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A PEOPLE'S ARCHIVE OF EMPIRE

# Unsilenced.

*Five hundred years of colonialism, atrocity, extraction and resistance — the history textbooks abbreviate.*

silencedhistory.org  
Print edition · 2026

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**COLOPHON**

## About this edition

This PDF is the print companion to *silencedhistory.org* — a free, citation-led archive of the colonial record. Every chapter is a faithful rendering of a page on the live site, including its source images and captions. Where the site uses interactive charts, the underlying figures are summarised in prose. Photographs are reproduced under public-domain or Creative Commons licences and credited in each caption.

This book takes a deliberately wide angle: it treats slavery, partition, famine, neocolonial debt, media framing, factory farming and modern racism as one continuous logic rather than discrete chapters. The aim is not to compress suffering into a hierarchy, but to make the family resemblance visible.

Sources are listed at the end of every chapter on the website. For the live, hyperlinked edition with full bibliography, please visit [silencedhistory.org](https://silencedhistory.org).

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*I*

# Foreword

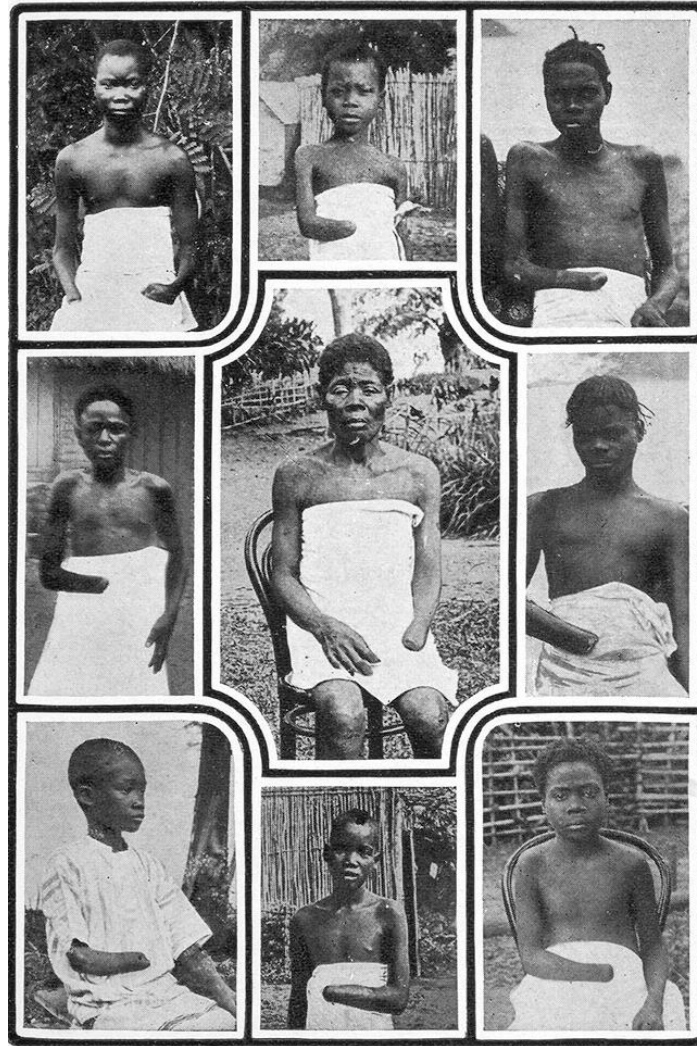
[silencedhistory.org/](https://silencedhistory.org/)

Vol. I · A Documentary Archive · Est. 2026

This is an archive for what was done, what is still being done, and what the comfortable nations of the world would prefer you never read in one place.

Begin the Record →

The Ledger Is Open



*Congolese victims of King Leopold II's rubber regime, c.1904*

10M+

Killed under Leopold II in the Congo, 1885–1908

60M

Indigenous deaths in the Americas after 1492

12.5M

Africans deported in the Atlantic slave trade

\$45T

Estimated wealth drained from India by Britain, 1765–1938

The Manifesto

## A polite lie is still a lie.

For five centuries a small number of European nations — joined later by the United States — built their wealth, their cities, their universities and their sense of moral seriousness on the backs of people they considered less than human. The conquest of the Americas, the Atlantic slave trade, the scramble for Africa, the looting of India, the partitioning of the Arab world, the genocides in Australia and Tasmania, the rubber terror of the Congo, the famines engineered in Bengal, the war on Algeria — these are not unrelated tragedies. They are the chapters of a single book, and the book is still being written.

What changed in the second half of the twentieth century was not the structure but the vocabulary. The colonies were renamed "developing countries." The conquered became "underdeveloped." The plundered became "in need of aid." The murderers became donors. The new vocabulary was kinder, and the bank accounts stayed where they were.

This site is built on a refusal. A refusal to pretend the past is past. A refusal to confuse paternalism with solidarity. A refusal to accept that the descendants of empire get to grade everyone else's homework on civilization, modernity, and progress — while editing their own history out of the textbook.

We are not interested in revenge. We are interested in the record.

By the numbers

## The accounting they prefer scattered.

Eight figures, every one published, every one cited. Together they describe the size of a crime that polite history insists on telling in pieces.

~108M

Lower-bound combined deaths from colonial violence & famine

12.5M

Africans deported in the Atlantic slave trade

\$45T

Drained from India by Britain (1765–1938)

~84%

Of earth's land surface once claimed by a European power

80%

Of the Herero people killed by Germany, 1904–1907

122 yrs

France charged Haiti an 'independence indemnity', 1825–1947

8M+

Objects held in the British Museum; tiny fraction returned

0 min

Compulsory British curriculum time on the Bengal Famine (2024)

Source — Hochschild, King Leopold's Ghost; Davis, Late Victorian Holocausts; Sen; Olusoga & Erichsen; Anderson.

Caution — A note on numbers

Every figure on this site is conservative. Where ranges exist, we use the lower published end. The point is not to inflate — the point is that even the smallest honest number is unbearable, and that the comfortable countries have built their moral self-image on the assumption you will never see these numbers in one place.

## The Archive

Sixteen chapters · Read in any order

Ch.

I

Read →

## A History of Conquest

Spain, Portugal, Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, the United States — five centuries of taking.

Ch.

II

Read →

## Timeline of Empire

1452 to today: chronology of conquest, atrocity, and resistance.

Ch.

III

Read →

## **Atrocities & Erasure**

The Congo Free State, Bengal, the Herero and Nama, Algeria, Tasmania, the Americas.

Ch.

IV

Read →

## **Why This Was Different**

Persia, Rome, the Mongols are not an alibi. Why 'every empire did it' fails as a defence.

Ch.

V

Read →

## **Stolen Credit**

The science, mathematics and civilisation the West learned from Iran, China, India, Egypt, the Islamic world, Africa and the Americas — and then claimed.

Ch.

VI

Read →

## **The Ledger**

Charts, numbers, and evidence — what the body count and the bank statements actually say.

Ch.

VII

Read →

## **Racism in the Present Tense**

It did not end. It changed its clothes.

Ch.

VIII

Read →

## **Empire by Other Means**

Migrants, refugees, talented workers, sanctions, and the dictators (including Iran's) the West quietly prefers.

Ch.

VIII·b

Read →

## **The Colonies They Still Hold**

Overseas territories, the Commonwealth, the CFA franc, 750 U.S. bases, brain drain, war contracts — and the labels that hide all of it.

Ch.

IX

Read →

## **The Left's Mirror**

On pity as a costume for contempt.

Ch.

X

Read →

## **How the Left Became the Worse Right**

An internal critique of the Western left's failure to deliver equality.

Ch.

XI

Read →

## **The Same Logic, Other Victims**

Why the industrial domination of animals belongs in this conversation, not outside it.

Ch.

XII

Read →

## What Schools Skip

The curriculum is a confession written in white-out.

Ch.

XIII

Read →

## The Case for Reparations

Stolen wealth is not a metaphor. It is a ledger.

Ch.

XIV

Read →

## Library

Books, documentaries, films, and essays that tell the truth.

Ch.

XV

Read →

## Visual Archive

The photographs the empire would prefer you not see in one place.

Ch.

XVI

Read →

## What We Can Do

Refusal is a practice, not a slogan.

"Europe is literally the creation of the Third World. The wealth which smothers her is that which was stolen from the underdeveloped peoples."

— Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961

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## Sources & Further Reading

132. [1] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (Présence Africaine, 1955; English: Monthly Review, 1972).

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134. [3] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Pantheon, 1978).

135. [4] Jason Hickel, Dylan Sullivan & Huzaifa Zoomkawala, "Imperialist appropriation in the world economy: Drain from the global South through unequal exchange, 1990–2015", *New Political Economy / Global Environmental Change* (2022).

All works cited in good faith for documentary, educational and critical use. Errors and omissions: contact the archive.

# *II*

## **About This Archive**

[silencedhistory.org/about](https://silencedhistory.org/about)

## The premise

Most Western curricula treat European empire as background scenery — a few dates, a few names, a few regrettable episodes. The scale, the method, and the wealth that flowed home are quietly trimmed away. This site puts the record back on the page, sourced and cross-referenced, so the conversation can begin from facts rather than from inherited comfort.

## Editorial principles

- **Sourced over sensational.** Casualty figures, dates, and quotations are cross-referenced with academic historians — Hochschild, Davis, Rodney, Fanon, Said, Olusoga, Beckles — and with primary documents where possible.
- **Specific over abstract.** "Colonialism was bad" persuades no one. Named people, named places, named amounts do.
- **Present-tense, not just past.** Empire did not end in 1960. Trade rules, debt structures, and police violence are part of the same story.
- **No guilt theatre.** The point is not to shame readers. The point is to make accurate description normal.

## Who built it

An independent editorial project. No institutional funding, no advertising, no tracking beyond basic anonymous traffic counts. Corrections and source suggestions are welcome — see the contact page.

## How to use it

Start with the Manifesto, then follow whichever thread pulls you — the Timeline, the Ledger, or a single atrocity. Pages are designed to be readable on their own and shareable as individual links.

# *III*

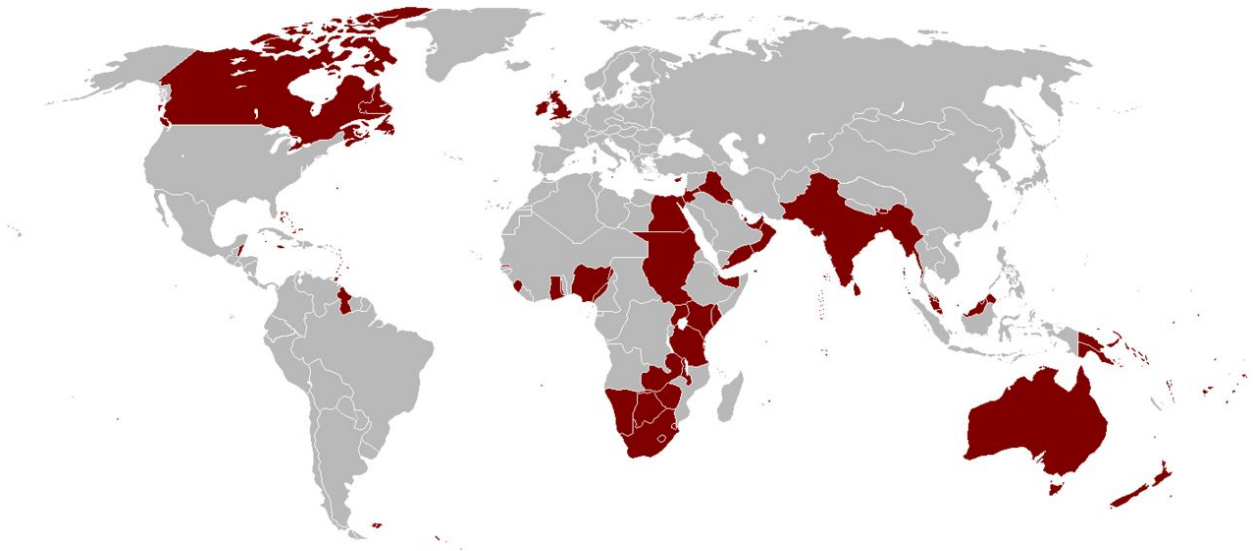
## **Why This Project Is Different**

[silencedhistory.org/why-different](https://silencedhistory.org/why-different)

When the conversation turns to colonialism, a particular sentence tends to appear, usually with a sigh of historical patience: *but every civilisation has conquered others. The Persians did it. The Romans did it. The Mongols did it. The Ottomans did it. Why single out Europe?* The sentence is meant to close the discussion. It should open it.

## 1. Scale

The Achaemenid empire at its height covered roughly 5.5 million square kilometres. Rome at its peak: about 5 million. The Mongol empire — the largest contiguous land empire in history — reached approximately 24 million. The British empire of 1920 governed **35.5 million square kilometres** on every inhabited continent, and the European colonial system as a whole, at one point or another, claimed sovereignty over roughly **84% of the earth's land surface**. No previous empire was planetary. This one was.



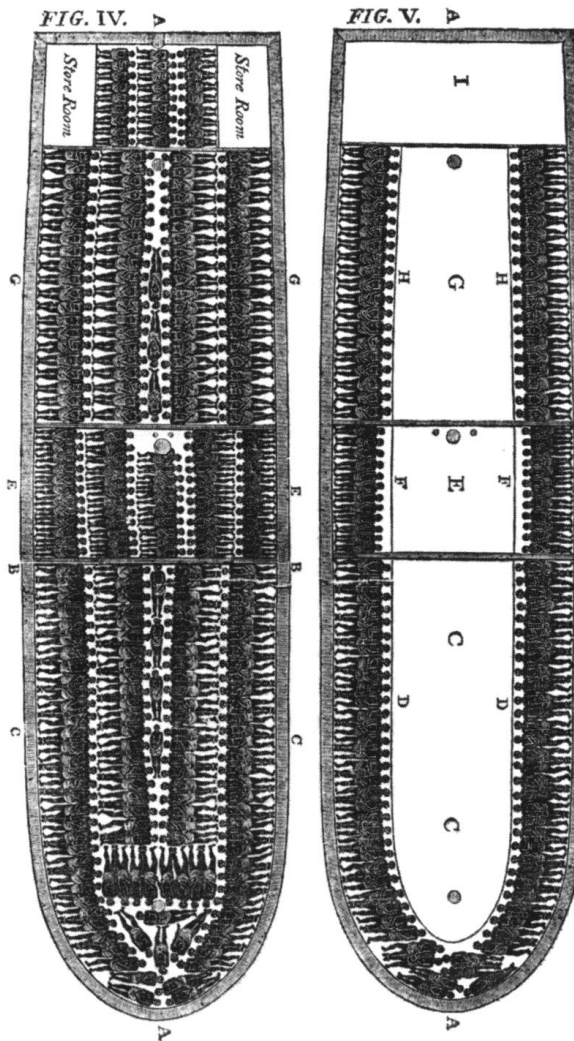
*Map of the British Empire at its greatest extent in 1921*

## 2. Race as a permanent legal category

The Persian, Roman and Mongol orders absorbed the conquered. A Greek could become a Roman senator; a Christian could rise in the Ottoman administration; the Mongols ruled China through Chinese officials. These empires were violent and extractive, but they did not invent a biological caste that travelled with you for life, was inherited by your children, and remained legally enforceable in the metropole as well as the colony. The European project did. Race, in the modern sense — a fixed, heritable, subhuman status used to organise labour, property, and citizenship — is a colonial invention, refined in the Atlantic system and exported worldwide.

### 3. Chattel slavery on an industrial scale

Slavery existed in many earlier societies. It was usually a punishment, a war consequence, or a debt status, and it was almost never hereditary in perpetuity for an entire defined population. The transatlantic slave trade did something new: it forcibly deported roughly **12.5 million people** across an ocean, stripped them of any legal personhood for life, declared the same condition heritable for their children and their children's children, and built the financial, insurance, shipbuilding and banking sectors of half of Europe and North America on the cash flow. The Code Noir, the Atlantic plantation, and the cotton-finance complex have no real precedent in earlier empires.



*Diagram of the slave ship Brookes, 1788, showing the stowage of 454 enslaved Africans*

## 4. Capitalism made it a permanent engine

Ancient conquest mostly took tribute and moved on. Colonial conquest restructured the conquered country's economy to serve the conqueror's, indefinitely. Indian textile production was deliberately strangled so Manchester could sell cloth back to India. Congolese rubber, Caribbean sugar, West African cocoa, Bolivian silver, Iranian oil, Indonesian spices — entire continents were reorganised into single-commodity suppliers for European industries. When the formal flags came down, the trade structure stayed. That is why the wealth never went home with the soldiers.

## 5. It is, in living memory, ongoing

The Persian empire collapsed in 330 BCE. Rome in the West fell in 476 CE. The Mongol khanates fragmented in the 14th century. Algeria became independent in 1962. Angola in 1975. Zimbabwe in 1980. Namibia in 1990. South African apartheid was repealed in 1994. The Chagossians were expelled from their islands by Britain in 1973 and have not been allowed home. France still uses the CFA franc to manage the monetary policy of fourteen African countries. The empire is not ancient history. It is your grandparents' lifetime, and in many cases your own.



*CFA franc banknotes used in fourteen African countries*

### Caution — The 'whataboutism' move

Asking "but what about the Persians?" in a conversation about Belgian Congo is not an act of historical fairness. It is a closing manoeuvre. It changes the subject from a specific, documented, recent crime — about which records exist, descendants live, and assets are still on the books — to a vague, abstract pageant of "human nature." The vagueness is the point.

## 6. They knew it was wrong at the time

One of the favourite escape hatches is the phrase "by the standards of their time." By whose standards? Bartolomé de las Casas was writing against the destruction of the Indies in 1542. Equiano was publishing in 1789. The Haitian revolutionaries declared, in 1804, that no human being could be property. Edmund Dene Morel was documenting the Congo atrocities in real time, in English, for a British readership. The Quakers, the abolitionists, the colonised themselves — they knew, they said so, and they were ignored, jailed, or killed. The "standards of the time" included loud objections. The colonisers chose not to listen. That is a moral choice, not a historical inevitability.



*The Cyrus Cylinder, a clay artefact from c. 539 BCE held in the British Museum*

## 7. The wealth is still here

The Roman aqueducts are ruins. The Persian apadana is an archaeological site. The Mongol postal network is a paragraph in a textbook. The wealth from colonialism is a living balance sheet. It is in the endowments of British and American universities built on slave money. It is in the Lloyds insurance market that insured the slave ships. It is in the museums that still hold the Benin bronzes, the Parthenon marbles, and ten thousand other objects. It is in the family trusts of descendants of plantation owners and merchant houses. It is in sovereign debts owed by the formerly colonised to the institutions of the formerly colonising. You cannot say "that was a long time ago" while still living off the dividend.

## 8. The justification still circulates

Caesar did not write op-eds for *The Times* defending the conquest of Gaul as a "burden we reluctantly took up to civilise the natives." Niall Ferguson does. Roman senators did not give TED talks on why Carthage's destruction was, on balance, good for global development. Contemporary European politicians do, about Africa, about the Middle East, about the Indian subcontinent. As long as the alibi is still being recited in the present tense, the crime is also in the present tense.

5.5M km<sup>2</sup>

Persian empire at maximum extent

5M km<sup>2</sup>

Roman empire at maximum extent

24M km<sup>2</sup>

Mongol empire at maximum extent

35.5M km<sup>2</sup>

British empire alone, 1920

In sum

Every empire was cruel.

Only one industrialised the cruelty, made it racial, made it global, and is still collecting on the loan.

References

## Sources & Further Reading

35. [1] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (Présence Africaine, 1955; English: Monthly Review, 1972).
36. [2] Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (Knopf, 2014).
37. [3] Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (Basic Books, 2014).
38. [4] Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (UNC Press, 1944).
39. [5] Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (Bold Type, 2016).
40. [6] Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview* (Westview, 1993).
41. [7] Jason Hickel, Dylan Sullivan & Huzaiifa Zoomkawala, "Imperialist appropriation in the world economy: Drain from the global South through unequal exchange, 1990–2015", *New Political Economy / Global Environmental Change* (2022).

