was intrigued by this well-dressed white man showing a great deal of respect to his mother and all the other black people around him. This was a level of respect he had simply not witnessed before and recalls this as the single most defining moment of his life. This was not the only time that Huddleston would have an impact on Tutu however. Whilst Tutu was in hospital (badly ill for two year) he was often visited by Huddleston and they would talk and share ideas for long periods of time. This gave Tutu confidence in that 'there was an important white man coming to visit me' which helped him form his views and decide to take action. I strongly believe that both Mandela and Tutu were destined to lead the fight against the apartheid and deserved to be remembered for eternity. However Huddleston's work inspired these two heroic figures, and should equally be acknowledged.

Tom Dykes, Director of ACTSA summed up the work of Huddleston perfectly when I contacted him, saying 'he inspired thousands of people in Britain and beyond to campaign

for democracy'. This was crucial because at the time of apartheid there needed to be a catalyst back in England to alert the dormant public to the horrors that were taking place in South Africa, yet also to fight against racism back in England. On his return to England due to ill health, his fight against racism did not stop. His famous book 'Naught for your comfort' really brought home to the English public the issues facing South Africa. It showed the hardship of the black citizen in South Africa which contrasted sharply with the comfortable, materialistic life that many of the British people were living at that time. Overall, the book sold 250,000 copies in its first year which highlights how successful he was in bringing the effects of the apartheid to the forefront of British concerns. This inspired more people in Britain to intervene in support of change for South Africa and also to get involved in similar matters that are closer to home. Huddleston, with fellow activists, helped Caribbean immigrants in the 1950's who were trying to gain access into Britain and also led demonstrations in Trafalgar Square in the 1960's. Both his awareness raising book and his actual support for Caribbean immigrants have shaped today's Britain. This revolutionary and forward thinking approach should be recognised in his home country for both its impact at the time and its ongoing relevance to matters prevalent in today's society such as the current debate on immigration.

His passion to work with the people of Sophiatown was particularly driven by his interest in the future of the young children. The young children of Sophiatown had the largest impact on Huddleston's work as demonstrated by his comments 'The Sophiatown child is the friendliest creature on earth, and the most trusting'. The children's trust in Huddleston appears to be similar to the trust that Tutu had placed in him, as again the fact that a white man was treating black people respectfully lead to a bond that is similar to one between friends. Therefore, Huddleston took it upon himself to fight for their freedom whenever he could, organising conferences such as the Harare International Conference to fight against the repression of children and apartheid.

His determination to improve the life of the children of Sophiatown even led him to take on the churches of South Africa saying that 'on a whole, they do not care'. This showed immense bravery as it was unknown for a white man to stand up in a revolutionary way for black South Africans, and to continue even though he was constantly followed by Police as well as regularly being threatened with arrest. His persistence and bravery in helping those in need was undoubtedly key in many black South African lives. Those 65,000 who were removed from Sophiatown due to their race, those children who trusted in him, and his supporters who put their faith in his work rather than a church, would believe he should be recognised with this reward.

In addition to action on a grand scale he also supported the lives of the community in very practical ways. As mentioned he loved the people of Sophiatown and left changes that would help many of them get out of a poverty trap that existed. He created shelters for the children to live in during winter, built schools to give them the ability to gain education and

remarkably raised funds for an Olympic size swimming pool in Soweto that has massively benefited South African swimmers. All of this and more was done by a man who was suffering with diabetes and was under constant threat of being arrested for his work. Again, these activities highlight how his passion and determination to change things drove him even though he was not anywhere near full health. Furthermore, he was quoted saying 'I am dying' not because of his diabetes but because he was forced to leave his beloved Sophiatown.

Throughout his life, Huddleston received a vast variety of acknowledgments for his dedication and life changing efforts, ranging from the Isitwalandwe Medal to the Anffield Wolf book award for 'Naught for your comfort'. The Isitwalandwe Medal is the highest award that can be given to someone by the African National Congress and translates as 'the one who wears the plume of a rare bird', recognising how important he was to the struggle in not only South Africa but also Zimbabwe and other nations. He was the first white man to obtain this grand honour. For all the awards he has received abroad he is yet to be acknowledged for his achievements in any way in Britain. Therefore, I believe that a statue of him outside parliament would be a more than suitable way for us, as a nation, to show our respect to a man who had fought untiringly to abolish apartheid and to improve the treatment of black people around the world.

Huddleston was an Englishman who influenced those who have become renowned in history for their bravery and impact in the struggle against apartheid (Mandela and Tutu), yet he himself is not even known by the majority of people outside South Africa. His work was fundamental in South Africa and the awards he gained from countries like Zimbabwe show their recognition of his heroism. The people of Sophiatown would say he deserves it because of the support he gave them in their struggle to change their lives. As mentioned earlier, Tom Dykes said that Huddleston 'inspired thousands' and arguably should have a statue even if his actions were limited to inspiring key figures such as Mandela and Tutu. However, I consider Trevor Huddleston to be a man who saw a vast injustice in the world he was living in, and even though it didn't directly affect him he was appalled and subsequently acted both in South Africa and back in Britain. His outrage led him to dedicate his life to gain rights for the black people of South Africa, Britain, and more, even though he faced difficulties with illness. He was never scared to speak his mind, challenging the church and the authorities, constantly showing his bravery. Therefore a dedicated statue outside parliament next to Nelson Mandela who stated that 'no white person has done more for South Africa than Trevor Huddleston' would be entirely fitting.