Black Lives Matter protesters gather in Bristol, 7 June 2020
Lee Thomas / Alamy Stock Photo

George Floyd protest in Bristol: Colston statue toppled

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The killing of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota on 25 May 2020 sparked off protests against the way in which black people are treated both in America and many countries across the world. Thousands of people attended an anti-racist demonstration in Bristol. A group of the protesters surrounded the bronze statue of Edward Colston, which honoured a man whose ships sent approximately 80,000 enslaved men, women and children from Africa to the Americas between 1672 and 1689. It was the financial success of the transatlantic slave trade that enabled Colston to be the benefactor that he became in Bristol. Ropes were tied around the stone monument and it was pulled to the ground. It was then dragged across a short distance and thrown off the quayside into the water.
www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-52955868

Implications for the primary history curriculum

The toppling of the slave trader Colston's statue in Bristol was followed by challenges to other figures associated with slavery and imperialism including Cecil Rhodes who has a statue at Oxford. This reflected wider concerns about the experiences and treatment of black people now and throughout history. The disproportionate impact of covid-19 in Black communities added fuel to existing historic concerns that had a contemporary impact, such as the treatment of the Windrush generation who had faced difficulties in claiming citizenship. These events over a range of issues have led to an outpouring of grief and concern for the life chances of people in black communities now.

In the wake of this a group called the Black Curriculum has written to the Secretary of State for Education calling for more Black history to be taught in schools.

What was the current situation with respect to the school history curriculum?

The Runnymede Trust acknowledges that the National Curriculum provides opportunities for including a diverse approach to the past but as teachers we choose whether to opt in or out of doing it. At the same time not all schools are obliged to follow the National Curriculum, which is only a requirement for local authority schools. The National Curriculum

makes reference to diversity within societies and relationships between different groups as part of 'the purposes for teaching history', but unlike earlier versions of the National Curriculum does not relate this to ethnicity. Thereafter, diversity is not specifically mentioned in the document except through the second-order concepts of similarity and difference. There is a requirement to provide a coherent and broad-based understanding of the past and make links between local, national and world history. At the same time it does include some optional topics related to Black history – Rosa Parks and Mary Seacole at Key Stage 1, Benin at Key Stage 2 together with the transatlantic slave trade, migration and empire as optional topics in secondary schools at Key Stage 3. These topics are limited in scope and no guidance is provided as to how they relate Black history to a broader understanding of our past. This said, the National Curriculum provides a framework rather than a syllabus and it can be argued that by focusing on this there is a compelling case for including Black history within the curriculum.

Essentially, whatever decisions are made about how or what is taught in history, the decision as to whether to teach Black history or not rests with each of us. If children are to receive a coherent and broadly based understanding of the past, make links and connections between local, national and world history and learn through enquiry based approaches built around an understanding of causation, continuity and change, similarity and difference together with significance, they really need to appreciate this through a range of people's experiences and perspectives which ought to include those of Black communities as part of a broad-based understanding of our past.

This raises a number of fundamental questions: How and when should it be taught? Black History Month has been valuable in encouraging schools to include at least some Black history. However, it does raise some issues with respect to how Black history relates to the curriculum as a whole. Black history really needs be entwined throughout the teaching of history rather than as a separate entity. Although Black History Month has provided a starting point for developing Black history, it is necessary for all children, and especially children from Black communities, to understand how their history is integral to a broad-based understanding of our past. Black history forms part of our inclusive past alongside other aspects of diversity – including different ethnic groups, gender, religious beliefs, localities, classes and abilities/disabilities.

Developing a Black history thread across the Primary History Curriculum

Significant people (KS1)	e.g. Mary Seacole, Walter Tull, Bessie Colman
Pre-historic Britain	Make reference to evidence of the first people found in Africa
Romans, Saxons and Vikings	Challenge images of white Roman soldier with evidence that people came to Britain from different parts of the Roman Empire including Africa.
Britain post 1066	Compare these migrants to Britain with people who have come here since 1066, including Black settlers One of the following: Develop migration to Britain since 1066 as a theme and compare the experiences of people at different times – Tudor times before slavery, during the period of slavery in the 17th and 18th centuries and post slavery such as their contribution to World War II and the Windrush Generation after the war. Teach the Transatlantic Slave Trade as a key turning point – including the diverse range of Black peoples' experiences, including those who were involved in challenging slavery. Including the experiences of Black people within topics e.g. Tudor, England, World War I and II.
Local History (KS1/2)	Focus on migration/presence of Black people e.g. migration stories (oral testimonies, artefacts, photographs) links between a local stately house and slavery
Benin	Relate to the history of Africa and Britain from Tudor times to empire in 1897.

