

Decolonising history teaching in the United Kingdom: Movements, methods, and curricula

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ABSTRACT

Toppling the statue of the slave merchant Edward Colston in Bristol, removing the monuments of King Leopold II from public places in Belgium, Black Lives Matter protests, and mass demonstrations targeting remembrance of certain chapters of the history of the Global North – these are some of the significant events that drew attention to the ongoing disputes around the legacy of colonialism during the summer of 2020. These developments form an integral part of the long-drawn-out process of decolonisation: decolonising the culture of the former mother countries. From museology through the natural sciences and linguistics to visual arts, vast areas of the academic, scientific, and cultural scene of the Global North are crucially affected by decolonizing tendencies, with the teaching of history arguably among the most disputed ones. This paper reviews the key decolonising aspirations of history teaching in the United Kingdom by studying the goals, messages, methods, and endeavours of three movements: *Why Is My Curriculum White?*, *The Black Curriculum*, and *Rhodes Must Fall Oxford*, address different levels of education and urge the transformation of numerous aspects of history teaching (teacher training, curricula, teaching methodology, etc). Source materials examined include the work, teaching aids, and written, audio, or video content published on various social media platforms by these three organisations, as well as parliamentary papers and reports of public and non-governmental bodies.

KEYWORDS

history education, history curriculum, curriculum, decolonisation, The Black Curriculum, Rhodes Must Fall Oxford, Why Is my Curriculum White?, Black British history

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INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to find a more divisive notion in the late 20th and early 21st century academic world than decolonisation, the impact of which reaches far beyond the countries that were once colonisers and colonised, or university campuses and the sphere of politics. Decolonisation as a social, economic, or cultural process or a political agenda has generated enormous waves in various circles of the intellectual, political, economic, and cultural scene both in the Global North and the Global South. Furthermore, social movements fighting colonialism have managed to prevail on numerous battlefronts of remembrance, resulting in the transformation of the public places of former imperial metropolises.

Toppling statues, renaming streets, removing busts, plaques, and obelisks, noisy demonstrations, the rising popularity of the Black Lives Matter movement – coverage of these events during the summer of 2020 reached the Hungarian public about the recent anti-colonial tendencies of the Global North. However, there is obviously more to decolonisation than protests against the still existing positive narratives about imperialism in the former mother countries. The fall of the Bristol statue of the slave merchant Edward Colston (Olusoga, 2020; Siddique & Skopeliti, 2020) or the attacks against the monuments of Winston Churchill in Westminster (Adam & Booth, 2020; “Churchill statue,” 2020) or those of Voltaire in Paris (“Paris statue,” 2020) are indisputably the most spectacular actions, but they represent only one aspect of a much bigger issue.¹

It is impossible to overestimate the impact of decolonisation in the fields of culture and academia. Since the last decades of the twentieth century, a large number of papers, articles, studies, and books have been published on different issues related to colonialism. From psychology through linguistics and museology to natural sciences, the decolonisation of elements rooted in colonialism has begun in almost all disciplines, and it has brought fascinating results as well as debates (Adams & Mulligan, 2002; Ndhlovu, 2021; Pahuya, 2011; Pitman, 2021; Raja et al., 2021; Schoon, Mabweazara, Bosch & Dugmore, 2020).² Not surprisingly, history as a study has a special role in these processes. First, subjects at the very heart of this phenomenon, such as colonialism and imperialism have been mostly understood in a historical context, producing knowledge about these issues. On the other hand, history as a subject in school, teaching history, as well as the training of history teachers is also receiving special attention. From a decolonising point of view, history teaching in its present state is among the key means of constantly reproducing the inequality rooted in colonialism between the descendants of the colonisers and the colonised, and it maintains the dominant position of a positive assessment of empire building in the public discourse and culture of the former mother countries.

The aim of the present study is to review the decolonising tendencies of several levels of history teaching in the United Kingdom, including all key stages of public education, teacher

¹It is unfortunate that the overwhelming majority of the Hungarian articles on these events repeated the same one-sided narrative, putting all the anti-colonial movements of the Global North in the same category and labelling them as a threat to historical knowledge and Western civilisation. This kind of one-dimensional superficiality and false framing in the Hungarian public discourse is one of my major motivations behind studying the current cultural aspects of decolonisation.