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# *IV*

## **A Compressed History**

[silencedhistory.org/history](https://silencedhistory.org/history)

Colonialism is not a metaphor and it is not ancient history. It is the organized, continuous, deliberately profitable seizure of other peoples' land, labor and lives by a handful of European states and their settler offshoots over a period of roughly five hundred years. The wealth it produced built the cities we now call beautiful. The borders it drew are the borders we now call countries. The hierarchies it invented — between "civilized" and "primitive," between "white" and the rest — are the hierarchies we now call common sense.

What follows is a short account, empire by empire. It is not complete. No site could be. It is meant as a starting point, a refusal of the polite shrug that treats this history as too "complicated" to summarize. It is not complicated. It is uncomfortable.

## 01 . Spain

1492 — 1898



*Spain*

When Columbus made landfall in the Bahamas in October 1492, the Caribbean was home to millions of Taíno, Kalinago, Lucayan and other peoples. Within fifty years, the Taíno of Hispaniola were effectively extinct — worked to death in gold mines, butchered for sport, killed by smallpox and

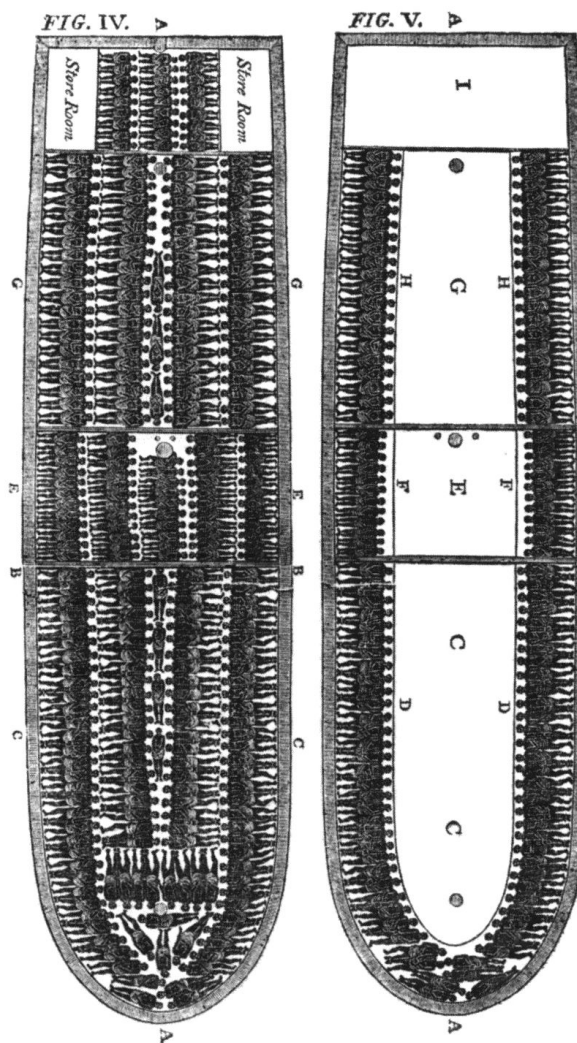
measles introduced by the conquistadors. Bartolomé de las Casas, a Spanish friar who lived through it, wrote that he had seen children fed to dogs.

The conquest of the Aztec Empire (1519–1521) and the Inca Empire (1532–1572) destroyed two of the most sophisticated political and architectural civilizations on the planet. The libraries of Tenochtitlán were burned. The terraced cities of the Andes were stripped. The silver mines of Potosí, in modern Bolivia, swallowed an estimated eight million Indigenous and African enslaved workers between 1545 and 1825. The bullion that came out of that mountain financed the Habsburg empire and, eventually, the European banking system.

Spain's American empire was not an accident or a misunderstanding. It was an organized, theologically justified, century-long extraction operation. Today Spanish school curricula still routinely describe it as the *encuentro* — the 'encounter.'

## 02 . Portugal

1444 — 1975



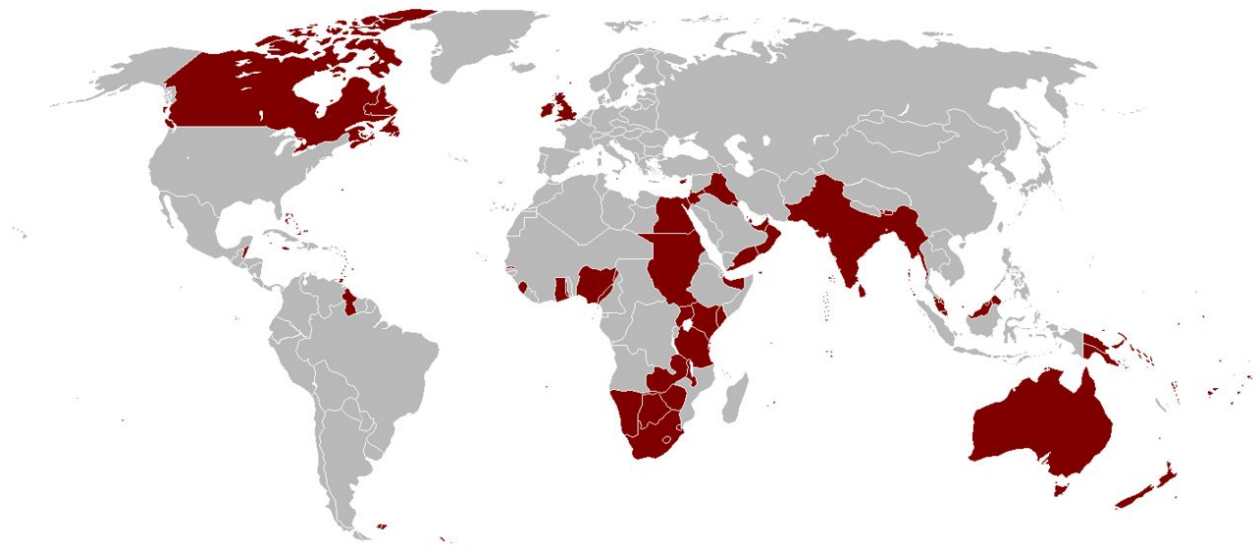
*Portugal*

Portugal pioneered the European slave trade. The first cargo of enslaved West Africans was unloaded at Lagos, Portugal, in 1444. Over the next four centuries, Portuguese ships would carry roughly 5.8 million human beings across the Atlantic — more than any other European nation. The sugar plantations of Brazil, the gold and diamond mines of Minas Gerais, and the wealth of Lisbon were built on this trade.

In Africa itself, Portugal held Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde and São Tomé until the 1970s — long after most of Europe had been forced out. Its colonial wars in the 1960s and 1970s killed tens of thousands and displaced millions. The dictatorship of Salazar called this the 'civilizing mission.'

## 03 . United Kingdom

1600 — 1997



*United Kingdom*

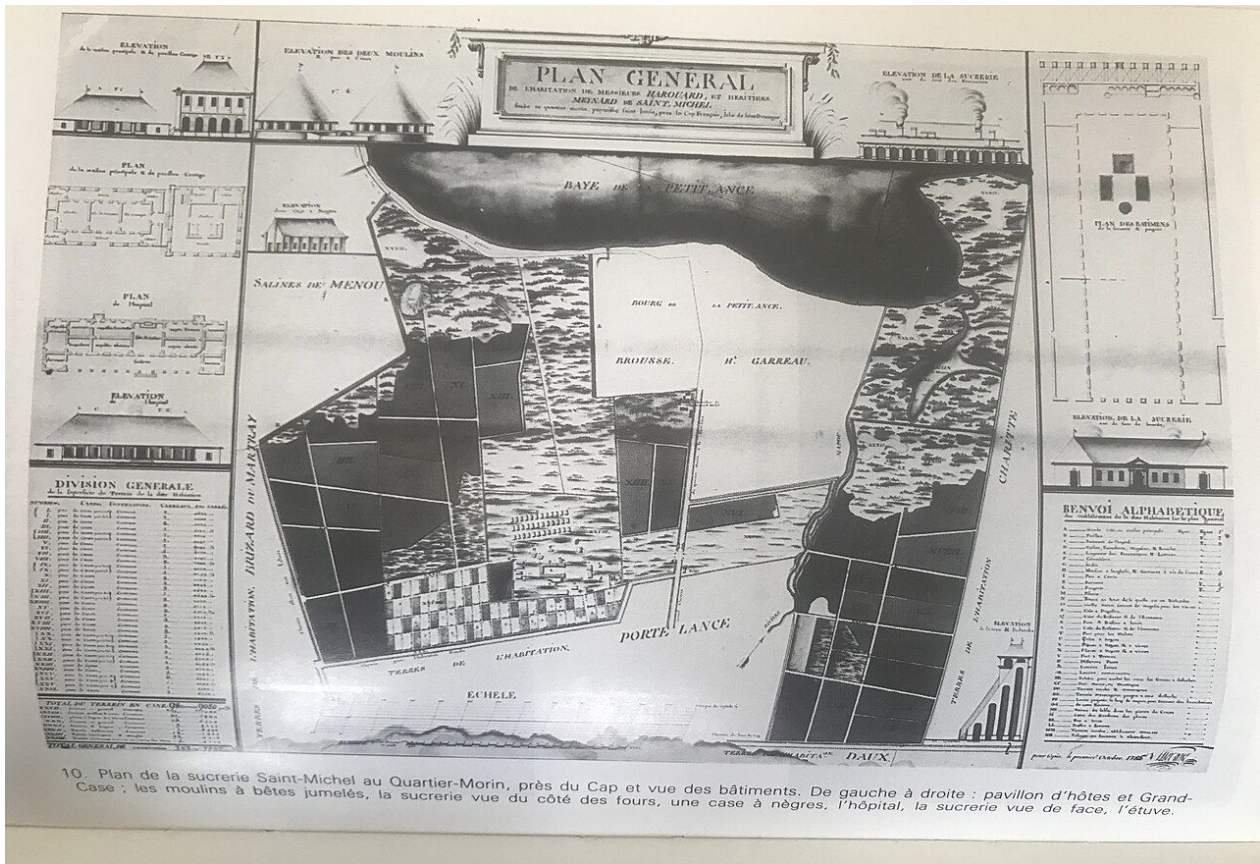
At its height in 1920, the British Empire ruled roughly a quarter of the world's land surface and a quarter of its population. The wealth that built London — its squares, its museums, its banks, its insurance industry, its universities — was extracted from India, the Caribbean, West Africa, East Africa, Ireland, Malaya, Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, Hong Kong and beyond.

The economist Utsa Patnaik has calculated that Britain drained roughly \$45 trillion from India alone between 1765 and 1938. India entered the British orbit producing roughly 25% of global GDP. It left it producing 4%. Between two and four million Bengalis died in the 1943 famine — a famine Churchill engineered by diverting food to British troops and then blamed on Indians for 'breeding like rabbits.'

In Kenya, the Mau Mau uprising of the 1950s was suppressed in concentration camps where torture, castration and rape were systematic. The British government destroyed the records when it left. In 2013 it finally paid £19.9 million in compensation to surviving victims — without admitting liability.

# 04 . France

1534 — 1962



10. Plan de la sucrerie Saint-Michel au Quartier-Morin, près du Cap et vue des bâtiments. De gauche à droite : pavillon d'hôtes et Grand-Case : les moulins à bêtes jumelés, la sucrerie vue du côté des fours, une case à nègres, l'hôpital, la sucrerie vue de face, l'étuve.

France

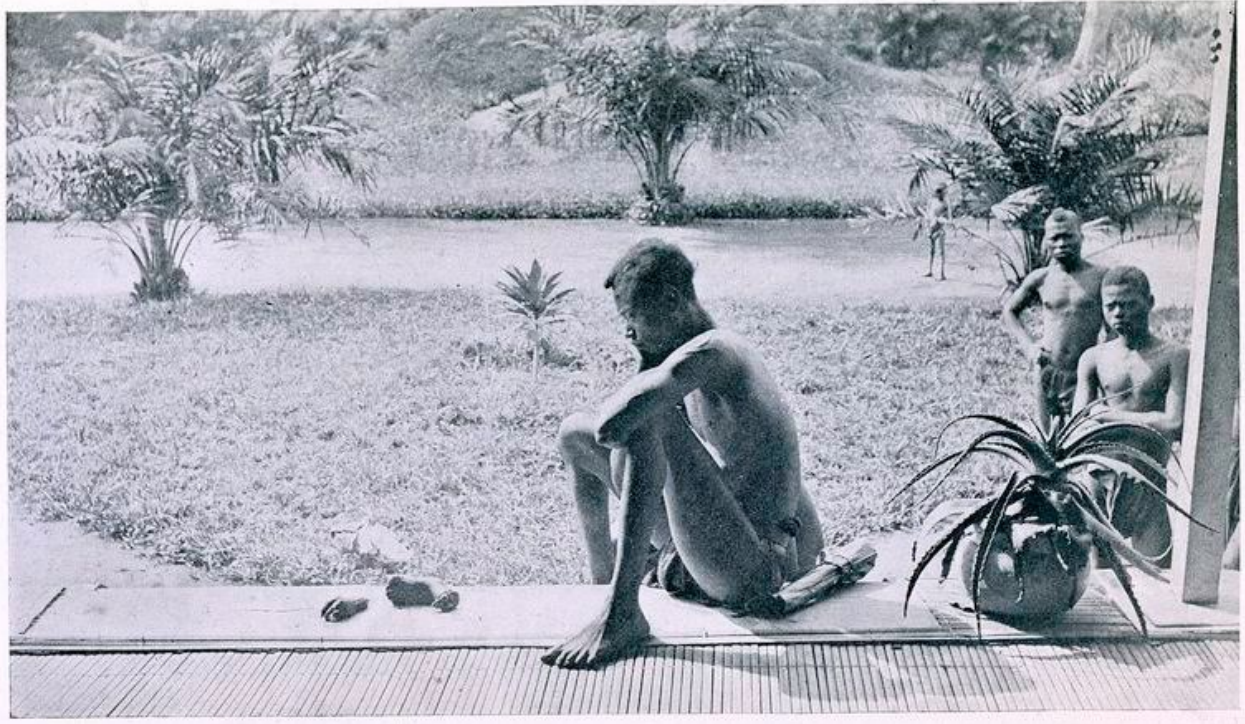
The French empire stretched from the Caribbean to West Africa to Indochina to the Pacific. Saint-Domingue (modern Haiti) was, in the eighteenth century, the most profitable colony in the world — producing 40% of Europe's sugar and 60% of its coffee with the labor of half a million enslaved Africans worked to death on an industrial schedule. When Haiti freed itself in 1804, France responded in 1825 with gunboats and demanded 150 million gold francs as 'compensation' for the loss of its slaves. Haiti finished paying this ransom in 1947. It is the principal reason Haiti is poor today.

In Algeria, the French colonization that began in 1830 killed an estimated 825,000 Algerians in its first three decades alone. The Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962) killed several hundred thousand more. French paratroopers in the Battle of Algiers used systematic torture — electrodes, waterboarding, rape. The French Republic only officially acknowledged this in 2018.

Across French West Africa, the colonial franc — the CFA — still ties fourteen African countries' monetary policy to the French Treasury today.

# 05 . Belgium

1885 — 1960



*Belgium*

King Leopold II of Belgium personally owned the Congo from 1885 to 1908. It was not a Belgian colony. It was his private property — a country eighty times the size of Belgium, ruled as a forced-labor camp for rubber and ivory. Quotas were enforced by the Force Publique, who were required to bring back a severed hand for every cartridge they fired.

Estimates of the death toll range from eight to fifteen million people. Roger Casement's 1904 report and E.D. Morel's campaign forced Leopold to hand the territory over to the Belgian state in 1908. The state continued the system, more quietly, until 1960. When the Congo finally became independent, its first elected prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, was assassinated within months in a plot involving Belgian and CIA operatives.

Leopold's statues still stand in parts of Belgium. The Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren — built with Congolese wealth — was, until recently, an unironic temple to the 'civilizing mission.'

## 06 . Netherlands

1602 — 1949



*Netherlands*

The Dutch East India Company (VOC), founded in 1602, was the world's first multinational corporation and one of its most violent. It ran the spice trade from Indonesia for two hundred years, depopulating the Banda Islands in 1621 — the VOC governor Jan Pieterszoon Coen massacred or deported almost the entire population of about 15,000 to monopolize the nutmeg crop.

Dutch rule of the East Indies (modern Indonesia) ended in 1949, but only after a brutal four-year war in which Dutch forces committed massacres at Rawagede and South Sulawesi that the Dutch state acknowledged and apologized for only in the 2010s. The Atlantic operations of the Dutch West India Company carried roughly 600,000 enslaved Africans, primarily to Suriname and the Caribbean.

## 07 . Germany

1884 — 1919



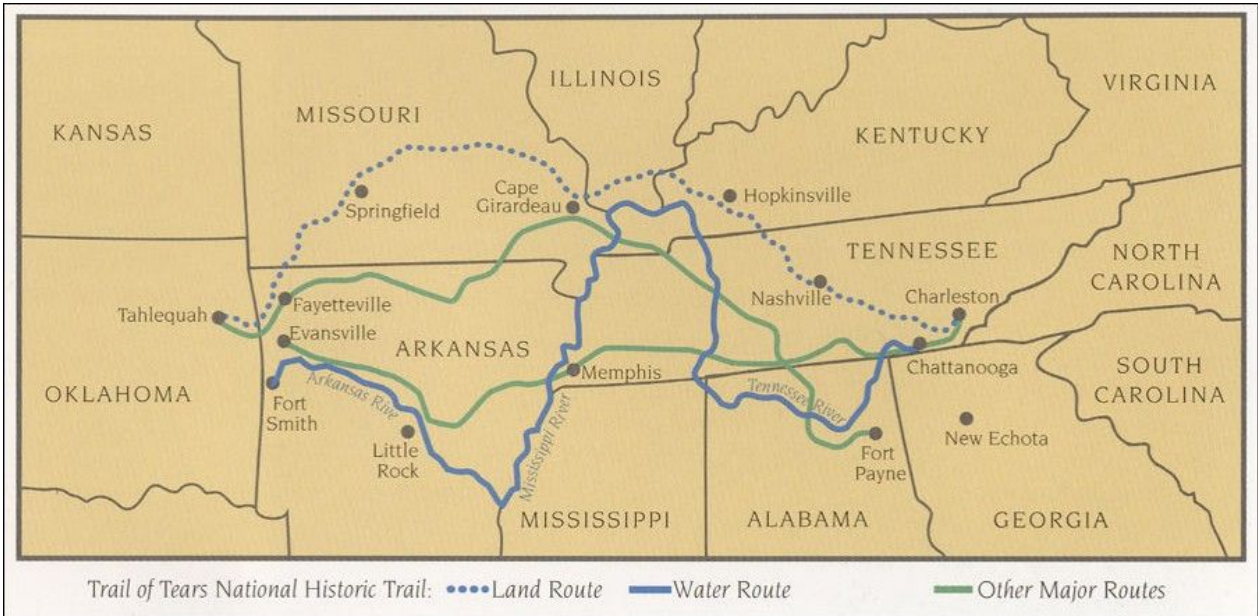
*Germany*

Germany's colonial period was shorter, but it produced the first genocide of the twentieth century. Between 1904 and 1908 in German South West Africa (modern Namibia), General Lothar von Trotha issued an extermination order against the Herero and Nama peoples. The Herero were driven into the Omaheke desert and prevented from reaching water. Survivors were imprisoned in concentration camps where roughly half died. About 80% of the Herero and 50% of the Nama were killed.

The techniques developed in Namibia — racial classification, concentration camps, eugenic experiments, the medical 'study' of skulls of murdered people — would, three decades later, return to Europe. The German government formally recognized the Herero and Nama genocide only in 2021.

## 08 . United States

1776 — present



United States

The United States is the largest and most successful settler-colonial project in modern history. The Indigenous population of what is now the contiguous United States fell from roughly 10 million in 1492 to about 250,000 by 1900 — through war, forced removal, broken treaties, deliberate destruction of the buffalo, and the residential school system in which Indigenous children were taken from their parents to be 'killed as Indians and saved as men.'