Is it enough to focus on significant people like Mary Seacole and Walter Tull?

It is important to teach a diverse range of people at Key Stage 1 and these individuals provide valuable insights into the time in

which they lived. By their nature, however, significant people in any community are unusual. Children need to go beyond tokenistic representations and develop a more broadly based and diverse understanding of the experiences of Black and other ethnic communities at different times in the past.

What does considering the transatlantic slave trade involve?

In some old/traditional textbooks there is a focus on the triangular trade which consisted of British slavers selling weapons in West Africa for slaves and transporting them to the West Indies and southern states of America, in return for tobacco and cotton produced on plantations. The triangular trade continued until it was challenged by British reformers, notably Wilberforce leading to its demise through acts of parliament in 1807 and 1833. The issue with this approach is that it ignores the role of context and the experiences of African peoples as real people, treating them as a passive traded presence. It also ignores the wider implcations of slavery and its legacy today. Firstly, it is important to appreciate that African societies had developed before Europeans arrived in Africa. Secondly, some local rulers were complicit in the trade, although the impetus came from European traders who provided the incentives and demand for the rapid expansion of the slave trade. At the same time a focus on those directly involved with the trade does not fully appreciate its broader impact on a range of trades in Britain such as metal working and investments in landed property for example, while changing tastes associated with sugar and cotton clothes depended on slave labour. Thirdly, each slave was an individual and their different experiences need to be explored and acknowledged. Black people were involved in resistence to slavery and the fight for its abolition. Within Britain the experiences and role of Ignatius Sancho and Olaudah Equinano are of particular significance. Finally, although the scale of the transatlantic slave trade is important it is still part of the historic and contemporary presence of slavery and that it existed in other societies including ancient Greece and Rome. The transatlantic slave trade is an optional topic at Key Stage 3 and you would find it useful to liaise with your secondary school to ensure that work is not repeated. However, Susie Townsend (2019) provides a clear insight into how you can teach this topic at Key Stage 2.

Should Black history be about more than the slave trade?

The answer is definitely yes. The first evidence of humans has been found in Africa. Benin is an example of one of the many complex and advanced kingdoms of Africa that were there long before the arrival of Europeans. There is evidence of people from Africa in Britain in the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods; and Miranda Kaufmann's excellent research into Black Tudors provided examples of Black people in a range of contexts and occupations and trade that took place between Britain and Africa prior to the slave trade. The slave trade and subsequently the growth of the British Empire impacted on the experiences of Black people. However, alongside this it is important to explore different people's experiences and the contribution of Black people during key events including the First and Second World Wars, and, also, meeting Britain's need for labour in the aftermath of the Second World War.

This articles provides as starting point for developing a Black history dimension through the National Curriculum. We need to develop a thread throughout the history curriculum that incorporates the diverse stories of the times studied and that is integrated into the examination of the past. We intend all future editions to have an article which specifically relates to diversity and anticipate that contributions from people developing Black history will form part of this.

Websites

Runneymede Trust (n.d.) Teaching Resources www.runnymedetrust.org/about.html

The Black Presence in Britain www. blackpresence.co.uk/

British Library n.d. *Windrush Stories*. file:///C:/Users/Paul/Downloads/Windrush%20Stories%20primary%20creative%20writing%20tasks%20-%20updated.pdf

Miles, R. and Lyndon-Cohen, D. (n.d.*) Colonial Countryside project*. https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1WLkEHYXYd_edozphfPf7O-eTTExQrXOg

Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 'Forces'. Available at: www.cwgc.org/history-and-archives/second-world-war/forces. This provides pictures and key information of forces from different parts of the world.