²For example, the repatriation of artefacts with a colonial origin kept in the museums of the former mother countries, renaming artworks, and exploring the colonial roots of totalitarian ideologies.



training at the university level, and the composition of teaching staff through focusing on: 1, three movements that criticise the British educational system from an anti-colonial standpoint;³ 2, decolonising aspirations concerning curricula; 3, the methods adopted by the three examined movements. Furthermore, special emphasis is placed on the background, motives, and main goals of decolonising approaches in history teaching in the United Kingdom.

Four groups of source materials are examined. First, the *Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History: A Report and Resource for Change* report⁴ lists and analyses the most pressing problems that stem from colonialism and may alienate British Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) young people from studying history, who made up 30% of school-age children in England in 2018 (Royal Historical Society, 2018). The lack of BME students in the history teacher training programs could put the UK educational system in a difficult position in the long run. The three above-mentioned movements have produced a considerable amount of texts on issues such as reforming curricula at all levels of education, racism in the British school system, or topics related to Black people in history teaching. As result of the work of The Black Curriculum, two reports have been published so far annually with the purpose of exploring “how the current History National Curriculum systematically omits the contribution of Black British history in favour of a dominant White, Eurocentric curriculum, one that fails to reflect our multi-ethnic and broadly diverse society” (Arday, 2021, p. 4). As all the studied movements are very active on the internet, their posts and written, audio, and video contents shared on various social media platforms cannot be neglected. The official organisations of the British educational system, as well as the legislative bodies also address these issues. The Macpherson report,⁵ published in 1999, named education as one of the fields that “suffer from the disease” of racism, “institutional or otherwise” (Secretary of State for the Home Department, 1999, 6.54). Moreover, according to the inquiry led by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny, racism could be eradicated “through the educational system, from pre-primary school upwards and onwards” (Secretary of State for the Home Department, 1999, 6.54). Finally, due to the large amount of attention recent events related to anti-colonialist aspirations and actions has generated, the issue is abundant in press and media sources.

There are two more elements that require further explanation. The first relates to the chosen research area, the United Kingdom. The issue of decolonising history teaching can be examined and reviewed in all its complexity in the case of UK education, from key stage 1 to the training of staff at university departments, from the streets through classrooms to the Palace of Westminster. Furthermore, Great Britain was indisputably among the most important actors in modern-age colonisation. As the former mother country of the largest empire of the world, the United Kingdom still lives with the consequences of its empire building. Imperialism and colonialism have left deep marks on British culture, many of which are still visible and prominent (Buettner, 2016; Colley, 1992).

³Why Is My Curriculum White?, The Black Curriculum; Rhodes Must Fall Oxford.

⁴Prepared and published by the Royal Historical Society in October 2018.

⁵The aim of the inquiry was to explore the circumstances and background of the tragic death of Stephen Lawrence, who was stabbed on 22 April, 1993. The attack on the 18-year-old Black British man was racially motivated. The horrific event drew attention to racism in British society.



Another issue is the interpretation of the term ‘decolonisation’. Since the mid-twentieth century, numerous approaches have been elaborated. The first ones centred on the independence the former colonised territories and peoples had regained. In the second half of the twentieth century, however, the understanding of decolonisation, which had originally focused on politics and the once subjugated countries began to broaden (Bhambra, Gebrial & Nişancıoğlu, 2018; Buettner, 2016; Hopkins, 2008; Jansen & Osterhammel, 2013). My hypothesis is that the large demonstrations on the streets and the toppling of statues the world witnessed in the summer of 2020, renaming public spaces in the cities in the Global North, as well as the rise of anti-colonial movements urging reforms and transformation in the field of economy, politics, culture, and education form part of a larger process: decolonising the mother country’s culture. The collapse of the great colonial empires built by European countries, and changing the flags and names of the former colonies during the two decades following World War II was far from the end of undoing colonialism.

THE MOVEMENTS

In the last few decades anti-colonial movements have mushroomed in the Global North (Bhambra et al., 2018). This is particularly true in the case of English-speaking countries, where many of the decolonisation aspirations and organisations have been launched at universities. The academic background is one of the common characteristics of the three movements reviewed in this paper. Although *Why Is My Curriculum White?* (WIMCW) is not as active as *The Black Curriculum* or *Rhodes Must Fall Oxford*, the cause it is fighting for has also been adopted by other anti-colonial groups.

