

United States Senate

June 22, 2020

The Honorable William Barr
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Barr,

Violent mobs have, in recent weeks, defaced and torn down statues, memorials, and monuments around our country. These criminals masquerade as protestors exercising their lawful right to peaceably assemble, but there can be no right to destroy public or private property. To borrow from Abraham Lincoln—whose Memorial in our nation’s capital was also defaced—“there is no grievance that is a fit object of redress by mob law.”

On Friday, this mobocratic spirit reached an absurd conclusion with the tearing down of a statue of Ulysses S. Grant in San Francisco. That would be General Grant, the commander of the Union forces, who destroyed the Confederate Army and whose very initials captured his tenacious, unrelenting approach: “unconditional surrender.” And it would be President Grant, the statesman who smashed the Ku Klux Klan, signed the first major civil-rights legislation, and presided over passage of the Fifteenth Amendment. When the mob tears down a statue of U.S. Grant, it’s not about the Civil War—it’s because they hate America.

And that’s just one example. Elsewhere, mobs have also destroyed monuments to George Washington, Francis Scott Key, Saint Junipero Serra, and Christopher Columbus, among others. It’s past time to stop the mob; these vandals should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Unfortunately, local authorities, who normally would prosecute such crimes, have proven unwilling in many cases to uphold the rule of law. In some cities, it appears that feckless politicians have directed police to stand idly by while mobs rampage.

Thus, I urge the Department of Justice to bring charges against these criminals. They aren’t exactly criminal masterminds, typically filming their crimes and posting the videos on social media. Federal laws such as the Anti-Riot Act and the Veterans Memorial Preservation and Recognition Act should cover some crimes. Other federal laws may also apply.

I commend your efforts against rioting and looting earlier this month. Regrettably, there’s more work yet to quell the mob. The country is fortunate to have an Attorney General up to the task.

Sincerely,



Tom Cotton
United States Senator