

## Decolonising History

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Imagine a detective at a crime scene, immobile, refusing to move, failing to assess the scene from different perspectives, interviewing only a selected few of the witnesses, while ignoring others. When she does finally talk to some of the others she asks them to corroborate the evidence she's already got, not to give their own account of what has happened.

A decolonised approach to historical 'detective work' would require much more than interviewing the witnesses our detective ignored, or looking at the scene from more perspectives – though such work would need to be done. A decolonised history would also explore the histories that had shaped this detective's prejudice and bias. Some of this may be deliberate – perhaps she chose to speak to only some people. But perhaps it simply did not occur to her to do otherwise. What are the structures that enabled her not to see, not to think of these people? Where do these come from? What are their histories?

A decolonised history seeks much more than a better understanding of the history of European Empire. It seeks to understand how that history lives on today, in our institutions, in our social perspectives and in the very way in which we 'do' history. Humans have been thinking and writing about the past for millennia, but the discipline of history as we know it today is a product of the age of European Empire. This has had profound consequences for our understanding of where 'history' happens and who shapes it. European colonial practice was built on racialised, gendered hierarchies. European people, or to be precise, able bodied, heterosexual, white men, were held to be the most developed on the globe. They were the drivers of modernity and progress, while all others were the inert and docile recipients of their civilised dynamism.

A decolonised history explores how these ideas emerged and continue to shape our understanding of not only the world under European empire, but also before that. Indeed, a fundamental part of undoing the blinkers of colonised history is to teach more widely and actively about attitudes and world views that existed before European empire, while thinking about why and how these came to be side-lined later on.

Calling for a decolonised and less Eurocentric history is absolutely not to argue that we should not teach about the Tudors or the English Civil War, as some critics have suggested. But it is a call to look at these histories in a more critical, globally connected way. Teaching about the Tudor kingdom as a contemporary of the Mughal empire and Ming dynasty would help students to see that the sixteenth century marked a period of powerful state building right across the globe. But we should also ask students to think about why we haven't traditionally thought about Tudor rule in this way. What do we miss if we see the Tudors as part of only a 'British' story? How does doing so erase the economic and political desires that led to the formation of the East India Company and the import of wealth and riches from Asia to Britain?

Far from 'cutting' white men or white peoples out of history, as some critics have argued, the call to decolonise history requires us to look precisely at why these stories have come to dominate our understanding of what counts as history, and how this view of history reflects the prejudiced hierarchies of empire that should have no place in today's democratic society.