American chattel slavery — the basis of the cotton economy that fueled the Industrial Revolution on both sides of the Atlantic — was the most racially codified and intergenerational system of slavery in human history. It ended in 1865. The wealth gap it created has not closed. The system that replaced it — sharecropping, convict leasing, Jim Crow, redlining, mass incarceration — has not been dismantled either.

Outside its own borders, the United States overthrew governments in Iran (1953), Guatemala (1954), Congo (1961), Brazil (1964), Indonesia (1965), Chile (1973) and dozens of other countries, generally on behalf of corporations and against democratically elected leaders. It calls this 'foreign policy.'

## 09 . Italy

1882 — 1947



*Italy*

Italian colonialism is the empire most successfully hidden inside Europe. Beginning with the seizure of Eritrea in 1882, Italy went on to invade Libya in 1911, Somalia, and twice — in 1896 and 1935 — Ethiopia. The first invasion ended at Adwa, where an African army humiliated a European one; the second ended with mustard gas. Mussolini's air force, commanded by his sons Vittorio and Bruno, dropped tens of thousands of chemical bombs on Ethiopian villages between 1935 and 1936 in open violation of the Geneva Protocol, then bayoneted survivors and bulldozed monasteries.

In Libya, General Rodolfo Graziani — the 'Butcher of Fezzan' — herded between 80,000 and 100,000 Cyrenaicans into concentration camps in the Sirte desert between 1929 and 1934; roughly half died. No Italian was ever tried; Graziani served briefly as a defence minister of Mussolini's puppet republic and lived peacefully until 1955. The popular Italian self-image of *italiani brava gente* — 'Italians, the good people' — is one of the most durable national myths in Europe.

## 10 . Russia and the Soviet Union

1552 — 1991



*Russia and the Soviet Union*

The Russian Empire is the colonial project Western histories most consistently leave out of the European story, on the grounds that the conquests happened by land rather than by sea. Beginning with Ivan IV's destruction of the Kazan Khanate in 1552, Moscow expanded continuously eastwards across Siberia, southwards into the Caucasus and Central Asia, and northwards over the Indigenous peoples of the Arctic. The conquest of the Caucasus alone (1817–1864) ended with the Circassian genocide: roughly 1.5 million Circassians killed or deported to the Ottoman Empire, with population losses of 90–95% in some districts.

Under the Soviet Union the imperial form survived, dressed in the vocabulary of internationalism. Stalin deported entire nations — Crimean Tatars, Chechens, Ingush, Volga Germans, Kalmyks, Karachay, Balkars, Meskhetian Turks, Koreans — in cattle wagons, killing between a third and half of each. Central Asian republics were locked into cotton monocultures and Russian was the language of all advancement. The fact that the Soviet Union also funded anti-colonial movements abroad does not change what it was at home.

# 11 . Japan

1895 — 1945



*Japan*

Japan is the one non-European empire that successfully adopted the entire European colonial playbook in a single generation. Following its industrial revolution in the late 19th century, it annexed Taiwan (1895), Korea (1910), Manchuria (1931) and large portions of China and Southeast Asia, ruling 100 million people at its 1942 peak. Unit 731 conducted live human vivisections on Chinese, Korean and Allied prisoners in Harbin; the Nanjing massacre of 1937 killed between 200,000 and 300,000 civilians in six weeks. Up to 200,000 'comfort women', mostly Korean, were enslaved in military brothels.

Japan's place in this archive is not whataboutism: the point is that empire was a technology, not a race. When Japan adopted it, Japan produced the same atrocities the European powers produced. Japan has paid limited reparations and has yet to issue an unequivocal apology for the comfort women system, while Western Cold War priorities — anti-communism, basing rights — actively shielded Japanese war criminals from prosecution after 1945.

*" We must do our utmost to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern — a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English*

*in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. "*

Receipts

## The eight empires at a glance

Compiled from peer-reviewed colonial economic history and demographic estimates. Death tolls are conservative midpoints.

Pre-empted

## Objections answered

The strongest version

*" Every civilisation in history conquered its neighbours. Empire is a human universal, not a European invention. "*

Reply

Conquest is universal. What was new was the combination of four things in the European period: (1) global maritime reach, (2) chattel-race slavery as a legal category, (3) industrial extraction backed by joint-stock corporations, and (4) a theological-then-scientific racial hierarchy that justified it all. The Mongols, the Aztecs and the Ashanti did not build any of those four things. The fact that violence is old does not make this particular system old, and it is this particular system whose wealth and borders we still live inside.

The strongest version

*" It was a long time ago. Holding people responsible today for what their ancestors did is collective guilt. "*

Reply

The Haitian indemnity was paid until 1947. British taxpayers finished paying off the 1833 slave-owner compensation loan in 2015. Algeria fought France until 1962. The Chagossians were evicted in 1971. The Congo Free State ended within living memory of people now collecting pensions. 'A long time ago' is a feeling, not a date. The institutions are still here, the wealth is still here, and the bill is still arriving.

The strongest version

*" Yes there were abuses, but empires also brought railways, hospitals, universities, the rule of law. The balance sheet is mixed. "*

Reply

A railway built to extract cotton, by forced labour, on a gauge incompatible with the country next door, is not a gift to the people it bypasses; it is infrastructure for the extractor. Mike Davis showed that British 'modernisation' coincided with the worst famines in Indian history. The 'rule of law' that legalised the Code de l'indigénat, the Native Land Act and the Indian Penal Code's sedition clauses is not the rule of law. The balance sheet, when honestly drawn, is not mixed.

The strongest version

*" Africans sold other Africans into slavery. Indians collaborated with the Raj. Empire was a partnership. "*

Reply

Some collaborated, under duress or for advantage; that is true everywhere occupiers go. The European powers supplied the demand, the credit, the firearms, the ships, the insurance, the courts and the legal category of the human being as property. A fence who funds and arms a thief and writes the contract for the stolen goods does not become innocent because someone local handed over the silver.

The strongest version

*" You are cherry-picking the worst episodes and ignoring the genuine progress empire brought. "*

Reply

Find any major modern industry whose foundational capital, raw inputs or scientific knowledge did not pass through a colonial circuit between 1500 and 1960. Cotton, sugar, rubber, tea, coffee, cocoa, palm oil, tin, copper, gold, diamonds, oil, uranium, the Royal Society's botanical surveys, the Linnean classification of the world — all of it. The picking is not cherry. The orchard belongs to someone else.

"The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production."

— Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, 1867

Take it further

## Do something with this chapter

92. 01Name your city's chapterFind which of the eight empires above your city most directly profited from. Most European and American cities of any size have a documented chapter. Bring it up next time someone calls colonialism 'ancient history.'

93. 02Read one primary sourcePick one of the empires above and read a single primary document: Las Casas, Casement's Congo Report, the Hunter Commission on Amritsar, von Trotha's extermination order. Ten pages from the archive beats a hundred from the apologist.

94. [03]Send the tableThe comparison table above is designed to be screenshot-shared. It defeats 'whataboutism' in one image. Use it.

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All works cited in good faith for documentary, educational and critical use. Errors and omissions: contact the archive.

V

# An Atlas of Atrocities

[silencedhistory.org/atrocities](https://silencedhistory.org/atrocities)

What follows is not exhaustive. It cannot be. We have selected episodes that are well documented, well sourced, and that together sketch the geography and the method of colonial violence. The method is consistent: dehumanize, extract, deny. Each of these cases has its own enormous scholarly literature. Each is also structurally absent or actively distorted in the school curricula of the countries responsible.

## 01 The Congo Free State

1885 – 1908

Where

Central Africa, under King Leopold II of Belgium

Period

1885 – 1908

Estimated toll

Up to 15 million dead (≈50% population collapse)



*The Congo Free State*

King Leopold II ran the Congo as his personal property for twenty-three years. The territory existed to extract wild rubber. Villages were given quotas. Failure to meet the quota meant the Force Publique would burn the village and cut off the hands of survivors as proof to their officers that bullets had been

used on humans, not animals.

By 1908, when international pressure finally forced Leopold to transfer the territory to the Belgian state, the population had fallen by an estimated half. The wealth Leopold extracted built the Arcades du Cinquantaire in Brussels, the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren, and the seaside resort of Ostend.

## 02 The Bengal Famine

1943

Where

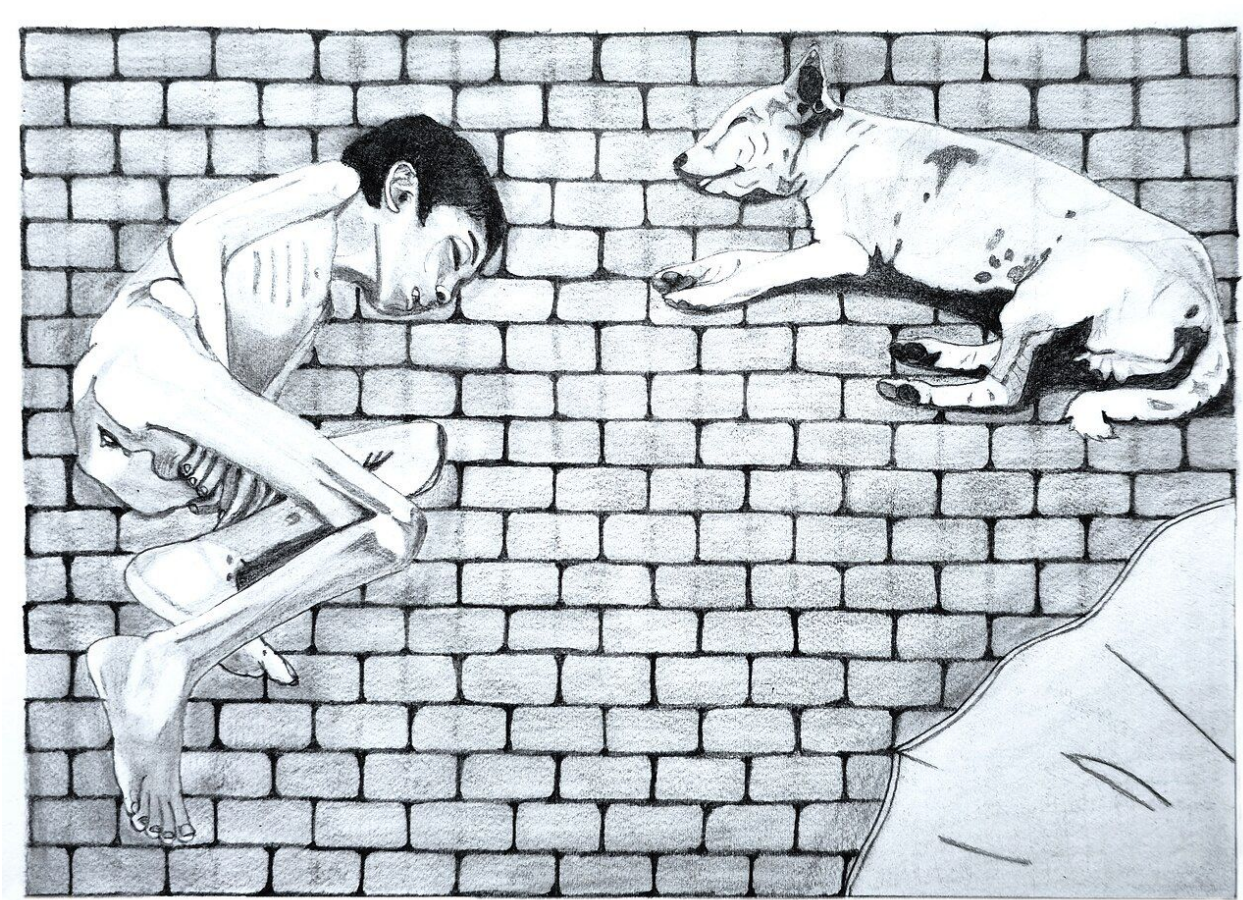
British India

Period

1943

Estimated toll

Up to 4 million dead (direct starvation + disease)



*The Bengal Famine*

In the middle of the Second World War, Britain diverted food from Bengal to feed British troops and stockpile reserves in Europe. When officials in India warned Churchill that people were dying, his response, recorded by Leopold Amery, was to ask why Gandhi had not yet died.

The Bengal famine was not caused by crop failure. Rice harvests in 1943 were only slightly lower than normal. It was caused by deliberate policy: requisitioning, scorched-earth tactics against possible Japanese supply lines, and a refusal to release reserves. Two to four million people starved in a province under the direct administration of the British Crown.

## 03 The Iranian Great Famine

1917 – 1919

Where

Persia (Iran), under joint British and Russian military occupation

Period

1917 – 1919

Estimated toll

Up to 10 million dead — possibly 40% of the population



*The Iranian Great Famine*

While Persia was a declared neutral in the First World War, British and Russian armies occupied the country and turned it into a logistical theatre against the Ottomans. The historian Mohammad Gholi Majd, working from U.S. State Department archives, documents what followed: occupation forces requisitioned or purchased almost the entire harvest, blocked grain shipments at the southern ports, and in some districts burned food storages to deny them to rivals or to clear land for military use. Wheat that Iranian peasants had grown was loaded onto British transports for Mesopotamia and India.

The result was the largest demographic catastrophe of the First World War. Famine and the typhus and cholera epidemics that travelled with it killed, by Majd's accounting, somewhere between eight and ten million Iranians — close to forty percent of the population — in barely two years. The episode is virtually absent from British and Russian textbooks. It is absent from the standard Western chronologies of the Great War. Even in Iran, the cynical use of the famine by later regimes has not produced a public reckoning commensurate with its scale.

The Iranian case shows the colonial logic at its most undisguised: a neutral country, a foreign army, a confiscated harvest, a population left to die, and a century of silence afterwards. The phrase 'collateral damage' had not yet been invented; the practice was already mature.

## 04 The Herero and Nama Genocide

1904 – 1908

Where

German South West Africa (Namibia)

Period

1904 – 1908

Estimated toll

≈80% of Herero, ≈50% of Nama killed

When the Herero rose against German settler land seizures in 1904, General Lothar von Trotha issued an Extermination Order: 'every Herero, with or without rifles, with or without cattle, will be shot.' The Herero were driven into the waterless Omaheke desert. Wells were poisoned. Survivors were sent to concentration camps on Shark Island, where forced labor and starvation killed roughly half of them.

German anthropologists collected the skulls of victims for racial-science research. Some of those skulls were only returned to Namibia in the 2010s. Germany formally recognized this as a genocide in 2021, more than a century later.

## 05 The Algerian War

1954 – 1962

Where

## French Algeria

### Period

1954 – 1962

### Estimated toll

Up to 1.5 million Algerians dead (FLN figure; French state cites 400,000)



*The Algerian War*

France did not consider Algeria a colony. It considered it part of metropolitan France. When Algerians rose for independence in 1954, the French Republic responded with the Battle of Algiers, in which paratroopers under General Massu used systematic torture — la gégène (electric shock to the genitals), waterboarding, rape — to extract information from suspected FLN members.

The war killed several hundred thousand Algerians. Entire villages were 'regrouped' — forcibly relocated to camps. In Paris in October 1961, French police under Maurice Papon murdered between 100 and 300 Algerian demonstrators and threw their bodies into the Seine. The French state acknowledged this in 2012.

## 06 Tasmania

1803 – 1876

### Where

British colony of Van Diemen's Land

### Period

1803 – 1876

Estimated toll

Effective extinction of full-descent Tasmanian Aboriginal people



*Tasmania*

The British colonization of Tasmania is one of the few cases in modern history that historians describe, with little controversy, as genocide. Settlers, with state backing, conducted the 'Black War' — a campaign of hunts and massacres that, combined with introduced disease and forced displacement, reduced an Aboriginal population of perhaps 5,000–10,000 to a handful within a generation.

Truganini, often (and inaccurately) called the last full-blooded Tasmanian Aboriginal woman, died in 1876. Her skeleton was put on display in a museum until 1947.

## 07 Wounded Knee

29 December 1890

Where

Lakota Pine Ridge Reservation, United States

Period

29 December 1890

Estimated toll

≈300 Lakota men, women and children



*Wounded Knee*

The Seventh Cavalry surrounded a band of Lakota under Spotted Elk who had been ordered to disarm. When the shooting started — over a deaf elder named Black Coyote who did not understand he was being told to give up his rifle — soldiers used Hotchkiss guns to cut down men, women, children and infants. The bodies were left in the snow.

Twenty soldiers received the Medal of Honor for this. The medals have never been rescinded.

## 08 The Destruction of Libraries and Cultures

Ongoing

Where

The Americas, Africa, Asia

Period

Ongoing

Estimated toll

Incalculable



*The Destruction of Libraries and Cultures*

The Mayan codices — folding books containing centuries of astronomy, mathematics, history and prophecy — were systematically burned by Spanish missionaries in the sixteenth century. Bishop Diego de Landa burned dozens of them at Maní in 1562. Four codices survive. Four.

The library of the University of Sankoré in Timbuktu, the libraries of the Songhai Empire, the architectural records of the Benin Bronzes (16,000 of which were looted by the British Army in 1897 and still sit, mostly, in European museums), the Buddhist sculptures of Gandhara, the ceremonial objects of the Pacific Northwest — colonialism was not only a project of killing people. It was a project of erasing the proof that they had a civilization in the first place.

## 09 The Amritsar Massacre

13 April 1919

Where

Jallianwala Bagh, Punjab, British India

Period

13 April 1919

Estimated toll

379 official /  $\approx$ 1,000 Indian estimates



*The Amritsar Massacre*

On Baisakhi day, an unarmed crowd — pilgrims, families, political meeting-goers — was trapped in a walled garden with one narrow exit. Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer arrived with fifty rifles, blocked the gate, and ordered ten minutes of continuous fire into the densest part of the crowd. Many died trying to climb the walls; others drowned in the garden's well, where 120 bodies were later recovered.

Dyer was relieved of command but never tried. The Morning Post raised £26,000 for him by public subscription — about £1.3 million today — and the House of Lords passed a motion of approval. Britain offered no formal apology until David Cameron called the killings 'deeply shameful' in 2013, still short of the word 'sorry.'

## 10 Mau Mau and the Kenyan Gulag

1952 – 1960

Where

British Kenya

Period

1952 – 1960

Estimated toll

≈90,000 executed, tortured or maimed; 160,000+ in camps



*Mau Mau and the Kenyan Gulag*

When the Kikuyu rose to demand the return of land stolen by white settlers, Britain declared a State of Emergency and built a network of concentration camps that historian Caroline Elkins, working from the surviving files, called Britain's Gulag. Detainees were beaten, electrocuted, castrated, and worked to death; women were raped with bottles and broken glass.

In 2011 the British government tried to deny the records existed. In 2013, after losing in the High Court, it admitted the abuses, paid £19.9 million in compensation to 5,228 elderly survivors, and quietly disclosed the 'Migrated Archive' — 1.2 million colonial files secretly shipped from twenty-three colonies to Hanslope Park to keep them out of the hands of newly independent governments.

## 11 The Philippine–American War

1899 – 1902 (resistance into 1913)

Where

U.S.-occupied Philippines

Period

1899 – 1902 (resistance into 1913)

Estimated toll

≈20,000 combatants and 200,000 – 1,000,000 civilians dead



*The Philippine–American War*

America's first overseas colonial war began the moment Filipino independence fighters realised the United States had bought the islands from Spain rather than recognising the republic they had just declared. General Jacob H. Smith ordered Samar turned into 'a howling wilderness' and instructed his men to kill every male over the age of ten. The 'water cure' — a forerunner of waterboarding — was used in field tribunals.

On Jolo in 1906 the U.S. Army surrounded around 1,000 Moro men, women and children in the crater of Bud Dajo and killed nearly all of them. Mark Twain, then vice-president of the Anti-Imperialist League, wrote that the flag should be redesigned 'with the white stripes painted black and the stars replaced by the skull and crossbones.' The episode does not appear in most American high-school textbooks.