Why Is My Curriculum White? was initiated by the students of the University of London in 2014 (Salami, 2015). The short history of the WIMCW can be traced back to a video that is still available on the UCL YouTube channel. This 20-min material features people, mostly students, expressing their views and concerns about the curriculum being dominated by White authors and still reflecting racial hierarchy rooted in colonialism, marginalising non-European, non-White philosophers, scholars, etc. The description of the video cites the National Union of Students Black Students Campaign National Students Survey: “42 per cent did not believe their curriculum reflected issues of diversity, equality and discrimination [...] institutions must strive to minimise Euro-centric bias in curriculum design, content and delivery and to establish mechanisms to ensure this happens” (UCL., 2014), summarising the main goals of *Why Is My Curriculum White?*

One could easily categorise the WIMCW as a campaign rather than a movement. There is no leading umbrella organisation behind it, but the messages the UCL students began to spread in 2014 have been echoed at university campuses all over the United Kingdom. The initiative has been adopted by the University of Leicester Student’s Union (Leicester Student’s Union, n.d.), Lancaster University has its own student-led campaign group (*Why Is My Curriculum White? – LU*, 2020), while the Keele University Student Union has released the Keele’s Manifesto for Decolonising the Curriculum (Keele University, n.d.). Since 2014, the scope of anti-colonial activities has broadened, and a considerable number of movements have emerged with the purpose of tackling colonial legacy at the universities. These organisations, like the student unions, embraced the cause of the WIMCW. The National Union of Students keeps the issue



of decolonisation on its agenda and wages the campaign “Decolonise Education” (National Union of Students, n.d.). Apart from the BME Student’s Network, other anti-colonial organisations, groups, and projects (Students’ Union UCL, 2017; University College of London, 2021) also run at the University College of London campuses, for example, Dismantling The Master’s House, in which UCL students and teaching staff are involved (Dismantling The Master’s House, n.d.). Thus, despite it being monocausal or its lack of an umbrella organisation, the impact of the WIMCW on decolonising UK education should not be neglected.

The reform of the curriculum is also among the key objectives of The Black Curriculum (TBC) and the Rhodes Must Fall Oxford movements. In the case of the TBC, the choice of name highlights the founders’ most important aim: to have a National Curriculum that reflects the diverse society of the United Kingdom by incorporating Black British history.

If the UCL is named as the birthplace of Why Is My Curriculum White?, in the case of The Black Curriculum another university campus, the London School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) shall be noted as its place of origin. Although the TBC left the academic sector right at its start, several of its key members are connected to academia as current university students or alumni, like founder and CEO Lavinya Stennett (Weale, 2020). Stennett was inspired to challenge the Eurocentric National Curriculum and British history teaching in Aotearoa (New Zealand), where indigenous history and culture is accessible to everyone and forms an integral part of citizens’ everyday life. The SOAS housed the launch event of the TBC in 2019 (The Black Curriculum, n.d.a). Their aims, published on their official website attached to their mission statement, say a lot about the factors that gave birth to the TBC:

1. “To provide a sense of belonging and identity to young people across the UK.
2. To teach an accessible educational Black British history curriculum that raises attainment for young people.
3. To improve social cohesion between young people in the UK” (The Black Curriculum, n.d.b).

According to the organisation, in their current form, history teaching in British schools and the curriculum cannot awake the interest of BME children. In addition to underachievement and disaffection, the inadequate curriculum could be a source of further complications, such as its negative influence on the sense of belonging to the British national community.

In order to achieve its goals, the TBC has a wide range of activities, including media campaigns, publishing a zine as well as learning resources, and selling merchandise⁶ (The Black Curriculum, 2021). The movement organizes trainings and workshops for teachers, and the activists teach classes on Black British history in schools. In comparison to the WIMCW, beside the extension of its fields of operation or its number of aims, another difference is that The Black Curriculum operates as a registered social enterprise, and it has a well-structured organisation with scholars, teachers, and students who are the faces of the movement, like Lavinya Stennett. Moreover, the TBC has built up a considerable network of partners and supporters. These include well-known public figures such as the renowned historian and broadcaster David Olusoga (The Black Curriculum, 2020c), who has been working on raising awareness about colonialism and Black British history in the United Kingdom for many years, the Mayor of London, the Royal African Society, firms and private enterprises such as Lush, Macmillan, or Marks &

⁶Including #TBH365 bath bombs with Lush and “Learn” tote bags with DeMellier.