NBHA (n.d.) Northampton Black History Association, www.northamptonshireblackhistory.com/

Ministry of Information (1944) 'West Indies Calling', available at: www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060021318

National Archives (n.d.) *Moving Here: 200 years of migration in England*, available at: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk www.movinghere.org.uk/

National Archives (n.d.) *The Black Presence: black settlers in Tudor times*, available at: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/early_times/settlers.htm

Other history news reports

Ground-penetrating radar reveals an ancient Roman city

Archaeologists have used radar to map an entire walled ancient Roman city called Falerii Novi about 30 miles to the north of Rome. The city was about half the size of ancient Pompeii and would have had a population of about 3,000 people. They have found evidence of elaborate baths, at least 60 large houses, a temple and a network of water pipes running beneath buildings.
www.aol.co.uk/news/2020/06/10/ground-penetrating-radar-reveals-splendor-of-ancient-roman-city/

Archaeologists may have found London's earliest playhouse

The Red Lion playhouse, London's earliest playhouse set up by John Braine during the reign of Elizabeth I, may have been found at a site in Whitechapel. Archaeologists have found evidence of timber structures, artefacts and buildings that could be remains of the playhouse. It would have provided the first permanent home for acting troupes and a venue for Shakespeare's plays in the 1590s.
www.aol.co.uk/news/2020/06/09/archaeologists-may-have-uncovered-londona-s-earliest-playhouse/

Minecraft: Lockdown lesson recreates ancient island tomb

This story relates the achievement of Dr Ben Edwards from Wrexham, and his daughter Bella, whose models of Bryn Celli Ddu on Anglesey, created during the pandemic lockdown, are now being shared with classrooms around the world using Minecraft gaming. They are based on burial mounds which date back 5,000 years and whose passage tomb entrance aligns with the sun at dawn on the summer solstice. The game includes the tomb as it may have appeared in the Bronze Age, alongside other burial mounds and pits, rock art and what a Neolithic home may have looked like.
www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-53239650?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/c1038wnxyy0t/archaeology&link_location=live-reporting-story

Back-garden archaeology: Britons unearth artefacts during lockdown

A number of garden finds have come to light as people have been digging their gardens while off work or unable to go out as much as usual. Neolithic arrowheads and a post medieval snake-shaped belt hook, a medieval silver coin found beneath a lawn are among finds uncovered by gardeners. Michael Lewis, head of portable antiquities and treasure at the British Museum, is encouraging gardeners not to be embarrassed about checking whether their discovery may be significant.
www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/jul/19/back-garden-archaeology-britons-unearth-artefacts-during-lockdown

The schoolgirl who helped win the war

This is very much a personal history. Thirteen-year-old Hazel Hill must have been a really good mathematician. She helped her father with calculations which proved that Spitfires should be loaded with eight rather than four guns. Many people believed this to be impossible but the father and daughter team proved them wrong and the implementation of their ideas is believed to have been a major factor in ensuring the effectiveness of the Spitfire during World War II. Her unusual story has been celebrated by the BBC as one of the lost stories of the war which they weave into the broader context of the time.
www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000kzx7

Resources

History textbooks to develop your knowledge of black history:

Dresser, M. and Hann, A. (2013) *Slavery and the British country house*, Swindon: English Heritage.

Kaufmann, M. (2017) *Black Tudors*, London: One World.

Kushner, T. (2012) *The Battle of Britishness: migrant journeys, 1685 to the present*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Olusoga, D. (2016) *Black and British: a forgotten history*, London: Macmillan.

Phillips, T. Phillips, M. (2009) *Windrush: the irresistible rise of multicultural Britain*, London: Harper Collins.

HA resources

Bracey, P., MacDonald, C., Billins, K. and Kaup, K. (2014) 'Eweka's Story: Benin, Big Picture History and National Curriculum 2014' in *Primary History, 67*, pp. 24–28.

Gove-Humphries A., Bracey, P. and Jackson, D. (2017) 'Why is diversity so important? How can we approach it?' in *Primary History, 75,* pp. 8–13.

Doull. K. and Bracey, P. (2019) 'Diversity: guidance for history subject leaders and teachers' in Primary History Summer Resource, *Primary History*.Tucknott, P. (2018) 'Why stop at the Tudors? Enhancing an understanding of the sixteenth century through a comparative study of Benin' in *Primary History, 79*, pp. 32–38.

Townsend, S. (2019) 'Teaching sensitive topics: slavery and Britain's role in the trade' in *Primary History, 83*, pp. 12–17.