## 12 The Putumayo Rubber Atrocities

c.1900 – 1912

Where

Peruvian and Colombian Amazon, under the British-registered Peruvian Amazon Company

Period

c.1900 – 1912

Estimated toll

≈30,000 – 40,000 Indigenous dead; entire peoples extinguished



*The Putumayo Rubber Atrocities*

What Leopold did in the Congo, Julio César Arana did in the Amazon — on behalf of a company listed on the London Stock Exchange and audited by British accountants. Indigenous Huitoto, Bora and Andoque people were forced to tap rubber under threat of flogging, mutilation and the 'rubber stocks.' Roger Casement, the same Foreign Office investigator who had exposed Leopold, produced a 1912 report so damning that a House of Commons inquiry followed.

Nothing happened. Arana was elected to the Peruvian senate. The Indigenous population of the lower Putumayo had fallen from an estimated 50,000 to fewer than 8,000 within a decade. The City of London absorbed the profits and absolved itself of the deaths through the convenient fiction of limited liability.

## 13 The Indonesian Mass Killings

1965 – 1966

Where

Indonesia, with U.S., British and Australian intelligence backing

Period

1965 – 1966

Estimated toll

500,000 – 1,000,000 dead



*The Indonesian Mass Killings*

Following the alleged 30 September coup attempt, the Indonesian army under General Suharto, supplied with kill lists by the U.S. embassy in Jakarta, oversaw the extermination of suspected communists, ethnic Chinese, trade unionists and leftist artists. Rivers in Bali and East Java were clogged with corpses. The CIA's own retrospective called it 'one of the worst mass murders of the 20th century'; it remains absent from almost every Western chronology of the Cold War.

Declassified documents released in 2017 confirm that U.S. and British officials not only knew but actively encouraged the killings as a strategic gain. No Western government has apologised. Indonesia has held no trials. Joshua Oppenheimer's films *The Act of Killing* (2012) and *The Look of Silence* (2014) finally forced the episode into international view — fifty years late.

## 14 The Aborigines and the 'Frontier Wars'

1788 – 1934

Where

Australia

Period

1788 – 1934

Estimated toll

≈65,000 – 100,000+ Aboriginal dead in frontier violence; population collapse from ≈750,000 to ≈74,000 by 1933



*The Aborigines and the 'Frontier Wars'*

Australian historians have catalogued more than 400 separate massacres of Aboriginal people by settlers, police, and Native Mounted Police units between 1788 and 1928. The Myall Creek massacre (1838), the Coniston massacre (1928, the last officially recorded), and dozens of poisonings of waterholes with arsenic or strychnine are documented by name and date.

Australia simultaneously operated the 'Stolen Generations' policy from c.1905 to 1969: an estimated one in three Aboriginal children was forcibly removed from their families and placed in church and state institutions, where many were physically and sexually abused. A formal apology came in 2008. Reparations have not.

## 15 The Armenian Genocide and Its Imperial Context

1915 – 1923

Where

Ottoman Empire (Anatolia, Syrian desert)

Period

1915 – 1923

Estimated toll

≈1.5 million Armenians; 250,000 – 750,000 Assyrians; 350,000+ Greeks



*The Armenian Genocide and Its Imperial Context*

The Ottoman Empire's destruction of its Christian minorities is recognised as genocide by the European Parliament, the United States Congress, and most credible historians. It deserves a place in this archive not because the Ottomans were European colonialists — they were not — but because the modern Republic of Turkey still denies the genocide, and because the major Western powers, including Britain, France and Germany, knew, archived the evidence in real time, and then declined to prosecute under the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) when oil concessions in Mosul became the higher priority.

The pattern is colonial in its bookkeeping if not in its perpetrator: a mass killing whose denial is now policed by an allied state, whose evidence sits in the foreign offices of states that traded recognition for resources, and whose survivors are still asked, a century later, to prove that what happened to their grandparents happened.

## 16 The Comfort Women & Unit 731

1932 – 1945

Where

Japanese-occupied China, Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia

Period

1932 – 1945

Estimated toll

≈200,000 women trafficked into sexual slavery; 200,000+ killed in biological-warfare experiments



*The Comfort Women & Unit 731*

Imperial Japan ran two parallel atrocities whose paper trails were largely destroyed in August 1945 and whose surviving documentation the United States classified in exchange for the research data. The 'comfort women' system trafficked an estimated 200,000 Korean, Chinese, Filipino, Indonesian and Dutch women into military brothels; survivors waited fifty years for any official acknowledgement, and the Japanese state still disputes the numbers. Unit 731, in occupied Manchuria, performed vivisection, frostbite testing and plague-bomb development on Chinese, Korean, Mongolian and Soviet prisoners.

The architects of Unit 731 — including its commander, Shirō Ishii — were granted immunity from prosecution by General MacArthur's occupation administration in exchange for handing their biological-warfare research to the United States Army's Fort Detrick programme. The Tokyo Tribunal

heard nothing about it. The data was used. The victims were not informed.

## 17 Operation Condor

1968 – 1989

Where

Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, Brazil — with U.S. coordination

Period

1968 – 1989

Estimated toll

≈60,000 killed, 30,000 disappeared, 400,000 imprisoned



*Operation Condor*

Operation Condor was a continent-wide intelligence-sharing agreement between the military dictatorships of the Southern Cone, brokered and underwritten by the United States via the CIA and the Pentagon. Its purpose was the cross-border kidnapping, torture and 'disappearance' of left-wing dissidents, trade unionists, priests, students and journalists. Pregnant women were kept alive until they delivered; their babies were given to military families. Roughly 500 stolen children have been identified by Argentina's Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo. Hundreds remain missing.

Henry Kissinger, in a 1976 cable later declassified, told the Argentine foreign minister: 'If there are things that have to be done, you should do them quickly.' He died in 2023 without standing trial. The U.S. School of the Americas, which trained many of the responsible officers, was renamed in 2001 and continues to operate.

## 18 Yemen

2015 – present

Where

Yemen, under a Saudi-led coalition armed by the US, UK, France, Germany

Period

2015 – present

Estimated toll

≈377,000 dead (2022 UN figure); 17m+ in acute food insecurity



*Yemen*

Since March 2015, a Saudi- and Emirati-led coalition has bombed Yemen using jets and munitions overwhelmingly supplied by the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Germany. Wedding halls, school buses, hospitals, water-treatment plants and the port of Hodeidah have been deliberately targeted. The naval and air blockade has produced what UNICEF described as the world's worst humanitarian crisis: cholera in the hundreds of thousands, child malnutrition at famine thresholds, and a state of permanent economic strangulation.

British arms-export licences to Saudi Arabia have been suspended, restored, and ruled unlawful by the UK Court of Appeal (2019), then resumed. US arms sales continued under three administrations. This is not history. It is the present tense, performed by the same parliaments that lecture other countries on rules-based order.

A note on numbers

## Every figure on this page is contested by someone who would prefer it be lower.

The figures above are the **upper-bound credible estimates** drawn from peer-reviewed scholarship and archival research, and they count *both direct deaths* (killing, massacre, execution) *and indirect deaths* (engineered famine, deportation, introduced disease, forced labour, the epidemics that travel with occupation). We use the upper bound on purpose. A standard tactic of colonial apologetics is to seize on the disputed margins of casualty counts — "actually it was closer to two million than ten" — as if a reduced number were a vindication. It is not. Lower figures almost always originate from the responsible power or its sympathisers; higher figures, from independent historians working in the archives of the dead. We have chosen the latter.

How it works

## The shared method

Read enough of these cases in sequence and a recipe emerges. It is not a metaphor. It is an operational playbook that recurs across centuries, continents and perpetrators.

205. Step 01 **Racial classification** Reduce a population to a category — 'savage', 'native', 'communist', 'terrorist sympathiser', 'illegal' — that places it outside the protections of the law you would apply to yourself.

206. Step 02 **Legal architecture of exception** Pass an Emergency Act, declare a Protectorate, draw a Mandate boundary, invoke a State of Siege. Once the territory is legally exceptional, normal procedural restraints do not apply.

207. Step 03 **Extraction quota** Set a target — rubber, grain, tax, votes, intelligence, lebensraum — and devolve responsibility for hitting it to local commanders without scrutiny of method.

208. Step 04 **Outsourced violence** Use settlers, militias, native auxiliaries, contractors or allied dictatorships. Plausible deniability is built into the org chart.

209. Step 05 **Document destruction** Burn the files (British Operation Legacy, 1957–63), classify them (US records on Indonesia 1965, Japan's Unit 731), or move them (the Hanslope Park 'Migrated Archive').

210. Step 06 **Statute of limitations / amnesty** By the time evidence surfaces, perpetrators are dead, treaties shield successor states, and the bureaucracy that would prosecute has been folded into a friendly post-war alliance.

211. Step 07 **Narrative laundering** Recast the episode as 'civilising mission', 'security operation', 'tragic excess of a few bad apples' or 'complicated period'. Fund the historians who specialise in the complication.

Receipts

## Coverage asymmetry

Death tolls and English-language Google Books mentions per million dead, indicative orders of magnitude only. The asymmetry, not the decimal, is the point.

*" I do not understand this squeamishness about the use of gas. I am strongly in favour of using poisoned gas against uncivilised tribes. "*

*" I hate Indians. They are a beastly people with a beastly religion. The famine was their own fault for breeding like rabbits. "*

The same playbook, this decade

**Yemen, 2015 – present.** Saudi- and UAE-led coalition, US/UK/French/German weapons, naval blockade, 377,000 dead by the UN's 2022 count. The Court of Appeal in London ruled UK arms sales unlawful in 2019; they resumed in 2020.

**Gaza, 2023 – present.** The International Court of Justice ruled in January 2024 that a plausible case of genocide had been made out; the ICC issued arrest warrants in November 2024. Western governments that built the post-1945 'rules-based order' continued arms transfers.

**Sudan, 2023 – present.** 150,000+ dead, 12 million displaced, El-Fasher under siege. UAE-supplied weapons reaching the RSF; minimal Western media coverage relative to scale; almost no diplomatic pressure on the supplier.

**Eastern Congo, ongoing.** A 30-year conflict over coltan, cobalt and gold has killed an estimated 6 million. The minerals end up in every phone, laptop and electric vehicle in this article's audience.

Pre-empted

## Objections answered

The strongest version

*" Every civilisation has done terrible things. Why single out the West? "*

Reply

Because this is a Western-language site speaking to Western audiences about Western curricula. Other civilisations' atrocities are catalogued in their own historiographies. The asymmetry being addressed here is the asymmetry of which atrocities the audience was taught — not a claim that anyone else is innocent. Equivalence claims are usually deployed as exit ramps from accountability, not invitations to broader honesty.

The strongest version

*" These events happened a century ago. Why hold today's people responsible? "*

## Reply

No one on this page is asked to feel personal guilt for what their great-grandparents did. The ask is institutional: the wealth, museums, universities, pension funds, banks and constitutions of today's Western states were directly capitalised by these events and still hold the proceeds. Holding institutions accountable is not generational guilt. It is normal property law.

The strongest version

*" The numbers are inflated. "*

## Reply

We use upper-bound credible estimates from peer-reviewed scholarship and explain why in the 'note on numbers' below. The pattern of disputing tolls — but only for atrocities committed by one's own country — is itself part of the apologetic playbook this page describes.

The strongest version

*" Context matters. These were the norms of the time. "*

## Reply

Contemporary critics — Las Casas (1542), Diderot, Tom Paine, Frederick Douglass, William Morris, E. D. Morel, Roger Casement, J. A. Hobson — denounced colonial violence in the language of their own century. The 'norms of the time' defence requires erasing the people who, at the time, refused those norms.

The strongest version

*" Focusing on this fosters resentment and makes integration harder. "*

## Reply

The opposite is observable. Societies that confronted their record — post-war Germany, post-Apartheid South Africa, Spain since 2007, France on Algeria since 2018 — have produced more durable social peace than societies that refused (the UK on empire, the US on the South, Belgium on the Congo until very recently). Honesty does not destabilise; the cover-up does.

Take it further

# What to do with this page

246. 01Name one eventPick the case from this page your country was responsible for and learn its name, its dates and one perpetrator. Mention it next time someone claims your country 'liberated' anyone.

247. 02Read the inquiryMost of these atrocities have a public-domain official report — Casement on the Congo and the Putumayo, Hunter on Amritsar, the Sachar / Mukherjee work on Bengal. Read one. Cite it.

248. 03Support a survivor bodyDonate to or amplify the Mau Mau War Veterans' Association, the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the Korean Council for Justice, or your nearest equivalent.

## References

# Sources & Further Reading

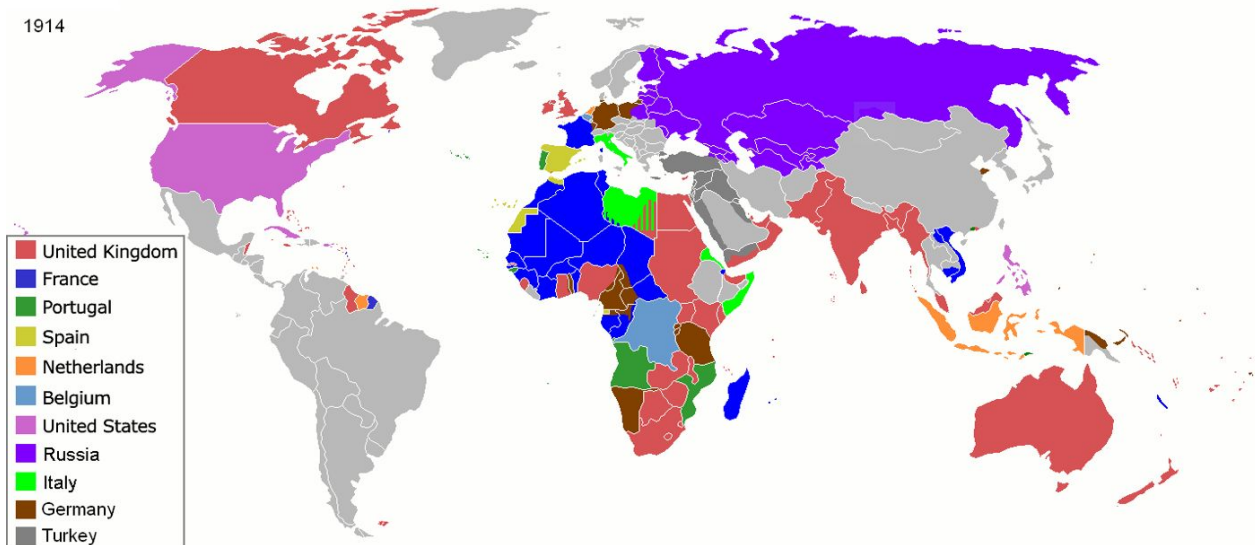
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All works cited in good faith for documentary, educational and critical use. Errors and omissions: contact the archive.

# *VI*

## **A Timeline of Empire**

[silencedhistory.org/timeline](https://silencedhistory.org/timeline)



*World map of colonial empires in 1914, showing the territorial holdings of Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Italy, the United States, Russia and Japan.*

1. 1452 Doctrine of Discovery Pope Nicholas V authorises the king of Portugal to reduce 'Saracens, pagans, and any other unbelievers' to 'perpetual slavery.' The legal architecture of the Atlantic slave trade is signed in Latin.
2. 1492 Invasion Columbus reaches the Caribbean Within fifty years the Taíno of Hispaniola, estimated by Las Casas at three million, are effectively extinct. Across the hemisphere as a whole the population collapse over the next century reaches, by the highest credible estimates, around 100 million dead from violence, enslavement and introduced disease. The word 'discovery' is invented to describe what is, in fact, a hostile arrival.
3. 1518 Trade The Asiento system begins The Spanish crown licenses the direct importation of enslaved Africans to the Americas. Over the next three centuries roughly 12.5 million people will be deported across the Atlantic.
4. 1602 Corporation Dutch East India Company The world's first joint-stock company is founded with the legal right to wage war, mint coinage, and execute prisoners. The corporation predates the modern nation-state in several of these powers.
5. 1621 Massacre Banda Islands Jan Pieterszoon Coen massacres the Bandanese to monopolise nutmeg. Of roughly 15,000 inhabitants, around 1,000 survive. The world's spice cabinet is built on a depopulated archipelago.
6. 1757 Conquest Battle of Plassey The East India Company defeats the Nawab of Bengal and begins the systematic extraction that, by the most cited estimate, will drain \$45 trillion from the Indian subcontinent.
7. 1791 Resistance Haitian Revolution begins Enslaved Africans in Saint-Domingue overthrow the most profitable colony in the world. France will spend the next 122 years extracting an 'independence indemnity' as punishment.
8. 1830 Invasion France invades Algeria A 132-year occupation begins. By independence in 1962, between 300,000 and 1.5 million Algerians will have been killed.

9. 1845FamineGreat Irish FamineUnder British rule, Ireland continues to export grain and livestock while one million Irish die and another million emigrate. The market, parliament concludes, must not be disturbed.
10. 1857RepressionIndian Rebellion crushedBritish forces respond to the uprising with mass executions, including the practice of strapping prisoners to the mouths of cannons. The Crown takes formal control of India the next year.
11. 1884Carve-upBerlin ConferenceFourteen European states and the United States meet to partition Africa. No African is invited. The continent is divided with straight lines drawn through nations, languages and watersheds.
12. 1885AtrocityCongo Free State establishedKing Leopold II of Belgium acquires the Congo as personal property. Over the next 23 years, up to 15 million Congolese will die under the rubber regime — roughly half the population.
13. 1893CoupOverthrow of Hawai'iAmerican sugar planters, backed by U.S. Marines, depose Queen Liliuokalani. The kingdom is annexed five years later.
14. 1898EmpireSpanish-American WarThe United States acquires Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines and effective control of Cuba. The 'American Century' begins as a colonial project.
15. 1904GenocideHerero and Nama GenocideGerman colonial troops in present-day Namibia drive the Herero into the desert and intern survivors in concentration camps. Around 80% of the Herero and 50% of the Nama die.
16. 1915GenocideArmenian GenocideThe Ottoman state deports and murders approximately 1.5 million Armenians. Hitler will later cite the world's indifference as evidence that genocide can be forgotten.
17. 1917FamineIranian Great Famine beginsJoint British and Russian occupation forces seize harvests, blockade southern ports against grain imports, and in some districts burn food storages to clear land for military use. Persia, a declared neutral, loses up to 10 million people — close to 40% of its population — to famine and the typhus epidemics that follow. The episode is omitted almost entirely from Western histories of the First World War.
18. 1919MassacreJallianwala BaghBrigadier-General Reginald Dyer orders his troops to fire on unarmed Indian civilians at a religious gathering. At least 379 are killed; Dyer is celebrated by the British public.
19. 1929ResistanceAba Women's WarTens of thousands of Igbo women rise against British colonial taxation in Nigeria, in one of the largest anti-colonial revolts of the inter-war period.
20. 1943FamineBengal FamineUnder Churchill's wartime policy, up to 4 million Bengalis die. Grain is diverted to British troops and to strategic reserves; relief is refused. Harvests in 1943 were only slightly below normal — the famine is a policy outcome.
21. 1945MassacreSétif and GuelmaOn the day Europe celebrates the end of fascism, French forces in Algeria massacre between 6,000 and 30,000 Algerians demanding independence.
22. 1947PartitionPartition of IndiaBritain leaves in haste. Up to two million people are killed in the resulting violence; 15 million are displaced. The borders are drawn by a man who has never visited the country.