Spencer. TBC is much more than a movement, it refers to itself as a company that in 2021 reached 1,805 young people in 200 schools and more than 6,063 teachers and senior leaders in 12 counties around the United Kingdom and even Canada (The Black Curriculum, 2021).

In terms of organisation, aims, and range of activities, Rhodes Must Fall Oxford (RMFO) is somewhere between the WIMCW and the TBC. RMFO is an example of the global characteristic of decolonising the mother country's culture, as it was not British academia that bred the Rhodes Must Fall movement but Cape Town. The history of Oxford's largest anti-colonial student-led movement began in South Africa on 9 March, 2015, with a graduate of the University of Cape Town (UCT). On that day, Chumani Maxwele poured a bucket of human excrement over the UCT's Rhodes statue as a sign of protest against the still existing inequalities rooted in colonialism and the legacy of imperialism embodied by the bronze sculpture of the world's most well-known imperialist, one of the key architects of the British empire in Southern Africa, Cecil John Rhodes (Fairbanks, 2015). Almost in parallel with the launch of the RMF, another movement also raised its banner, with Fees Must Fall (FMF) demanding to stop the increase of student fees and "free and decolonised education" (Griffith, 2019, p. 143). A month later the statue was removed from the UCT campus.

The Rhodes Must Fall Oxford flame was brought to Oxford by Rhodes scholar Ntokozo Qwabe. RMF has been organising demonstrations to protest against the still existing Rhodes cult on Oxford University campuses,⁷ which can be traced back to the large donation Rhodes had given to Oriel College, his alma mater. The façade of the Oriel is the most targeted spot of the RMFO protests because of the college's Rhodes statue. But it is about more than a monument, as Oxford University is still abundant in memorials of Cecil Rhodes. The scholarship program named after Rhodes is one of the most illustrious in the world, and being a "Rhodesian" has become an identity-forming factor among the alumni. Members of the elites of different countries can be found among them, for example, US President Bill Clinton (Buikema, 2020). Furthermore, the universities served as the academic background of empire building or colonial exploitation by producing theories and knowledge that was built around racial hierarchy, for example. Of the three movements, the actions of Rhodes Must Fall Oxford have received the most media attention, which can be explained by the fact that it is one the most illustrious academic institutions in the world and a key element in the British elite and establishment production line. In addition, the South African example from 2015 is widely known, and Cecil Rhodes himself is perhaps the most infamous empire builder (Buikema, 2020; Gebrial, 2018; Henriques & Abushouk, 2018; Peters 2018).

BACKGROUND FACTORS AND GOALS

As can be seen from the previous section, the activities of the different anti-colonial organisations and campaigns cover all levels of history teaching, the classrooms, the curriculum, the teaching staff, as well as academia.

In order to achieve the reforms, the decolonisation of history teaching and British education, a rich set of instruments have been adopted by the movements. However, to have a better

⁷Apart from protesting against the Rhodes cult, the reform of the curriculum and the decolonisation of the academic sphere can also be found among the aims of the RMFO.



understanding of these methods, it is first worth reviewing the factors that have created The Black Curriculum or Rhodes Must Fall Oxford. Parallelism of colonial and postcolonial narratives in the cultural canon of the former mother country is the first aspect to highlight (Buettner, 2016). Activists refer to artworks, books, comics, and movies still occupying a prominent place in reading lists or enjoying high respect, keeping colonialism in a positive historical context or praising the cause of the British Empire without any comprehensive critical assessment or postcolonial recontextualization as a source of dichotomy. As long as the statue of Rhodes stays at the façade of Oriel College, the message is clear: one of the most respected institutions of the academic world is not willing to face the dark side of the past of the country and the university. Moreover, Black aspects of history have stayed in a marginalised position in the curriculum, representing Eurocentrism. Learning the history of BME people is limited to Black History Month. October is dedicated to Black history in the schools of the United Kingdom, but mostly only the issue of slavery and slave trade or Windrush is discussed, offering another opportunity to put a positive sheen on the British Empire through emphasising the fights of the Royal Navy against slave merchants. Thus, in its current shape the educational system does not give British students the opportunity to learn about the non-White actors of the country's past. Furthermore, the curriculum closes off Black pupils from a major way through which they could feel more connected to British history, since "Britishness" remains a category that Black people find difficult to identify with and is predominantly reserved for Whites.