23. 1952RepressionMau Mau UprisingBritain interns over 80,000 Kenyans in detention camps. Torture, castration and execution are systematic. Compensation is paid only in 2013, after surviving victims sue in British court.
24. 1953CoupIran coupThe CIA and MI6 overthrow Iran's elected prime minister Mohammad Mosaddegh, who had nationalised the oil industry. Twenty-six years of Western-backed dictatorship follow.
25. 1960AssassinationPatrice LumumbaThe democratically elected leader of the newly independent Congo is murdered with Belgian and CIA complicity. Mobutu's kleptocracy is installed in his place.
26. 1965MassacreIndonesian anti-communist killingsBetween 500,000 and 1 million Indonesians are murdered with U.S. and U.K. intelligence support. Suharto's three-decade dictatorship begins.
27. 1973CoupChile, 11 SeptemberSalvador Allende, elected with the largest popular mandate in Chilean history, is overthrown by Pinochet with the active assistance of the United States.
28. 1994GenocideRwandaRoughly 800,000 Tutsi are killed in 100 days while the United Nations Security Council, fully informed, withdraws its peacekeepers.
29. 2003InvasionIraq War beginsThe United States and United Kingdom invade Iraq on false pretexts. Counting the 1991 war, twelve years of sanctions (which UNICEF linked to roughly half a million child deaths) and the 2003 invasion together, upper estimates of resulting Iraqi deaths exceed 2 million.
30. 2011InterventionLibya destroyedA NATO bombing campaign overthrows Gaddafi. Open-air slave markets reappear in Libya within four years.
31. 2020ReckoningGeorge Floyd, global protestsThe killing of an unarmed Black man in Minneapolis triggers the largest civil rights mobilisation in U.S. history and a brief, ferocious global conversation that the powerful do their best to end.
32. 2023AtrocityGazaAn assault on a besieged population is conducted, broadcast, and defended in real time by the same Western powers that built post-1945 humanitarian law. Mass civilian deaths are reframed as regrettable necessity.

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All works cited in good faith for documentary, educational and critical use. Errors and omissions: contact the archive.

# *VII*

## **The Data**

[silencedhistory.org/data](https://silencedhistory.org/data)

12.5M

Africans embarked on the Middle Passage; total Atlantic-trade deaths reach 17M when raids, marches and depot mortality are counted

SlaveVoyages.org; Inikori

\$45T

Drained from India by Britain (1765–1938) — several times the UK's current GDP

Patnaik, 2018

15M

Killed under Leopold II in the Congo — upper bound, population collapse 1885–1908

Hochschild; Vansina

≈10M

Iranians dead in the 1917–19 famine engineered by British and Russian occupation forces — possibly the largest per-capita catastrophe of WWI

Majd, *The Great Famine and Genocide in Persia*

## I. The body count

Upper-bound published estimates, in millions, counting *direct and indirect* deaths — violence, engineered famine, introduced disease, forced labour, deportation. Lower estimates exist for almost every entry; they are almost always produced by the responsible power or its sympathisers.

Source — Cook (*Born to Die*); Inikori; Davis (*Late Victorian Holocausts*); Majd (*Persia 1917–19*); Hochschild; Vansina; Sen & Mukerjee; Anderson; Kiernan; Cribb; Gibbons (*Lancet*); Iraq Body Count; UNICEF sanctions reports

Source — SlaveVoyages.org, Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database

## II. The wealth that moved

In 1700, India produced roughly a quarter of world GDP. By the time Britain left, it produced four percent.

Source — Maddison Project; Bairoch

Source — Patnaik (2018); Inikori; Brown University Slavery & Justice Report; Hickel

On the Record — What \$45 trillion looks like

Economist Utsa Patnaik calculated that Britain extracted roughly \$45 trillion (in current value) from India between 1765 and 1938 — through tax on Indian peasants used to buy Indian goods which were

then sold abroad, with the proceeds kept in London. That sum is several times the entire annual GDP of the United Kingdom today.

### III. The present tense

The accounting does not stop in 1960. Every chart below describes a country that officially considers racism a closed historical question.

Source — The Washington Post Fatal Force database

Source — Federal Reserve, Survey of Consumer Finances

Source — Henley Passport Index; IMF voting shares; Reuters Institute Digital News Report; UNESCO publication data — composite presentation.

Source — Institutional reports; Sarr-Savoy report (2018); Hicks, The Brutish Museums.

Counters

## The arithmetic of a single century.

■225M

Upper-bound combined deaths from colonial violence, engineered famine, slave-trade mortality, introduced disease and post-1945 Western interventions

36,000

Documented Atlantic slaving voyages

£20M

Paid in 1833 by Britain — to slaveholders, not the enslaved. Loan repaid in 2015.

90M FF

Demanded from newly free Haiti in 1825 by France, as the price of recognition

~84%

Of the earth's land surface was at some point claimed by a European power

54

African countries — borders almost entirely drawn in Berlin, 1884–85

1 / 5

Approximate Black share of the U.S. prison population vs. general population, today

0

Minutes of compulsory British school curriculum on the Bengal Famine, as of 2024

"If we cannot read the numbers, the apology is theatre."

— Unsilenced, editorial note

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# *VIII*

## **Stolen Credit**

[silencedhistory.org/stolen-credit](https://silencedhistory.org/stolen-credit)

A founding myth of the modern West is that civilisation is one of its inventions and that the rest of the world either received it as a gift or fell behind for failing to accept it in time. Almost every part of this story is false. The honest version is stranger and, for the comfortable nations, more uncomfortable: most of what the West calls its inheritance was, in fact, taught to it by the civilisations it later described as 'undeveloped'.

Persia & Greater Iran

## The empire Europe quietly imitated

The Cyrus Cylinder (c. 539 BCE) is often called the first known declaration of human rights — religious tolerance, an end to forced labour, the right of displaced peoples to return home. It predates the Magna Carta by 1,754 years. The British Museum holds it. British schoolchildren rarely hear of it.

The qanat — the underground aqueduct that turned Iranian deserts into farmland — was running for two and a half millennia before European hydraulic engineers 'rediscovered' the principle. The Achaemenid postal system, with its relay riders, was the operational model for every subsequent imperial communications network including Rome's.

Algebra in its medieval form is unthinkable without al-Khwarizmi (Persian, 9th c.), whose name became the word 'algorithm'. Modern medicine inherited the encyclopaedic compendiums of Ibn Sina (Avicenna, Persian, 11th c.); his Canon was the standard medical textbook in European universities for six centuries. Algebra, algorithm, alcohol, almanac, average, alkali, alchemy: the words trace the debt.

Persian poetry — Rumi, Hafez, Saadi, Khayyam, Ferdowsi — has been read continuously, in dozens of languages, for a thousand years. Goethe credited Hafez as the source of his West–East Divan. Emerson took Saadi as a model. None of this is on the standard Western humanities syllabus.



*The Cyrus Cylinder, c. 539 BCE, in the British Museum*

China

## Four inventions; one missing footnote

Paper. Printing. Gunpowder. The magnetic compass. The four technologies that, more than any others, made the European Renaissance and the European voyages of conquest physically possible. All four were Chinese, the earliest by more than a thousand years.

Movable type printing was developed by Bi Sheng around 1040, four centuries before Gutenberg. Cast iron was being produced in industrial quantities in China by the 5th century BCE — roughly seventeen hundred years before Europe managed it. The compass was being used for marine navigation off the Chinese coast by the 11th century, two hundred years before it appeared in the Mediterranean.

When a Chinese tech firm dominates a sector today and a Western press release calls it 'surprising', the surprise is the part that should be examined.



Frontispiece of the Diamond Sutra, the world's oldest dated printed book (868 CE)

India

## The number you are reading this in

The decimal place-value system, the symbol for zero as a number, and the basic algorithms of arithmetic that the entire global economy runs on were developed in India between the 5th and 7th centuries by mathematicians including Aryabhata and Brahmagupta. They reached Europe through Arabic translations of Indian texts; 'Arabic numerals' is therefore a misnomer the Arabs themselves were happy to correct.

Indian metallurgists were producing wootz crucible steel — the basis of the Damascus blade — by the 6th century BCE. The Iron Pillar of Delhi has stood, essentially un-rusted, for sixteen hundred years; metallurgists still publish papers on it.

Cataract surgery, rhinoplasty, the suturing of wounds: the Sushruta Samhita (c. 6th century BCE) describes hundreds of surgical procedures. European surgeons reinvented several of them in the 18th and 19th centuries and named them after themselves.



*Statue of the Indian mathematician and astronomer Aryabhata (476–550 CE)*

The Islamic World

## The bridge the West pretends did not exist

Between roughly 750 and 1250 CE, the libraries of Baghdad, Cordoba, Cairo, Damascus, Bukhara and Samarkand preserved, translated and extended the entire surviving corpus of Greek, Persian and Indian science. Without that labour, the European Renaissance has nothing to renaissance from. The Latin word 'cipher' comes from the Arabic **■ifr**, meaning zero; the word 'chemistry' from **al-k■miy■■**; the word 'admiral' from **am■r al-ba■r**.

Ibn al-Haytham (Alhazen, 10th–11th c., Basra and Cairo) wrote the Book of Optics, in which he experimentally established that vision is light entering the eye, not rays emitted by it. He is the father of the scientific method as the West later codified it.

Al-Razi (Rhazes), al-Biruni, al-Tusi, Ibn Rushd (Averroes), Ibn Khaldun: the names that built the bridge from antiquity to modernity. Their absence from Western 'history of science' syllabi is not an accident of citation. It is a curatorial choice.



*Soviet postage stamp commemorating al-Khwarizmi, 9th-century Persian mathematician*

Egypt & Nubia

## The civilisation Europe described as prelude

Pharaonic Egypt ran a complex literate state with surveying, advanced medicine, geometry, and continental trade routes while northern Europe was a forest. Kemetic medicine, including detailed papyri on diagnosis and pharmacology (Edwin Smith, Ebers, c. 1600 BCE), was studied by Greek physicians who acknowledged their teachers.

The Kingdom of Kush in present-day Sudan ruled Egypt as the 25th Dynasty in the 8th century BCE. The Meroitic script remains only partly deciphered. European Egyptology spent two centuries arguing that Egypt could not have been African; the argument continues, in softer language, on cable television.

Sub-Saharan Africa

# Universities older than Oxford

The University of al-Qarawiyyin in Fez was founded in 859 CE by a Tunisian woman, Fatima al-Fihri. It still operates. Oxford traces its first teaching to 1096, Bologna to 1088. The University of Sankoré in Timbuktu, in the 14th–16th centuries, held hundreds of thousands of manuscripts on astronomy, jurisprudence and medicine.

Great Zimbabwe — the dry-stone capital of a southern African kingdom from the 11th to 15th centuries — was so impressive when European colonists encountered its ruins that they spent decades insisting Africans could not possibly have built it. Subsequent archaeology has been unambiguous.

The Mali empire of Mansa Musa was, by several measures, the wealthiest political entity in the world in the 14th century. His pilgrimage to Mecca destabilised the gold markets of the entire Mediterranean for a decade. He is rarely a name in Western general education.



Timbuktu manuscripts on astronomy and mathematics, 14th–16th centuries

The Native Americas

# The world before 1492 was not empty

Tenochtitlán, the Mexica capital at Spanish contact, had a population in the hundreds of thousands — larger than any European city of the period except possibly Paris and Constantinople. It was a planned city of causeways, aqueducts, public sanitation and floating agriculture. Cortés' own officers described it as more beautiful than anything in Spain. They destroyed it.

The Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy operated a federated representative system of government with checks on executive power, formal procedures for impeachment, and women's councils, centuries before the U.S. Constitution. Several of the U.S. founders — including Benjamin Franklin — explicitly studied it. It is rarely credited.

Maize, potatoes, tomatoes, cacao, vanilla, peanuts, chillies, beans, squash, sunflowers, manioc, quinoa, sweet potatoes, peppers, tobacco, rubber, pineapple, avocado: roughly 60% of the crops grown in the world today were domesticated by Native American agronomists over millennia. The Italian, Indian, Thai and Sichuanese cuisines that exist today are post-Columbian.

Andean civilisations performed successful skull surgery (trepanation) with survival rates that European surgeons would not match until the 20th century. They engineered terraced agriculture at altitudes Europeans considered uninhabitable. The Inca road network at its height ran 40,000 kilometres.

The Pacific & Australia

## Navigation without instruments

Polynesian navigators colonised an oceanic triangle the size of a continent, using stars, swells, bird flight and oral charts called rapa, while Europeans were still hugging the Mediterranean coast. Captain Cook's Tahitian navigator Tupaia drew a map of the South Pacific from memory that included islands Cook had not yet visited.

Indigenous Australians maintained the longest continuous civilisation on earth — at least 65,000 years — with complex land management practices, including controlled burning, that European settlers misread as 'wilderness' and proceeded to break. Settler Australia is, on multiple measures, currently relearning what it spent two centuries destroying.

The Andes & Mesoamerica (continued)

## Genetics, calendar, statistics — in stone

Maya astronomers had calculated the synodic period of Venus to within a few seconds of the modern value by the 9th century CE, recorded the dates of solar eclipses 800 years into the future, and ran a base-20 mathematics that included a glyph for zero developed independently of Indian zero, perhaps centuries earlier. The four Maya codices Diego de Landa did not burn at Maní in 1562 give us the science. Whatever was in the other dozens of codices he did burn, we will never know.

The Inca quipu — a textile record system of knotted cords — encoded census data, tribute owed, grain stores and probably historical narrative; recent decipherment work suggests it is closer to a true writing system than colonial scholarship admitted. The Inca state ran a continental redistribution economy, with state granaries (qollqas) that pre-empted famine; the contrast with British India in 1876 or 1943 is exact.

Andean farmers domesticated more than 3,800 varieties of potato and selectively bred quinoa, oca and lupin into staples that have, in the last twenty years, been rebranded as Western 'superfoods'. The patents, in many cases, are now held in Geneva and Denver.

Turkic & Mongol Eurasia

## **The empire that wrote the rulebook for modern statecraft**

The Mongol Empire of the 13th and 14th centuries, however brutal in its conquests, ran a continent-spanning postal system (the yam), enforced freedom of religion by decree, standardised weights and measures from Korea to Hungary, issued the first paper currency on a continental scale, and ran a meritocratic civil service that included Persians, Chinese, Armenians and Russians in senior positions. The Pax Mongolica enabled the transmission to Europe of gunpowder, paper money, the compass and printing — the literal toolkit of the European 'modernity' that came next.

Uyghur scribes designed the script that the Mongol khans then exported; Tibetan Buddhist scholars staffed the Yuan court; Khwarezmian engineers built the siege weaponry. The story we are told — that 'the East' was static and 'the West' was dynamic — has the arrow of history pointing the wrong way for most of the second millennium.

Caribbean & circum-Atlantic

## **The political theory the slave-holder pretended not to read**

The Haitian Revolution of 1791–1804 was, in pure political-philosophy terms, the most consistent application of the Enlightenment's claim that all men are equal — more consistent than anything France or the United States produced in the same century. C. L. R. James's *The Black Jacobins* demonstrated, in 1938, that the Saint-Domingue insurgents were not 'imitating' French Republican ideas; they were perfecting them by removing the racial asterisk France refused to remove.

Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Édouard Glissant and Sylvia Wynter, all from the Caribbean, then produced in the 20th century the political vocabulary — *négritude*, internalised colonialism, relation, the genre of the human — that the rest of the post-colonial world has been using to think with ever since. Most Western philosophy departments still teach this material, when they teach it at all, as 'area studies' rather than as philosophy.

Korea, Japan & the longer East Asia

## Innovations the West later treated as its own discovery

King Sejong's promulgation of Hangeul in 1446 produced a fully phonemic alphabet specifically designed for mass literacy — a project of democratic linguistic engineering that has no real European parallel until the 20th century. The first ironclad warship, the *geobukseon*, was Korean; the first systematic use of standardised, interchangeable parts in firearms was likely Korean or Chinese, centuries before Eli Whitney's American 'invention' of the principle.

Edo-period Japan produced the futures market in rice (Dojima Rice Exchange, 1730), *Kaitai Shinsho* (the first comprehensive Japanese anatomical text, 1774, drawing on Dutch but adding original work), and an extraordinary tradition of mathematical *sangaku* problems pinned to temples for public solving — citizen mathematics, two centuries before the West invented the phrase.

The Steppe & Central Asia

## Where the algebra was actually written down

Samarkand under Ulugh Beg in the 1420s housed the most accurate astronomical observatory in the world; the *Zij-i Sultani* star catalogue, with positions for 1,018 stars, was used by European astronomers without attribution for two centuries. The trigonometric tables produced there for sine and tangent values were accurate to eight decimal places. Ulugh Beg was assassinated by his own son in 1449 for being too interested in science; the observatory was destroyed; the work survived because Samarkand was less peripheral to the world than the textbook now suggests.

Al-Biruni (973–1048), born in Khwarazm (modern Uzbekistan), calculated the Earth's radius from a single mountain in the Punjab using a method now in every undergraduate physics textbook, wrote a thousand-page comparative study of Indian science and religion, and theorised the rotation of the Earth around its axis six centuries before Copernicus.

Africa beyond the Sahel

## Iron, mathematics and the cities Europe pretended did not exist

Iron smelting in West and Central Africa is now archaeologically dated to at least 2000 BCE — independent of, and at least contemporary with, the Mediterranean. The Nok culture of present-day Nigeria was producing terracotta sculpture of extraordinary technical sophistication in the first millennium BCE. The Ishango bone from the Congo, dated 20,000 years ago, carries notations that several mathematicians read as a prime-number sequence and a lunar calendar.

Benin City, sacked by a British 'punitive expedition' in 1897, was at its height a planned city with electrified-grid street layout, defended by walls four times longer than the Great Wall of China and ten times the volume of the Pyramid of Khufu — the largest earthwork in human history. The looted bronzes are still in London, Berlin, Boston and Vienna; the city's history is rarely on the curriculum of the country that destroyed it.

The Pre-Islamic Levant and Mesopotamia

## The civilisations Europe took as its own backstory

Cuneiform tablets from Sumer (3rd millennium BCE) record the first known written laws, the earliest accounting, the first epic poetry (Gilgamesh) — and the first written contract dispute, which is, charmingly, a complaint about substandard copper. Babylonian astronomers were tracking Jupiter's motion with a geometric technique mathematically equivalent to integration, roughly 1,500 years before Newton.

Phoenician sailors circumnavigated Africa, on Herodotus's account, around 600 BCE — a claim modern oceanographers now consider plausible. The alphabet they invented, simplified by the Greeks and inherited by the Romans, is the one you are reading these words in. The 'Western' canon begins with these civilisations and then quietly redraws the family tree to make them ancestors of Europe rather than of the modern Middle East.

From the Archive — On the cumulative ledger

The decimal you count in is Indian. The zero you use is Indian, transmitted by Arabs. The paper you read on is Chinese. The coffee you drink is Ethiopian. The sugar in it was processed by Indian and Caribbean labour. The cotton of your shirt was picked, for most of modern history, by enslaved Africans in the Americas. The algebra your engineer used is Persian-Arab. The optics in your phone camera trace to Ibn al-Haytham. The crops in your supermarket are mostly American. None of this is foreign. All of it is yours. None of it is owed to the place you think it is.

How it works

## How credit is laundered

The disappearance of non-European authorship is not a series of accidents. It is a five-step procedure repeated so often that it has become invisible — and once you can name the steps, you can spot them in any week's science journalism.

80. Step 01 Translation without attribution The 12th-century Toledo school translated Arabic-language science into Latin while quietly dropping the chains of citation back to Baghdad, Persia and India. The original authors are written out within one generation of copying.

81. Step 02 Renaming after the rediscoverer Pascal's triangle was Yang Hui's triangle in 13th-century China and Khayyam's triangle in 11th-century Persia. The Pythagorean theorem was a

Babylonian identity 1,000 years before Pythagoras. Naming rights go to the European who 'discovered' it in a library.

82. Step 03 Independent-discovery framing When the prior art cannot be denied, it is downgraded to 'parallel' or 'independent' invention — implying European thinkers would have got there anyway. This protects the narrative of internal European genius.

83. Step 04 Absorption into a civilisational category Greek and Mesopotamian achievements are filed under 'Western civilisation' despite being neither European nor monotheist-Christian in origin. The category does the work the evidence cannot.

84. Step 05 Patenting and re-exporting Neem (US patent 1994, revoked 2005), turmeric (revoked 1997), basmati, hoodia, ayahuasca, rosy periwinkle: indigenous knowledge filed as private intellectual property in Geneva or Washington, then sold back to the countries it was taken from at a markup.

Receipts

## Invention vs the name on the trophy

A partial ledger. The pattern is the point.