Systemic racism in education has been identified by both the MacPherson report and the comprehensive study of the Royal Historical Society as a serious concern. This is supported by the fact that BME students form a tiny minority among the undergraduates of UK-domiciled Historical & Philosophical Studies. According to data provided by the RHS, in 2018 only 11.3% of students with such majors were people of colour, and among them only 2.4% were Black (Atkinson et al., 2018). This trend is also reflected in the composition of the teaching staff. Furthermore, there is another inequality that makes the issue more complex. According to the surveys of the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), BME teachers are very unevenly distributed across different parts of the United Kingdom. The overwhelming majority are concentrated in England, while the number of teachers from an ethnic minority or a mixed background is negligible in Scotland, Wales, or Northern Ireland. This inequality can also be noted in the number of accepted applications for teaching posts. However, the figures also show a promising positive trend, as the rate of acceptance in 2020 was 48% in the case of the Black applicants, although 78% of the White applicants were hired (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, n.d.). Both RHS and TBC put great emphasis on the need for an ethnically more diverse teaching staff, which would be a much better reflection of the current British society (Arday, 2021; Atkinson et al., 2018). Where these processes come full circle is that as the National Curriculum provides no room for Black history, history classes cannot spark the interest of the growing number of BME pupils and students. As a result, students with African, Caribbean, or mixed ancestry choose history as a university major in much smaller numbers than their White peers. Moreover, the reading lists students are expected to go through are still dominated by European, White authors, omitting scholars with other ethnic backgrounds. This leads to the underrepresentation of BME people in the teaching staff, who could probably be more successful in catching the attention of Black and non-White pupils if there was a reformed National Curriculum where Black British history formed an integral part.



To summarise, the main objectives of the anti-colonial movements, such as decolonising the academia of the United Kingdom, first include a fight against any type of racism in education, as well as reframing the colonial legacy in terms of its symbols as well as the curriculum. “Black history is part of British history and it needs to be part of everyday” ([The Black Curriculum, 2019](#)). In other words, British history should be made accessible for everyone, not only in October, but 365 days a year. This would not only benefit the BME communities but the whole British society, as learning Black history could contribute enormously to tackling racism and bias. Finally, diversifying the history teaching workforce is urged by various actors involved in these processes. As one TBC activist put it, “I think the most important thing is that it’s people who look like them teaching them things” ([The Black Curriculum, 2019](#)).

METHODS USED BY THE MOVEMENTS

The methods and tools used by the three movements include well-known and less conventional techniques. Lobbying and organising demonstrations are clearly among those bringing results. Not long after the launch of the movement, the leaders of the TBC were received at the Department of Education. The issues raised by [The Black Curriculum](#) or [Rhodes Must Fall Oxford](#) have been discussed in both chambers of the British parliament. Although they disagree on some details (curriculum, statues, etc.) according to [Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates \(Education, 2020; History Curriculum, 2020; Windrush Day, 2020\)](#) or politicians’ official communication, there is a broad consensus among the various parliamentary parties on the importance of teaching Black history ([Black History Month, n.d.](#)). This can be considered a huge step forward, achieved by civil society. Another notable success is that the issue of decolonising education and history teaching has attracted considerable interest from the press. Coverage of the launch of the TBC or news about noisy RMFO demonstrations have been published all around the world. This of course contributes significantly to the spread of anti-colonial messages. However, what is more interesting for the present study is the social media activity of these movements, another common characteristic of the contemporary anti-colonial, anti-racist movements. WIMCW, TBC, RMFO, and other organisations and initiatives put great emphasis on their presence on Instagram, TikTok, or Facebook. These are the channels [Rhodes Must Fall Oxford](#) uses to communicate with their supporters about the results they have achieved, the demonstrations they organise, and where they comment and frame news like the [Eswatini protests](#), [police brutality in Zimbabwe](#), or the issue of indigenous lands in Brazil from their point of view ([Rhodes Must Fall Oxford, 2021a, 2021b](#)). The RMFO demonstrations, with protesters chanting well-known slogans such as “Rhodes must fall” or “decolonise” have been streamed through Instagram ([Rhodes Must Fall Oxford, 2020](#)). The campaigns of these initiatives, such as the WIMCW, are primarily conducted on social media. The Black Curriculum’s communication of the #TBH365⁸ campaign has been done mostly through these platforms. The various other recently launched anti-colonial, anti-racist movements or activists who have almost the same targets and goals also have a high level of social media activity.