Living archive

## Biopiracy: the colonial logic with new paperwork

The transfer of knowledge from the global South to Northern patent offices did not end with decolonisation. It accelerated. Between 1990 and 2020, an estimated 7,000 patents were filed in the United States, EU and Japan on the active compounds of medicinal plants long used by Indigenous and traditional communities — almost none with consent, royalties or even acknowledgement.

The fungicidal properties of *neem* had been documented in Sanskrit pharmacological texts for at least two millennia when W. R. Grace and the US Department of Agriculture were granted a European patent on them in 1994. India spent ten years and millions of dollars to get it revoked. The patent on *turmeric* as a wound-healer was overturned in 1997 only because Indian researchers produced a 1953 paper from the Journal of the Indian Medical Association — and, separately, a Sanskrit verse.

*Hoodia*, used by the San of the Kalahari as an appetite suppressant for thousands of years, was patented by South Africa's CSIR and licensed to Pfizer; the San received a benefit-sharing agreement only after international outrage. *Ayahuasca*, central to dozens of Amazonian cosmologies, was patented in 1986 by a US citizen who had been given the plant by an Ecuadorian community. *Rosy periwinkle*, the basis of two billion-dollar leukaemia drugs, was taken from Madagascar without compensation.

The legal architecture — TRIPS, the WTO, the European Patent Office — is recent. The pattern is not. It is the same pattern as cotton, sugar, rubber and gold. The cargo is just smaller now and the paperwork is thicker.

The loanword ledger

## English is itself a receipt

Every word below entered English from a non-European language because the *thing* entered with it. The vocabulary is the inventory of what the West did not have on its own.

algebra

Arabic

algorithm

Persian (al-Khwarizmi)

alcohol

Arabic

alkali

Arabic

cipher / zero

Arabic (■ifr)

chemistry

Arabic (al-k■miy■)

admiral

Arabic

magazine

Arabic (makh■zin)

sugar

Sanskrit → Arabic

candy

Sanskrit (kha■a)

coffee

Arabic ← Ethiopian

tea

Chinese (Min Nan)

cotton

Arabic (qutn)

pyjamas

Persian / Hindustani

shampoo

Hindi (ch■mpo)

bungalow

Bengali (b■■■l■)

typhoon

Chinese / Arabic

ketchup

Hokkien (kê-tsiap)

lemon / orange

Arabic ← Persian ← Sanskrit

jungle

Hindi (jangal)

mango

Tamil / Malayalam

chocolate

Nahuatl (xocol■tl)

tomato

Nahuatl (tomatl)

potato

Taíno (batata)

hurricane

Taíno (huracán)

canoe

Arawak

tobacco

Taíno

barbecue

Taíno (barbakoa)

*" No people of colour ever colonised any white country. Yet white people moved into every corner of every continent — and called what they found 'discovery'. "*

Pre-empted

## Objections answered

The strongest version

*" Knowledge belongs to humanity. It doesn't matter where it came from — what matters is who developed it. "*

Reply

Agreed — which is why we should stop calling it 'Western' science, 'Western' medicine, 'Western' philosophy. The label is the theft. A genuinely universal account would name al-Khwarizmi, Brahmagupta, Bi Sheng and Ibn al-Haytham in the same breath as Newton and Descartes. Try it on any school syllabus and see how 'universal' the curriculum actually is.

The strongest version

*" Europe industrialised these ideas. Industrial application is its own contribution. "*

Reply

Industrial application required Chinese cast iron (17 centuries old by the time European foundries matched it), Indian cotton, Caribbean sugar capital, and enslaved African labour. The factory system is not a European invention sitting on top of borrowed maths; it is a global system whose profits flowed to one corner of it. Removing the borrowed inputs collapses the whole stack.

The strongest version

*" These civilisations stagnated. The West kept going. "*

Reply

The 'stagnation' thesis was authored by 19th-century European scholars (Hegel, Weber, Marx in his weakest mode) to retro-justify empire. It requires ignoring Mughal economic output (a quarter of world GDP in 1700), Qing China's continued dominance until the Opium Wars, the Ottoman scientific tradition into the 19th century, and the fact that 'the West kept going' largely by extracting from the places it called stagnant.

The strongest version

*" You're cherry-picking impressive examples. Most cultures invented little. "*

## Reply

Try the reverse test: name a major modern technology — agriculture, metallurgy, mathematics, medicine, navigation, textile production, writing, ceramics, brewing, optics, anaesthesia, plastic surgery, vaccination — with no non-European ancestor. The list is empty. The cherry-picking has been going the other way for 300 years; this page just stops doing it.

The strongest version

*" Why does origin matter? Move on. "*

## Reply

Because the misattribution underwrites a hierarchy: who is presumed to invent, and who is presumed to need help. That hierarchy decides which children get encouraged into STEM, which countries' research is taken seriously, whose patent claims succeed, and which civilisations are still described in the present tense as 'developing'. Origin is not nostalgia. It is the foundation of every present-day inequity on the next page of this site.

Still happening — 2020s edition

In 2023, a UCLA-led team announced the 'discovery' of a new use for a compound in the kava plant — used in Pacific ritual and medicine for 3,000 years. Headlines around the world ran the word *discovery*. Pacific scholars who had been publishing on the same compound for two decades were not contacted.

In 2024, a UK supermarket relaunched 'ancient grains' (teff, fonio, amaranth, quinoa) under its own house brand, with packaging that credited 'modern wellness science'. Teff has been Ethiopia's staple for at least 5,000 years. Fonio was grown in West Africa before the pyramids. The patent landscape on derived products is now controlled almost entirely by Northern firms.

In 2025, the global market for 'plant-based pharmaceuticals' was valued at \$50bn, growing at 11% a year. By the most careful estimate available, less than 0.2% of revenue flows back as benefit-sharing to the communities that did the original work.

859 CE

Founding of al-Qarawiyyin — oldest continuously operating university

Fez, Morocco

5th c.

Indian mathematicians establish positional decimal arithmetic

1040

Bi Sheng's movable type — 400 years before Gutenberg

65,000+ yr

Continuous Indigenous Australian civilisation

The West is not the author of civilisation.  
It is the most recent — and most violent — editor.

Take it further

## What to do with this page

192. 01Rename one thingNext time you say 'Arabic numerals' say 'Indian numerals, via Arabic transmission'. Next time you say 'Pythagorean theorem' add 'documented in Babylon a millennium earlier'. Small renamings travel.

193. 02Audit one syllabusAsk the nearest school, university or museum: of the named scientists, mathematicians and philosophers in your curriculum, what percentage are non-European? Publish the answer.

194. 03Fund the sourceDonate to or amplify one institution preserving the original record — the Mali Manuscript Project, the Endangered Archives Programme, or a local Indigenous knowledge initiative in your region.

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# *IX*

## **Ongoing Exploitation**

[silencedhistory.org/ongoing-exploitation](https://silencedhistory.org/ongoing-exploitation)

The most successful trick of the post-1960 order is the suggestion that decolonisation finished the job. It did not. It changed the uniform. The mechanisms that move wealth, labour and risk from the formerly colonised world to the formerly colonising world are larger, faster and more efficient than anything Leopold II or the East India Company ever ran. They simply no longer require a flag.

## I. The migrant as raw material

A Filipino nurse, a Bangladeshi construction worker in the Gulf, a Mexican fruit-picker in California, a Senegalese delivery rider in Paris, an Indian software engineer on an H-1B, an Iranian post-doc in a German lab: these are not unrelated stories. They are nodes of a single global labour market in which the rich economies import value at a price they could never legally pay their own citizens. The carer who wipes the British pensioner's mouth was trained on a Ghanaian or Kerala state budget. The infrastructure of Western comfort runs on bodies the West did not pay to raise.

## II. The talented worker as colonial subject

To be a "skilled migrant" in a Western country in 2026 is to discover, often by accident, that the social contract is conditional. The grateful immigrant who keeps their head down, accepts the lower salary band, lets the less-qualified colleague get credit, and never asks why their PhD supervisor's accent is mocked but theirs is "charming" — that immigrant is welcome. The one who behaves like a peer is not. Promotion stops. Visa renewal slows. The phrase "cultural fit" appears in the file.

This is not anecdote. It is now repeatedly measured. Identical CVs with non-European names receive between 30% and 50% fewer callbacks in audit studies across the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden. The system does not have to be conscious to be consistent.



*A modern Global South skyline*

### **III. Refugees as a category, not as people**

The refugee system, written by the same powers that produce most of the refugees, performs a strange double act: humanitarian language at the front desk, electrified fences at the perimeter. A Ukrainian fleeing a Russian invasion is, correctly, met with warmth, hotel rooms, work permits, and tearful headlines. A Syrian, an Afghan, a Sudanese, a Yemeni or a Palestinian fleeing comparable or worse violence — frequently violence the West helped engineer — is met with detention, deportation flights to third countries, and front pages discussing whether they will threaten the national culture. The difference is not need. The difference is race.

## IV. The dictators the West quietly prefers

Western foreign policy has a long and continuous habit of preferring a manageable dictator to an unmanageable democracy. Mossadegh in Iran in 1953. Lumumba in Congo in 1961. Allende in Chile in 1973. Aristide in Haiti in 1991 and 2004. Morsi in Egypt in 2013. Across the Gulf, the post-2011 Western embrace of the Saudi and Emirati monarchies has tightened, not loosened, as those states have grown more repressive. Egypt under Sisi receives more U.S. military aid than almost any other country on earth, while running one of the largest political-prisoner systems in the world. The pattern is so consistent that "democracy promotion" as a foreign-policy term has become, for most people who live outside the West, an in-joke.

On the Record — On Iran — and the convenience of an enemy

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a brutal, patriarchal, intellectually impoverishing regime that has crushed its own people for four decades. It also exists, in the form it does, because the United States and the United Kingdom overthrew the elected government of Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953 to recover an oil concession, and because successive Western administrations spent decades arming the Shah's secret police.

Today the same Western governments that perform outrage over Iranian human-rights abuses are, in practice, the cleric regime's most useful enemy. Sanctions collapse the middle class, ruin small businesses, kill cancer patients who cannot access medicine, and hand the regime its single most effective propaganda line — that the outside world is to blame. Meanwhile the regime's leadership and the Revolutionary Guard's commercial empire are remarkably untouched. A foreign policy that consistently strengthens both ends of a contradiction is not failing. It is working as intended: the Iranian people are punished, the regime endures, and the oil — or the strategic justification for the next base — remains in Western hands.

The Iranian people deserve a free, secular, accountable government chosen by them. They do not deserve sanctions, bombs, or another foreign-installed monarch, and they have repeatedly said so.

## V. The architecture of permanent debt

The IMF and World Bank, formally founded to stabilise the global economy, have spent the last fifty years acting as bailiffs. "Structural adjustment" — the condition attached to most emergency lending in the 1980s and 1990s — required developing countries to cut public health, sack teachers, devalue currencies, privatise water, and open their markets to imports. The results, in measured outcomes, were a generation of lost growth, collapsing literacy, and child mortality reversals across sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. The countries that refused — and were able to — recovered faster. The "advice" was not advice.

Most of the African continent is paying more annually in external debt service than it spends on health. The original loans were often issued to military regimes the Western powers had themselves installed. The interest now lands on schoolchildren.

## VI. The new extractions

Cobalt for the European electric car is mined by Congolese children. Lithium for the American smartphone is pumped from Bolivian salt flats. The fast-fashion shirt that falls apart after three washes was sewn in Dhaka for thirteen cents an hour. The shrimp on the Norwegian plate was peeled by an enslaved Burmese fisherman in the Gulf of Thailand. The labour of the formerly colonised world is, today, the input cost of almost every consumer good the West buys cheaply.

## VII. The kafala system: legal bondage in the Gulf

An estimated 24 million migrant workers from South Asia and East Africa live, today, under the kafala (sponsorship) system across Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain. Their immigration status is owned by their employer. A worker who quits — or whose employer refuses to release them — instantly becomes illegal. Passports are routinely confiscated. Wages are routinely withheld. The Guardian and Amnesty have documented thousands of deaths of workers building the stadiums of the 2022 World Cup and the towers of NEOM; cause of death is most often recorded, by Gulf authorities, as 'natural causes'.

The Gulf monarchies are not formally Western, but the architecture is underwritten by Western law firms, Western consultancies, Western banks that finance the construction, and Western governments that protect the regimes diplomatically in exchange for arms contracts. Kafala is the Atlantic slave trade with electronic timesheets and a marketing department.

## VIII. Chocolate, cobalt and the conflict mineral

Three quarters of the world's cocoa is produced in West Africa, primarily by smallholders in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. The farmer earns roughly 6% of the value of the finished bar; the brand owner (Nestlé, Mondelez, Mars, Ferrero) and retailer take the rest. Roughly 1.5 million West African children work in cocoa, many in conditions the U.S. Department of Labor classifies as the worst forms of child labour. The industry has missed every voluntary pledge it has made since 2001 to eliminate this.

Coltan and cobalt from eastern Congo finance the militias that have killed an estimated six million people since 1996 — the deadliest conflict since the Second World War, and one most Western consumers cannot name. The metal ends up in the capacitors of every mobile phone, every laptop, every electric vehicle on the planet. Apple, Intel and Tesla settled lawsuits over Congolese child mining in 2021 by promising to do better. The promise is renewed annually.

## IX. The medical guinea pig

Pfizer's 1996 trovafloxacin trial on Nigerian children during a meningitis outbreak killed eleven and disabled dozens; the company settled with the families for \$75 million in 2009 after a decade of refusal. Hundreds of HIV-drug trials were run on Africans throughout the 1990s and 2000s under protocols that would have been illegal on Western patients. Argentina, India and South Africa have hosted thousands of industry-sponsored trials on populations who, if anything goes wrong, cannot afford the drug they were used to develop.

The Tuskegee study (1932–1972), in which the U.S. Public Health Service withheld syphilis treatment from 400 Black sharecroppers to observe the disease's course, ended only in living memory. Its successors are still being run, on Brown bodies, in Mumbai and Lagos and Buenos Aires, for the European and American market.

## X. The tax-haven empire

The largest tax havens on earth are nearly all British Overseas Territories or Crown Dependencies — the Cayman Islands, the British Virgin Islands, Bermuda, Jersey, Guernsey, the Isle of Man — plus a handful of European micro-states and U.S.-linked jurisdictions (Delaware, South Dakota). The Tax Justice Network estimates that roughly \$7–10 trillion of private wealth, and another \$1.5 trillion of corporate profits annually, is parked offshore. African governments alone lose an estimated \$90 billion per year to illicit financial flows routed through this network — more than the entire continent receives in foreign aid.

The colonial structure here is exact: the formerly colonised generate the value, the formerly colonising power maintains the legal jurisdiction that allows the value to disappear, and the financial-services industry in London, New York and Zurich takes the management fee. The tropics still hold the wealth; only now it is in numbered accounts rather than warehouses.

Source — Henley & Partners

Source — OECD; World Bank; UNDP migration reports

### The instruments, briefly

Visa walls

The right to move is rationed by birth, not need

Skill drain

Western health and tech systems run on others' trained labour

IP regimes

WTO rules protect Western patents, lock generics out

Friendly tyrants

Sisi, MBS, Mobutu, Pinochet, the Shah — chosen partners

CFA franc

14 African states' currency still managed from Paris

Debt service

Many African states pay more in interest than on health

1953

U.S./U.K. coup against Mossadegh in Iran

1965

U.S./U.K.-supported massacres in Indonesia (500k–1M dead)

1973

Pinochet installed in Chile, 11 September

2013

Sisi's coup in Egypt; Western aid continues

How it works

## The same extractive logic, dressed for the 21st century

Where the slave ship once moved bodies in one direction and sugar in the other, today the flows are subtler — but the topology is identical. Each instrument below is a contemporary form of an older device.

58. Step 01 The visa replaces the chain. Mobility is rationed by passport. The carer, the construction worker and the seafarer cross the line because the line was drawn to need them; the day they stop being useful, the line closes.

59. Step 02 The supply chain replaces the plantation. The plantation owner is now a brand; the overseer is a tier-three supplier; the field is a Dhaka garment floor or a Côte d'Ivoire cocoa farm. The risk lives at the bottom, the margin at the top.

60. Step 03 The patent replaces the cargo manifest. Knowledge — seed, molecule, algorithm, ancestral recipe — is documented, claimed, and re-sold to its place of origin under the WTO TRIPS regime.

61. Step 04 The conditionality replaces the gunboat. An IMF programme can require the privatisation of water in Ghana, the cutting of nurses' wages in Kenya, the elimination of fuel subsidies in Argentina — without firing a shot. Default is the modern bombardment.

62. Step 05 The detention centre replaces the workhouse. Surplus labour is now warehoused at Manus Island, Nauru, Libya, Greek Aegean camps, US ICE facilities, UK barges. The detainee is the new pauper, with the same statelessness in a new wrapper.

63. Step 06 The sanction replaces the embargo. Cuba (since 1960), Iran (since 1979), Venezuela, Syria, Zimbabwe: economic strangulation of populations whose governments will not be moved by it, justified in moral language. The harm falls on the powerless.

Receipts

## Then and now — same logic, new instrument

Read horizontally. The vocabulary is the only thing that has changed.

*" Africa is poor because her investors and traders are rich. "*

*" They never came to liberate us. They came to find us, and they have not stopped finding us. "*

Extraction in 2025–26

**The cobalt rush.** Demand for cobalt has tripled since 2020 because of the EV transition. 70% of supply comes from the DRC; an estimated 25,000 children work the artisanal pits at any given time. Apple, Google, Microsoft, Tesla and Dell were sued in 2019 over child deaths; the case was dismissed in 2024 on standing grounds. The supply chain is unchanged.

**The Gulf's stadium graveyards.** The Guardian counted at least 6,500 South Asian migrant deaths during construction for the Qatar 2022 World Cup. Saudi Arabia's NEOM and FIFA 2034 preparations have already produced the next wave; reporting on conditions is now criminalised in several Gulf states.

**The shrimp on the supermarket shelf.** 2024 investigations found forced labour, including child labour, in peeling sheds supplying Walmart, Tesco, Carrefour and Albert Heijn. The shrimp comes from India, Thailand and Indonesia. No major retailer has pulled the line.

**The data sweatshop.** AI training and content moderation for OpenAI, Meta, Google and TikTok is contracted to firms in Nairobi, Manila, Caracas and Lagos. Wages are \$1–\$2 an hour. PTSD rates among moderators are documented at well above 50%. The chatbot that smiles in San Francisco was housetrained by someone in Kibera.

Pre-empted

## Objections answered

The strongest version

*" These workers chose the job. A bad job is better than no job. "*

## Reply

'Choice' under conditions engineered to limit options — visa systems that bind a worker to a single employer, IMF programmes that destroyed local industries, climate change that destroyed local agriculture — is not the philosopher's choice. The same logic justified indenture in 1880 and would justify almost any exploitation. If 'they agreed' is the standard, the system must guarantee real alternatives before invoking it.

The strongest version

*" Sweatshops are a step on the development ladder. Every now-rich country used them. "*

## Reply

Now-rich countries also used tariffs (currently illegal under WTO), state-owned banks (currently restricted under WTO), capital controls (currently constrained), free public health (currently cut by IMF programmes), and industrial subsidies (currently challenged via ISDS). The 'ladder' was kicked away from below the moment the climbers reached the top. Removing the rungs and then calling the floor a ladder is not honest.

The strongest version

*" Sanctions are non-violent. They are the preferable alternative to war. "*

## Reply

Sanctions on Iraq in the 1990s killed an estimated 500,000 children — Madeleine Albright told 60 Minutes 'the price is worth it'. Cuba's mortality from US sanctions over six decades is conservatively in the tens of thousands. The harm is concentrated on civilians; the elite has the dollar accounts and the smuggling network. 'Non-violent' depends on which body is on the receiving end of the violence.

The strongest version

*" Without Western corporations the Global South would have no investment. "*

## Reply

South–South FDI overtook North–South in 2018. Chinese, Indian, Turkish, Gulf, Brazilian and intra-African investment now exceeds what OECD firms supply. The 'we are the only investor' premise expired a decade ago — the OECD is now competing for access on increasingly equal terms. Many Southern governments would prefer no Western investment to investment that requires ISDS.

The strongest version

*" Brain drain is voluntary migration. The doctor chose to move. "*

## Reply

The training was paid by the country of origin; the productive years are captured by the destination; the dependent parents and the local hospital are left behind. Even if every individual choice is free, the aggregate is a one-way wealth transfer. Honest accounting would have rich countries refund the training cost — roughly \$15bn per year, by WHO estimates, for health workers alone.

The colonised did not stop being colonised.

They stopped being called that.

Take it further

## What to do with this page

99. 01Map your supply chainPick one thing you used today — a phone, a t-shirt, a chocolate bar. Find the country of extraction, the country of assembly and the country of brand HQ. Notice the asymmetry.

100. 02Refuse a sanction frameNext time a politician calls for sanctions, ask: 'On whose body does this fall, and which elite is shielded from it?' The answer almost always inverts the moral case.

101. 03Support migrant-worker organisingDonate to FairSquare, Migrant-Rights.org, the Domestic Workers' Alliance, or the Centre for Migrant Advocacy. These groups document what governments will not.

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**X**

# Neocolonies Today

[silencedhistory.org/neocolonies](https://silencedhistory.org/neocolonies)

The word "post-colonial" was an act of optimism. It assumed something had ended. The following is a partial — deliberately partial, because the full list would be a book — inventory of what has not.

## I. The colonies that still have governors

The United States holds **Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands** as "unincorporated territories" — a legal category invented by the Supreme Court in the Insular Cases of 1901, which ruled that the Constitution does not fully apply to people whose ancestors the United States acquired by war. Roughly three and a half million U.S. nationals cannot vote for the president whose military serves in their name.

The United Kingdom still holds **fourteen "British Overseas Territories"**, including the Falklands, Gibraltar, Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, and the British Indian Ocean Territory — that last one created in 1965 by forcibly expelling the entire Chagossian population so the United States could build a military base on Diego Garcia. The Chagossians, more than half a century later, are still not allowed home.



*Satellite image of Diego Garcia atoll, in the Chagos Archipelago, showing the runway and harbour of the U.S./U.K. military base.*

France holds **thirteen overseas dependencies**, including Mayotte, Réunion, French Guiana, Martinique, Guadeloupe, New Caledonia and French Polynesia. New Caledonia held independence referendums in 2018, 2020 and 2021; Paris counted the third one despite a Kanak boycott during COVID and announced that the territory had chosen France. In May 2024, when the French parliament tried to dilute the Kanak vote further, the territory rose in protest and Paris flew in police.

The **Netherlands** still holds Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten, Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba; **Denmark** still administers Greenland, whose subsoil — newly accessible as the ice melts — is suddenly of intense strategic interest. None of these are anomalies. They are the continuation, in legal form, of the project that began in the fifteenth century.

Source — UN list of non-self-governing territories; government data

## II. The Commonwealth and the trick of the soft word

The British Empire did not dissolve. It rebranded. The **Commonwealth of Nations**, with its 56 member states and its smiling biennial summits, is the empire's pension plan. The British monarch remains head of state in fifteen "Commonwealth realms" — Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Jamaica, the Bahamas and others — and judicial appeals from several Caribbean and Pacific countries still go, ultimately, to the **Judicial Committee of the Privy Council** sitting in London. A judge in Westminster can still overturn a court in Mauritius, by treaty.

The "Commonwealth" preference scheme also gave Britain, for most of the twentieth century, privileged access to the food, raw materials and cheap labour of the formerly colonised. The Windrush generation, invited from the Caribbean to rebuild post-war Britain, were then in 2018 stripped of their citizenship by a Home Office that had quietly destroyed their landing cards.

On the Record — The Francophonie, the Lusophonie, the Hispanidad

Every former colonial power has a cultural-diplomatic franchise that performs the same trick: a "community of language and friendship" that keeps the metropole at the centre of the table. The Organisation internationale de la Francophonie includes most of Francophone Africa; the Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa covers Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde and East Timor; the Spanish state hosts annual Ibero-American summits with its former colonies in Latin America. None of these organisations would be tolerated for a moment if Turkey proposed a Turkic Commonwealth or Russia an Orthodox one. The empires of the West get to be culture. Everyone else's empire gets to be ambition.

### III. The currency that is not yours

Fourteen African states still use the **CFA franc**, a currency invented in 1945 — its initials originally stood for "*Colonies françaises d'Afrique*"— and managed, in practice, from Paris. Until 2019, half of these countries' foreign reserves were held in the French Treasury. The CFA's fixed peg means African governments cannot devalue when they need to; their monetary policy is, in effect, made by the European Central Bank. Senegal's elected leadership cannot set its own interest rate. Côte d'Ivoire's central bank cannot print to fight a recession. This is a colonial relationship described in the language of central banking.



*A 1000 CFA franc banknote, currency used by fourteen African states under monetary arrangements set in Paris.*

### IV. The bases on someone else's lawn

The United States operates an estimated **750 military bases in roughly 80 countries**, including in countries that have asked it, repeatedly, to leave. France maintains permanent garrisons across the Sahel and the Pacific. The United Kingdom retains "sovereign base areas" in Cyprus. None of these arrangements are reciprocal. There is no Senegalese base in Bordeaux, no Iraqi base in Texas, no Cuban base in Florida.

Source — David Vine, US Bases Abroad database; SIPRI; Janes

## V. The land, the seabed, the subsoil

Most of the cobalt that powers the electric vehicles in Berlin, Oslo and San Francisco is dug, often by children, in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**. The processing then happens in China; the profit accrues to listed companies in the North; the social and environmental cost stays in Lualaba. The pattern repeats with lithium in the salt flats of Bolivia and Chile, with bauxite in Guinea, with coltan in eastern Congo, with rare earths in Inner Mongolia and Myanmar, with uranium in Niger that has lit French light-bulbs for half a century.

When the Sahel coup wave of 2020–2023 produced governments that wanted to renegotiate these arrangements, the Western press explained, with grave concern, that the region was "destabilising". The arrangement being defended was the colonial concession.



*Artisanal cobalt miners working with hand tools in an open pit in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.*

Source — USGS; Statista; company reports

## VI. The new colonialism: data, code, and seeds

A farmer in Maharashtra now pays a royalty, every season, to a Missouri-based corporation for the right to plant a seed her grandmother could have saved from last year's harvest. The intellectual-property regime imposed through the WTO's TRIPS agreement turned ancestral knowledge — turmeric, neem, basmati — into objects that could be patented in Western capitals and licensed back to the people who had cultivated them for millennia.

The new "AI revolution" runs on text and images scraped, without consent, from the archives of every culture on earth, but the resulting models are owned by five American and two Chinese corporations. The cloud infrastructure those models depend on sits in five jurisdictions. The labelling work — the part where humans tag thousands of disturbing images per shift for two dollars an hour — is contracted out to Kenya, the Philippines and Venezuela. The pattern is so familiar that giving it a new name would be flattering it.

## VII. Brain extraction

The most efficient extraction in the modern system is no longer rubber or sugar. It is a person. A British medical school costs the NHS more than £270,000 per graduate; a Filipino, Nigerian or Indian doctor working in the same hospital arrived pre-trained, at no cost to the British taxpayer. **Roughly 38% of Iranian physicians work outside Iran.** Over half of Sierra Leone's nurses work abroad. The richest countries on earth import care work from the poorest, refuse to pay for the training, and then complain about the cost of immigration.

Caution — The reverse remittance

Sending a child to a Western university for four years costs a Global South family, very often, more than that family will spend on any other single thing. The fees go, almost without exception, to institutions that were built — and in many cases named — using money from the slave trade, indentured labour, or the East India Company. The mechanism is a closed loop: the formerly colonised pay the descendants of the colonisers, in cash, for a credential that will then be required to be taken seriously back home.

## VIII. The war as extraction

Every major Western war of the last seventy years has, in addition to its stated objective, restructured a national economy in a way useful to Western contractors. The 2003 invasion of Iraq produced the privatisation of Iraqi oil and a generation of no-bid contracts for Halliburton, KBR, Bechtel and Blackwater. The 2011 destruction of Libya delivered the country's oil fields to a chaos that the international majors have learned to operate in. The 2014–2024 wars in Yemen, Syria and Sudan have delivered, between them, a refugee crisis that European centre-right governments have used to roll back the right to asylum across the continent.

A useful test: whenever a Western military intervention is described as "humanitarian", look at the contracts that follow it. The humanitarianism leaves; the contracts stay.

## IX. The labels themselves are a tool

"Developing country." "Emerging market." "Failed state." "Global South." "Sub-Saharan Africa." "MENA." "Fragile context." "Conflict-affected." Each of these terms describes the same set of countries from a different angle, and each implies the same thing: that the natural state of these places is incomplete, that they are on a journey towards a destination defined by someone else, and that the someone else is permitted — even obligated — to assist, advise, or in extremity, intervene.

A more honest vocabulary would talk about the *over-exploited* world. Or about the *creditor* nations, since most Global South countries are net creditors to the Global North if you count what was taken. Or simply about countries by name, without the imperial subtitle.

## X. The undersea cable and the satellite

Roughly 99% of all intercontinental internet traffic moves through fewer than 600 submarine cables. The companies that own and lay them — SubCom, Alcatel Submarine Networks, NEC, and increasingly Google, Meta, Microsoft and Amazon — are headquartered almost entirely in five jurisdictions: the United States, France, Japan, the United Kingdom and (now) China. African internet traffic between two African cities routinely transits via Marseille or London. Latin American traffic frequently routes through Miami. The colonial ports of the 19th century — Suez, Alexandria, Singapore, Lisbon, Marseille — are still the chokepoints, only now they carry data.

Low-earth-orbit satellite internet is consolidating along the same axis. A single American company operates more than 60% of all active satellites in orbit, can be switched off or geofenced unilaterally, and was reportedly disabled near Crimea by its owner in the middle of an ongoing war. There is no equivalent African, Latin American or Southeast Asian network. There is no plan for one.

## XI. Vaccine apartheid

When mRNA vaccines for COVID-19 became available in 2020, rich countries pre-purchased enough doses to vaccinate their populations four or five times over while South Africa and India spent the next two years asking the WTO to suspend patent protection so the technology — developed largely on public funding — could be produced locally. The proposal was blocked at the WTO by the EU, the UK, Switzerland and (until a partial reversal) the United States, on behalf of Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca and BioNTech.

By the time Africa had vaccinated 20% of its population, the United Kingdom had dosed 75% of its own and started discarding expired stock. Estimates published in Nature put the avoidable death toll of vaccine apartheid at over 1.3 million in the first 18 months alone. The pattern repeats with HIV antiretrovirals, with insulin, with cancer therapy — the molecule belongs to whoever can pay the licence.

## **XII. Carbon colonialism and the offset market**

The new wave of climate finance increasingly takes the form of land deals: European and North American corporations buy 'offsets' from forests in Kenya, Tanzania, Liberia, Cambodia, Peru and Indonesia, often by displacing the Indigenous communities who have managed those forests for centuries. The Ogiek of Kenya were evicted from the Mau Forest in 2023 to clear a carbon-credit project. The Maasai are being moved out of Loliondo for conservation concessions sold to Gulf royalty. Investigations by The Guardian, Die Zeit and SourceMaterial found in 2023 that more than 90% of rainforest offsets sold by the largest certifier, Verra, were 'worthless' — the claimed emissions reductions did not exist.

The carbon economy is, structurally, the new sugar economy. The North continues to emit. The South provides the land. The intermediaries in London and Geneva take a cut on the paperwork. The Indigenous communities are moved, again.

## **XIII. The investment-tribunal regime**

Buried inside more than 2,500 bilateral investment treaties signed in the 1990s and 2000s is a mechanism called Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS). It allows a foreign corporation to sue a sovereign government — outside its courts, in a private arbitration panel of three lawyers — when a new law (an environmental regulation, a minimum wage, a tobacco-control measure) reduces expected profits. Philip Morris sued Uruguay over plain-packaging tobacco rules. Vattenfall sued Germany for €4.7 billion when it phased out nuclear power. Chevron has fought Ecuador for decades over Amazonian oil contamination. Awards routinely exceed a country's annual health budget.

The architecture is the same as the 19th-century capitulations — extraterritorial courts to which the strong party submits the weak — only this time the language is 'investor protection'. There is no equivalent mechanism through which a citizen of Niger can sue a French oil company in a French court for what was extracted from the Air massif.

## **XIV. The ghost fleets and the stolen fish**

Off the coast of West Africa, between 30% and 50% of all fish caught are taken illegally by industrial trawlers flagged to Spain, China, Russia, South Korea and the EU at large. Senegalese, Mauritanian and Guinean small-boat fishers, whose families have worked these waters for centuries, return empty. The collapse of coastal fisheries is then explained, in EU policy papers, as a 'driver of irregular migration', and the same EU pays Frontex to intercept the men whose livelihoods its trawlers just destroyed. The boat in the Mediterranean and the trawler off Dakar are the same story.

## XV. The waste returns, but only one way

Europe ships roughly 1.5 million tonnes of plastic waste a year to Southeast Asia and West Africa for 'recycling', much of which is in fact dumped or burned, poisoning the groundwater of villages in Malaysia, Vietnam, Turkey and Ghana. Old electronics go to Agbogbloshie in Accra and to Guiyu in Guangdong. Decommissioned European ships, full of asbestos and PCBs, are beached at Alang, Chittagong and Gadani for hand dismantling by workers paid two dollars a day. The Basel Convention is meant to prohibit this. It is routinely circumvented. The arrow of waste, like the arrow of extraction, runs one way.

### Instruments of present-day empire

62+

Inhabited territories still administered from a foreign capital

56

Commonwealth member states, with the British monarch as figurehead in 15

14

African countries whose monetary policy is, in effect, made in Paris

750+

U.S. military bases in foreign countries

~70%

Of world cobalt mined in the DRC; profits accrue elsewhere

50%+

Of Sierra Leone's nurses work abroad in OECD countries

TRIPS

The WTO regime that turned ancestral knowledge into patented IP

Iraq · Libya · Yemen · Syria · Sudan · Gaza

The 21st-century wars whose contracts speak for themselves

1973

Britain expels the Chagossians for a U.S. base

2018

UK Windrush scandal: Caribbean Britons illegally deported

2021

France 'wins' New Caledonia referendum during a Kanak boycott

2024

Sahel governments revoke French military access; press calls them 'unstable'

How it works

## The five instruments of extraction without flags

Colonial economics survived decolonisation by changing instrument, not aim. Anyone who understands these five levers can read a Western government's relationship with the Global South in any week's news.

81. Step 01CurrencyAnchor the target country's money to the metropole (CFA franc to euro), hold its reserves abroad, deny it monetary sovereignty. Whoever sets your interest rate runs your economy.

82. Step 02DebtLend at hard-currency rates the borrower cannot print; attach conditions; refinance at IMF terms requiring austerity, privatisation and capital-account opening. The repayment exceeds the original loan within a decade.

83. Step 03Trade rulesThrough the WTO, EU and bilateral FTAs, prohibit the industrial-policy tools (tariffs, subsidies, IP infringement, capital controls) that every now-rich country used to develop. Lock the ladder.

84. Step 04Investor protectionThrough 2,500+ bilateral investment treaties and ISDS arbitration, give foreign corporations the right to sue host governments for any regulation that reduces expected profits — outside the host's own courts.

85. Step 05Military accessMaintain bases, status-of-forces agreements, intelligence partnerships and arms-supply dependencies that make refusing the above unsafe. 750 US bases enforce the other four levers without needing to fire.

Receipts

## Who actually holds African debt

The 'China is debt-trapping Africa' narrative is overwhelmingly false. Western private bondholders and multilaterals hold the majority. Sources: World Bank IDS, Debt Justice 2023.

*" Neo-colonialism is the worst form of imperialism. For those who practise it, it means power without responsibility; and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress. "*

The instruments in this week's news

**Argentina, 2025.** A new IMF programme attached to a \$20bn refinancing requires elimination of capital controls, labour-market deregulation, and privatisation of state energy assets — a near-perfect re-run of the 2001 programme that ended in mass unemployment and sovereign default.

**Kenya, 2024–25.** Finance Bill protests left more than 50 dead. The bill's tax hikes were demanded by an IMF programme; debt-service alone consumed 60% of Kenyan tax revenue. Coverage emphasised 'governance challenges'; the creditor names rarely appeared.

**Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, 2023–25.** Three Sahelian governments ended French and US military presence and announced exit from ECOWAS. Sahelian uranium had powered French electricity for fifty years; coverage shifted overnight from 'partner democracies' to 'fragile junta regimes'.

**The Chagos Islands, 2024.** After 56 years of expulsion and three UN court rulings, the UK agreed to return sovereignty to Mauritius — while retaining the US base at Diego Garcia for at least 99 more years. The Chagossians themselves were not consulted on the deal.

Pre-empted

## Objections answered

The strongest version

*" Post-colonial states have had 60+ years. Their failures are their own. "*

Reply

Compare the conditions at independence: most African and Asian colonies inherited single-commodity economies, near-zero literacy outside the coloniser's language, no native officer corps, borders drawn by Europeans, and immediate debt-service obligations to the departing power. South Korea and Singapore — the apparent counter-examples — received massive US capital inflows for Cold War reasons and were permitted to use industrial policy that the WTO has since outlawed for everyone else. The 'they had their chance' argument requires deleting the conditions of the chance.

The strongest version

*" China is the real neo-colonialist now. "*

Reply

China's debt holding in Africa is approximately 12% — a third of what Western private bondholders hold. Chinese terms are typically lower-rate and longer-tenor than the bond market's. The narrative is louder than the balance sheet. None of which is an endorsement of Chinese practice — Tibet, Xinjiang and Belt-and-Road labour conditions deserve their own scrutiny — only a request that the accounting be honest.

The strongest version

*" Western military presence prevents worse regional powers from filling the vacuum. "*

## Reply

The premise asks countries to be grateful for occupation as the price of stability. Test the inverse: would France accept 750 Algerian bases on its soil as protection from a worse alternative? If the answer is no, the standard is colonial.

The strongest version

*" The IMF and World Bank are technical institutions, not political. "*

## Reply

Voting share at the IMF is allocated by capital contribution. The US holds a unique veto over major decisions. The managing director has been European by tradition since 1946. The World Bank president has been American by tradition since 1944. 'Technical' is the costume that political authorship wears in Bretton Woods buildings.

The strongest version

*" Investment treaties protect everyone, including Southern investors abroad. "*

## Reply

In practice, more than 80% of ISDS claims are filed by Northern corporations against Southern governments. The system is asymmetric by design — there are almost no Southern multinationals large enough to file the reverse case. Equality of access without equality of capacity is the legal form of structural inequality.

In sum

They did not give the colonies back.  
They taught the colonies to pay rent.

Take it further

# What to do with this page

121. 01Trace one mineralPick the device you're reading this on. Look up where its cobalt, lithium, tantalum and tin were extracted, where they were processed, and where the manufacturer is headquartered. Map the route.

122. 02Read the loanFind your country's most recent IMF Article IV consultation or World Bank country programme. The conditions are public. Read them. They are the actual constitution of the borrower.

123. 03Refuse the soft wordStop saying 'developing country'. Try 'over-exploited country', 'low-income economy' or just the country's name. Watch how the conversation changes when the verb stops doing the laundering.

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# *XI*

## **Modern Racism**

[silencedhistory.org/modern-racism](https://silencedhistory.org/modern-racism)

The visible racism of the colonial era — the lynching photograph, the "Whites Only" sign, the human zoo — has not disappeared, but it has been pushed to the edges of official respectability. What remains in the center is something more durable, more plausibly deniable, and in some ways more powerful: a set of assumptions about who gets to be considered modern, competent, civilized, trustworthy, and equal.

These assumptions are not held only by overt racists. They are held — usually without self-awareness — by liberals, by progressives, by the entire bureaucratic machinery of immigration, finance, journalism, academic publishing, and international development. They are the working software of the post-colonial world.

§ 01

## The Two Passports

An American or French passport opens roughly 180 countries without a visa. A passport from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Somalia or Sudan opens fewer than thirty. This is not a neutral administrative fact. It is the inheritance of the colonial map — the same powers that drew the borders now decide who is allowed to cross them.