TBC uses the anniversaries of British history and the red letter days of the British calendar to spread knowledge about the Black aspects of these events. The contributions of Black British

⁸Teach Black History 365/To Be Honest 365.



people to the successes of the country are especially highlighted in the contents shared on these platforms. The social media activity of The Black Curriculum movement has obvious educational purposes. On International Nurses Day, the followers of the TBC Instagram profile could learn about outstanding Black healthcare workers such as Jamaican-born nurse Mary Seacole. “Mother Seacole” cured British soldiers and officers in the Crimean War using traditional Jamaican and West African healing practices as well as European medical techniques. The pioneers enjoy distinguished attention in these materials, such as James Africanus Beale Horton from Sierra Leone, who was one of the first Africans to receive a medical degree from a British university⁹ ([The Black Curriculum, 2021a](#)). The Remembrance Day¹⁰ post of the TBC commemorated the African and Caribbean servicemen and servicewomen of the British, Imperial, and Commonwealth armed forces with black poppies. The short biographies and figures presented include Omo-Oba Adenrele Ademola, a Nigerian princess who served as a nurse in London hospitals during World War II. She was shown in a wartime propaganda film to increase support around the British Empire for the war efforts of the mother country ([The Black Curriculum, 2021b](#)). Highlighting the results of Black British athletes during the Tokyo Olympics, the footballers of the Three Lions in the 2020 UEFA Euro Championship, or celebrating Lewis Hamilton as “a Black British trailblazer” ([The Black Curriculum, 2021c](#)) is to raise awareness among young people and spread knowledge about the Black contribution to the successes the United Kingdom has achieved in the fields of sports, science, the military, arts, etc.

Furthermore, The Black Curriculum has recognised the potential of young people learning effectively from their peers. The organisation has a National Ambassador Scheme (NAS), open to students aged 14–18. The ambassadors have the opportunity to advocate and educate ([The Black Curriculum, 2022a](#)) and move forward the cause of curriculum reform in their school communities. On the other hand, the participants of NAS acquire skills that could contribute to their success in their personal and professional life ([National Ambassador Scheme, n.d.](#)).

IN AND OUT OF THE CLASSROOM

The purposes described above have had a huge influence on the recommended reforms, which would affect the classroom activities of history teaching as well. The movements and the RHS urge the makers of educational policy to broaden the chronological and thematic frameworks in which Black British history is taught. The Eurocentric curriculum is also having an impact in this area. Regarding teaching the antiquity and the Middle Ages, there is still a significant discrepancy between the time spent discussing the Roman Empire or the Greek polis and ancient African or Chinese cultures ([Atkinson et al., 2018](#)). Chronologically the first issue regarding Black people that appears in most British classrooms is slavery in the early modern period. Instead of this one-dimensional framing of Black British history, the TBC recommends shedding light on the fact that it was not the early modern slaves who were the first Africans to step on the shores of the British Isles. For example, the TBC learning materials for KS2 and KS3 focus on the life of John Blanke, who was one of the so-called Black Tudors, one of the few

⁹The very first person to do so in the history of Edinburgh University.

¹⁰11 November.



hundred Africans who lived in England under the reign of the Tudor monarchs (Kaufmann, 2017). Blanke moved there in 1501 as an attendant of Katherine of Aragon and served as a highly respected trumpeter in the court of Henry VIII. Attention is directed to the fact that “the Black Trumpeter” played at the funeral of Henry VII and the coronation of Henry VIII, both of which took place in 1509, or that as a free man his daily wage was around £22 in today’s money. Furthermore, John Blanke appears twice in the Westminster Tournament Roll ordered by Henry VIII, another sign of recognition and respect (The Black Curriculum, n.d.c; The Black Curriculum, n.d.d). Through these historical data students can come to the conclusion that the relations between Africa and Britain did not begin with slavery, and Africans could be valued members of late medieval English society.

There is a broad consensus between the movements and the Royal Historical Society regarding the idea that discussing Black people in history classes must move beyond slavery and post-WW2 migration. However, the current curriculum and teaching practices reproduce the images and bias about people from Africa rooted in colonialism, who need the assistance and redemption of the Whites. Instead of this, movements such as the Bristol Bus Boycotts or Operation Black Vote and people who had a lion’s share in shaping Britain’s cultural and political face should be brought forward (Arday, 2020). The involvement of Black people should be taught in the case of the milestone events of British history. Discussing the lives of trailblazers and pioneers can also play a distinguished role in this context. In case of the World War I, the life and military career of Walter Tull serves as an excellent example. Pupils can learn from the Remembrance Day learning material that Tull was one of the country’s first Black football players¹¹, who rose to the rank of lieutenant and died in the line of duty in 1918 (The Black Curriculum, n.d.e).

In terms of adjusting the focus of history teaching, the *Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History* report emphasises the importance of paying more attention to world history in a more holistic way, not concentrating on European imperial history exclusively. In other words, the pre-colonial history of non-European people and culture must have a proper place in the curriculum (Atkinson et al., 2018).

Arts play a distinguished role in the proposed teaching materials of the TBC. As it is highlighted in *The Black Curriculum Impact Review 2021* video, part of their original mission was “Delivering arts-based history directly to young people making them knowledgeable, empowered and included” (The Black Curriculum, 2022)¹². The organisation’s Springboard Programme, sponsored by Universal Music and in cooperation with Black artists, provides free out-of-school workshops for youngsters aged 11–16 “to learn Black British history through the lens of music” (The Black Curriculum, 2022a, p. 9). Moreover, the activists and teachers of the movement teach classes concentrating on typically Black British musical genres. Through exploring the key characteristics of reggae or ska, pupils learn about the political, social, and cultural background of these subcultures. Creating artwork and the arts themselves are among the preferred methods of the TBC, and they are recommended in the learning resources published by the movement. For example, in the above-mentioned music classes the teacher and students sing along (The Black Curriculum, 2019). The proposed lessons end with the

¹¹Clapton, Tottenham Hotspur, Northampton Town.

¹²<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMyYQ3XZAHl>.



participants making something tangible or intangible related to the topic. In the case of learning about World War I and Remembrance Day, that product is a poppy the pupils prepare individually, while in the class dedicated to Mary Seacole poems focusing on the life of the Crimean War nurse are created (*The Black Curriculum, n.d.e*; *The Black Curriculum, n.d.f*). The last third of the John Blanke lesson in KS2 is dedicated to designing a hanging scroll that represents the life and culture of the pupils for the trumpet printed on the task sheet (*The Black Curriculum, n.d.c*). In KS3 the TBC learning material on the Westminster Tournament Roll encourages the learners to conduct research on the life of another Black Tudor and use the collected data to draw a comic strip (*The Black Curriculum, n.d.d*). The creative task in the KS2 Bristol Bus Boycott worksheet is to “imagine that you are a historian and artist. Create a poster about the Bristol Bus Boycott” (*The Black Curriculum, n.d.g*).

Apart from creating activities, special emphasis is placed on establishing an atmosphere where participants can emotionally identify with the subject of the given lesson. There are many topics where these two methods are combined. Regarding World War I and Remembrance Day, after discussing the tasks the soldiers from the West Indies performed and the problems they had to deal with, pupils are asked to imagine that they are among these servicemen and include war stories and drawings on life in the trenches in a letter or a message in a bottle. Another very similar task is to put themselves in the shoes of soldiers who were allowed to bring only three personal items while they were “stationed away”. The task is to justify and draw the items of their choice (*The Black Curriculum, n.d.e*). Role play is the homework when learning about Lilian Bader. During World War II, Bader served in the Women Auxiliary Air Force, which made her one of the first Black women to join the Royal Air Force. Pupils are asked to imagine that they were Lilian Bader or one of her colleagues and write a short script that describes their daily activities (*The Black Curriculum, n.d.h*).

Beside sharing historical knowledge, the TBC teaching materials draw learners’ attention to the long-term consequences or recent aspects of the given issue. Two of the discussion topics of the World War I and Remembrance Day lesson deal with inequality between the tribute UK society paid to the White and the non-White British combatants: “Do you feel like Britain has done enough to honour the legacy of the Black war heroes?” “What can you do to continue the legacy of these Black heroes?” (*The Black Curriculum, n.d.e*). The dispute around topics related to Black issues to be included in the National Curriculum also appears in these materials. The Mary Seacole worksheet informs pupils about the outrage triggered by a proposal in 2012, which would take Mary Seacole out of the Curriculum. The task associated with this matter is writing “an open letter to the public explaining why it is so important for Mary Seacole to be taught in schools” (*The Black Curriculum, n.d.f*).

The extensive use of ICT devices (website, YouTube, Quizlet) is also a feature of the programme developed by the TBC. Animated stories are of special importance for all the learning resources that are available on the website of the movements. All of them recommend to first watch the video related to the given topic on YouTube (*The Black Curriculum, 2020a, 2020b, 2020d*). Discussion, which is another crucial element of the TBC lessons, is also very much based on these videos, which serve as primary sources of information for the pupils. These animated summaries have been created by CommuniKate Design,¹³ are well designed

¹³The slogan of the studio, “Making rocket science child’s play” reflects the way their work makes the knowledge shared by the TBC easy for young people to grasp with the help of simple and easy-to-understand graphics (<https://www.communikate.design/>).



and use visual language as well as verbal and non-verbal tools that the viewers can easily understand. YouTube is not the only online platform involved in the TBC lessons. Quizlet is an online workshop and collection of learning tools, mostly known for creating and sharing flashcards. The TBC team has created Quizlet flashcards through which the learners can test their knowledge about Fanny Eaton, a Jamaican-born artist's model of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, or Olive Morris, a Jamaican-born civil right activist ([The Black Curriculum, n.d.i](#); [The Black Curriculum, n.d.j](#)).

CONCLUSION

Decolonisation as a global tendency has had an enormous impact not only on the former colonies but the mother countries as well. Undoing colonialism did not end with the collapse of the great European empires in the decades after the end of World War II. Colonies became independent, but colonial elements in the cultural scenes of one-time imperial centres such as the United Kingdom have remained intact in the last fifty years. Dealing with colonial legacy has a great impact on all disciplines and school subjects, but it is especially the reform of history teaching that is one of the key targets of decolonising the culture of the mother country. The reforms proposed and urged by different organisations, movements, or campaigns affect the educational system from top to bottom. History studies colonialism and imperialism and produces knowledge that leaves its mark on history teaching, as well as the social and cultural relations of the country in the long term. Academia and universities had in many cases served as ideological and scientific hinterlands of empire building, thus they have a particular responsibility in this field. Oxford still keeps symbols of colonialism like the statue of Rhodes on view. This serves as a good example for the parallel presence of narratives upholding the cult of empire building and decolonisation in British culture. However, apart from debates around symbolic spaces and monuments, the academic sphere also has other tasks to solve. Rhodes Must Fall Oxford and the Royal Historical Society both propose to increase the number of historians who "address the absences of Black British history" ([Atkinson et al., 2018, p. 83](#)) and urge the implementation of "intellectual equality" ([Atkinson et al., 2018, p. 83](#)) by including works of BME authors, as well as dealing with "the conspicuous absence of BME historians in UK university departments" ([Atkinson et al., 2018, p. 80](#)). Diversification of the teaching staff at all levels of education is also demanded by both the RHS and the TBC. The reform of the National Curriculum to overcome Eurocentrism rooted in colonialism, which still dominates history teaching, is demanded by many communities, organisations, and public figures. Nevertheless, the initiatives and movements reviewed in the present study go far beyond simply criticising the current educational system. Among them The Black Curriculum has elaborated the most complex programme of decolonising history teaching in the United Kingdom. The classes they hold, the zines they publish, and the learning resources they create beside spreading knowledge about Black British History, all aim to develop a sense of belonging in young BME people not only to their communities but also to British society in general. The question for the future is whether such movements will rise among other communities in the UK and if so, whether groups with similar purposes, i.e. the decolonisation of history teaching, will find common ground, which could be the key to the success of a much more complex reform of the sector.



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