A European tourist photographing a fishing village in West Africa is a traveler. A West African trying to reach Europe by the same sea is a 'migrant crisis.' The same human movement, in opposite directions, is described in opposite moral languages.



*The Two Passports*

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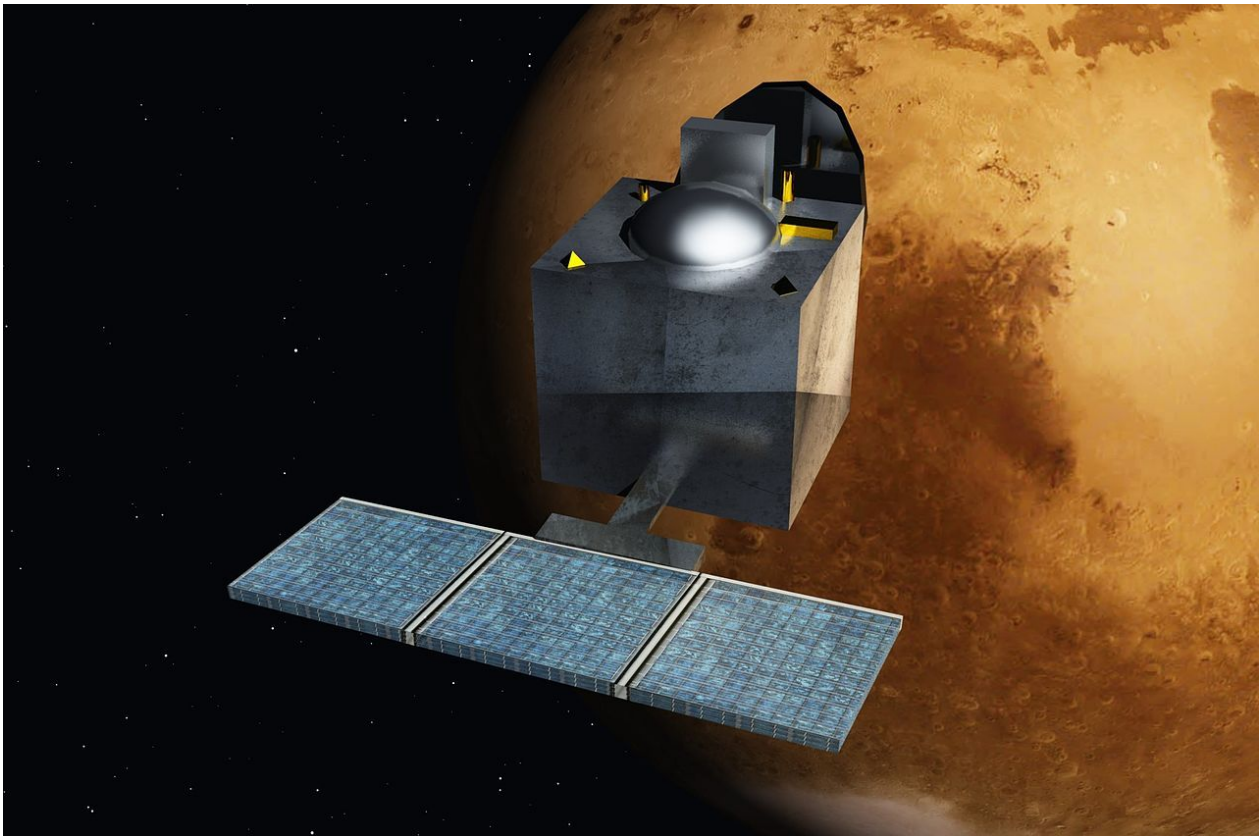
§ 02

## The Color of Competence

When a country in the Global South builds a high-speed rail network, designs a successful vaccine, lands a probe on the moon, or produces a globally dominant technology company, the response in the Western press is almost always disbelief, suspicion, or condescending surprise. The default assumption — quietly, persistently — is that modernity is something that happens elsewhere and is borrowed.

When an Indian, Iranian, Nigerian or Brazilian professional is genuinely brilliant in their field, the most generous frame available is often 'a credit to their country.' The frame is never applied in reverse. No one calls a Norwegian software engineer 'a credit to Norway.' They are simply a software engineer.

This is not about individual prejudice. It is about a hierarchy of expected competence baked into the global imagination of who counts as 'world-class' and who counts as 'impressive for where they're from.'



*The Color of Competence*

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§ 03

## The Word 'Developing'

'Developing country' is a remarkable phrase. It quietly implies that the destination of development is the country doing the naming. It treats centuries of plunder as a head start that the plundered are slowly catching up on, under benevolent supervision. It would be more accurate to use Walter Rodney's phrase: over-exploited countries.

The financial architecture that maintains this — the IMF's structural adjustment programs, the World Bank's lending conditions, the rating agencies of New York, the CFA franc tying fourteen African economies to the French Treasury — is not a meritocracy. It is the legal continuation of empire by other instruments.



*The Word 'Developing'*

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§ 04

## The Approved Victim

The post-colonial Western imagination has a strong preference for a particular type of person from a formerly colonized country: poor, grateful, suffering, in need of rescue, photogenically powerless. Charity campaigns, NGO posters, prestige cinema and humanitarian journalism are organized around this figure.

The same imagination has enormous difficulty processing the formerly colonized person who is none of these things — who is wealthy, educated, confident, technically advanced, unimpressed by Western institutions, and uninterested in being rescued. That person is read as suspicious, arrogant, probably corrupt, or somehow inauthentic. 'Where did you really learn English?' is, at heart, the same question as 'Are you sure you belong here?'



*The Approved Victim*

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§ 05

## When 'They' Become 'Us'

The clearest test of how a society really thinks about race is what happens when the supposed inferior reaches parity. A Black neighbor on welfare is, in racist eyes, an object of complaint. A Black neighbor with a higher-paying job, a better house, and children at a better school is, often, an object of fury. The first can be patronized. The second cannot.

This is the racism that hides inside many polite societies: comfortable with the dependent foreigner, viciously hostile to the flourishing one. The migrant is welcome as a cleaner, tolerated as a doctor, suspected as a CEO, and treated as a threat as a head of state.



*When 'They' Become 'Us'*

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§ 06

## The Algorithm Inherits the Hierarchy

When facial-recognition systems sold by Microsoft, IBM, Amazon and the major Chinese vendors were audited by Joy Buolamwini and Timnit Gebru at MIT in 2018, error rates on darker-skinned women ran above 34%, against under 1% on lighter-skinned men. Predictive-policing tools deployed in Chicago, New Orleans and London have been shown to reproduce the racial geography of the arrest records they were trained on, then to rebrand the bias as data. Apple Card and several large U.S. mortgage algorithms have been investigated for giving women and Black applicants worse terms after controlling for income.

The point is not that machines are racist. It is that they are extremely loyal to whoever wrote them. They inherit the prejudices of the data and the priorities of the engineers, then perform them at a scale and speed no human bureaucracy could match — while wearing the cultural costume of objectivity. Discrimination by spreadsheet is harder to sue than discrimination by sentence.

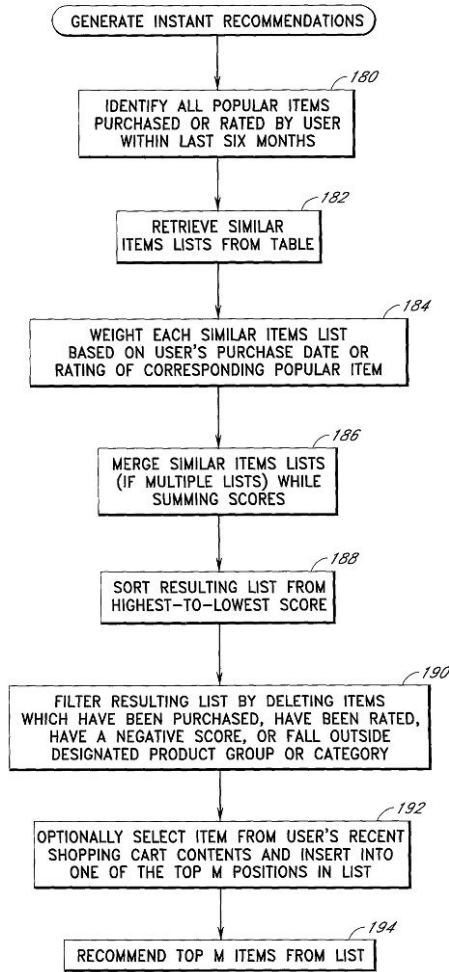


FIG. 5

*The Algorithm Inherits the Hierarchy*

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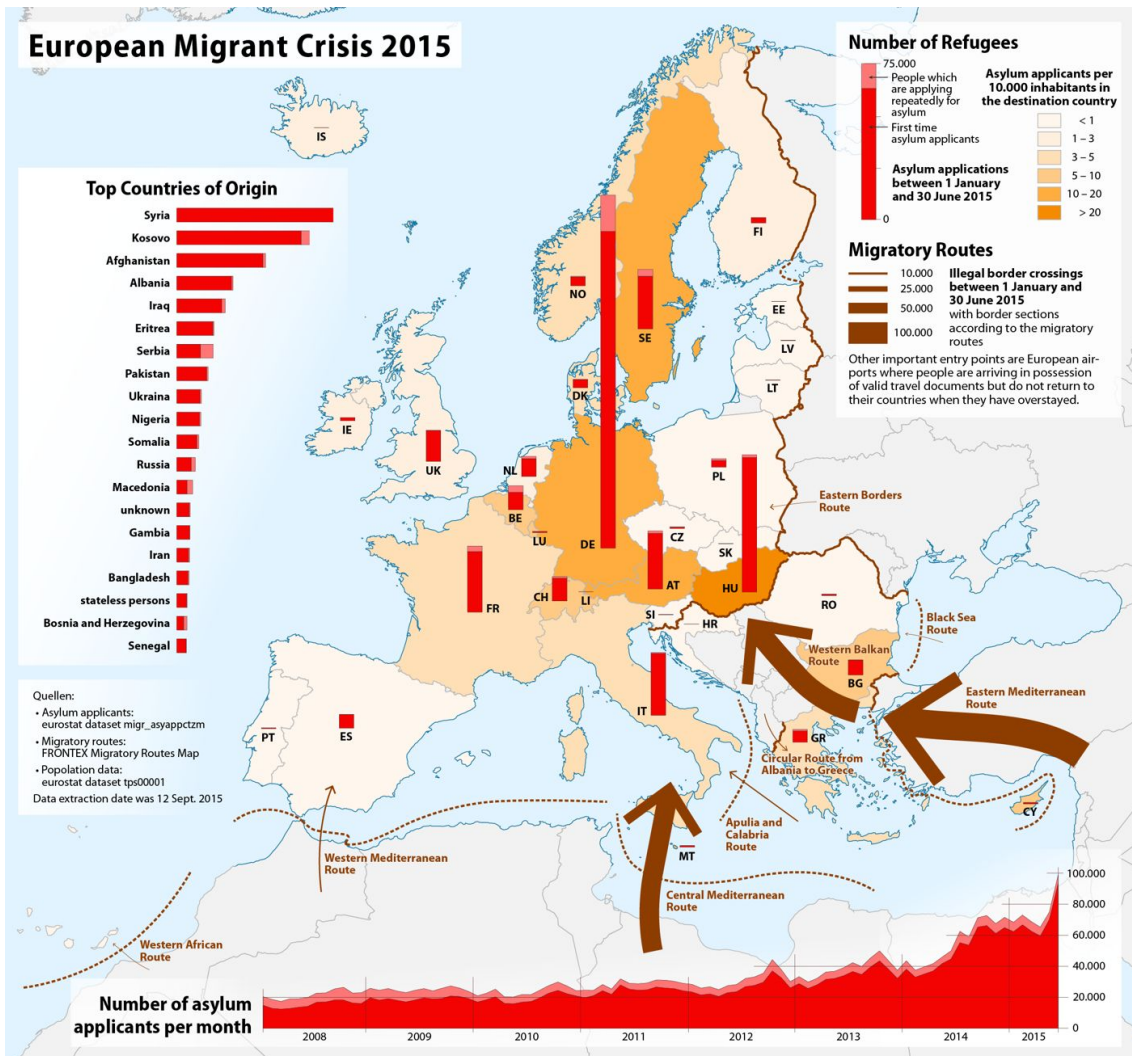
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§ 07

## The Geography of Grief

Compare the front-page treatment of 130 dead in Paris (November 2015) with 147 dead at Garissa University in Kenya (April 2015), or with the average week in eastern Congo, Sudan, Yemen or Tigray. Compare the front-page treatment of Ukrainian refugees in 2022 with that of Syrian, Afghan, Sudanese or Rohingya refugees fleeing comparable wars in the decade before. The discrepancy is not a coincidence. It is the residue of a hierarchy of grievability.

Journalists openly said the quiet part on air after the invasion of Ukraine — refugees who 'look like us', who are 'civilised', who are 'European'. The correspondents who used those words later apologised. The frame did not. It still organises what is treated as a tragedy and what is treated as a weather report.



*The Geography of Grief*

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§ 08

## The Anti-Trafficking State

Border regimes that present themselves as humanitarian — 'we are protecting migrants from smugglers, women from traffickers' — are, in practice, the largest single cause of migrant death and exploitation. The Mediterranean has killed more than 30,000 people since 2014, in conditions European coastguards repeatedly chose not to prevent. Australia's offshore detention regime on Nauru and Manus Island documented the sexual assault of children. The U.S. southern border separated thousands of children from their parents and lost track of where it put many of them.

The colonial pattern is exact: violence performed in the name of protecting the very people it harms. The 'civilising mission' of the nineteenth century and the 'anti-trafficking framework' of the twenty-first are operationally indistinguishable — both produce the suffering they then propose to manage.



*The Anti-Trafficking State*

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§ 09

## Diversity as a Brand-Safety Measure

Diversity, equity and inclusion in its corporate form has, in many institutions, become a brand-safety measure rather than a redistribution. The strategy deck is bought, the optical changes happen — the board adds a face, the lobby adds a portrait, the website adds a statement — while pay, equity, board votes, supplier contracts and political donations move barely at all. After the murder of George Floyd in 2020, U.S. corporations publicly pledged roughly \$50 billion to racial equity; by 2023 independent audits could account for under \$250 million actually disbursed.

When the political weather changed in 2024–2025, many of the same firms dismantled their DEI offices in a single news cycle on the explicit logic that diversity had been a cost rather than a value. That is the test that exposes the original commitment. A justice you abandon when it stops paying was a marketing campaign.



*Diversity as a Brand-Safety Measure*

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§ 10

## The Sanctioned and the Sanctioner

Western governments routinely impose sanctions on Cuba, Iran, Venezuela, Syria, Zimbabwe and others on stated grounds of human rights — while arming Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE, Israel, and previously Suharto's Indonesia and Pinochet's Chile under indistinguishable governance records. The variable predicting sanction is not human-rights performance; it is alignment with U.S. and EU foreign-policy preferences. The variable predicting weapons sales is the same.

The intellectual class that produces the moral framing for this — think tanks, op-ed pages, certain NGOs — performs the rhetorical heavy lifting that allows a foreign policy of selective outrage to look like a foreign policy of principle. The selectivity is the point. A universal standard would cost too much.

References

## Sources & Further Reading

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154. [2]UNHCR, Refugee Data Finder.
155. [3]Frontex, *Risk Analysis* annual reports; ECRE / IOM Missing Migrants Project.
156. [4]Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (The New Press, 2010).

157. [5]Devah Pager, "The Mark of a Criminal Record", *American Journal of Sociology* 108:5 (2003); Marianne Bertrand & Sendhil Mullainathan, "Are Emily and Greg More Employable Than Lakisha and Jamal?", *AER* 94:4 (2004).
158. [6]Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (Random House, 2020).
159. [7]Reni Eddo-Lodge, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* (Bloomsbury, 2017).
160. [8]UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, reports on systemic racism in law enforcement (A/HRC/47/53, 2021).

All works cited in good faith for documentary, educational and critical use. Errors and omissions: contact the archive.

## Everyday Architecture

### Bank loans

Black and Latino applicants in the U.S. are denied mortgages at roughly twice the rate of equally-qualified white applicants. (Federal Reserve, 2022.)

### Policing

Black Americans are roughly three times more likely than white Americans to be killed by police, controlling for population. (Mapping Police Violence, 2023.)

### Healthcare

Black mothers in the U.S. die in childbirth at roughly three times the rate of white mothers, controlling for income and education. (CDC.)

### Stop-and-search

Black people in England and Wales are searched at more than seven times the rate of white people. (UK Home Office.)

### Asylum

European countries that opened their doors to Ukrainian refugees in 2022 spent the previous decade fortifying borders against Syrians, Afghans and Sudanese fleeing comparable wars.

### Academic citation

Scholars based at universities in the Global South are systematically under-cited relative to colleagues at Northern institutions working on the same material — including material from the South.

### Medical pain

U.S. medical students in a 2016 PNAS study endorsed false beliefs about Black biology (thicker skin, less sensitive nerves); Black patients receive less analgesia for the same injuries.

### Hiring callbacks

Identical CVs with traditionally Black or Arab names receive ~30–50% fewer callbacks than ones with white-coded names across France, the UK, Germany and the U.S. (Bertrand & Mullainathan; Adida; CNRS.)

#### Air pollution

Black and Latino Americans breathe roughly 56% and 63% more particulate matter than is generated by their own consumption — pollution is exported to their neighbourhoods. (PNAS, 2019.)

#### School discipline

U.S. Black preschoolers — 4-year-olds — are suspended at 3.6× the rate of white preschoolers. (Department of Education OCR.)

#### Sentencing

Black men in the U.S. federal system receive sentences ~20% longer than white men for the same crimes. (U.S. Sentencing Commission, 2017.)

#### Maternal mortality (UK)

Black women in the UK are four times more likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth than white women. Asian women, twice as likely. (MBRRACE-UK.)

#### Climate finance

Wealthy nations pledged \$100 billion/year to climate adaptation in the Global South by 2020. They missed the target every year until 2022 — while spending many multiples on fossil-fuel subsidies at home.

#### Visa hierarchy

Schengen visa rejection rates for African applicants run 30–60%; for North American or East Asian applicants, under 5%. Application fees of those rejected are non-refundable, generating hundreds of millions in EU revenue annually.

#### How it works

## How a racial hierarchy is maintained without racial language

After the open vocabulary of empire became socially costly, the same outcomes were achieved through a more durable apparatus. Each step launders the previous one through a neutral-sounding term.

194. Step 01 Replace 'race' with 'risk' Credit risk, security risk, immigration risk, terrorism risk, flight risk. Risk is a quantitative-sounding word that lets institutions act on the same populations using historical data that already encodes the discrimination.

195. Step 02 Replace 'colony' with 'market' Resource extraction continues, but now under WTO rules, investor-state dispute clauses, and IMF programmes. The flag changes; the trade balance does

not.

196. Step 03 Replace 'savage' with 'fragile state' The Failed States Index, the Fragile States Index, the Governance Indicators of the World Bank — categorisations that justify intervention, asset freezes and conditionality without ever invoking biological hierarchy.

197. Step 04 Replace 'civilising mission' with 'humanitarian intervention' Same boots, same airframes, same cratered cities, new vocabulary. The 2011 Libya intervention, conducted under R2P, produced a slave market visible on CNN by 2017.

198. Step 05 Replace 'lynching' with 'algorithmic risk score' Predictive policing, no-fly lists, immigration-priority scoring, child-welfare risk models, fraud-detection systems — the outcomes track race, the inputs are 'neutral', the appeal process is mostly absent.

199. Step 06 Replace 'segregation' with 'school catchment / postcode lottery' Housing covenants ended in 1968 in the US, but redlining maps still predict 2024 school quality, life expectancy, broadband access and air pollution to within a few blocks of the original lines.

Receipts

## Same act, different headline

A diagnostic exercise. Read each row aloud and ask whether the framing would survive a swap of the perpetrator's identity.

The 'colour-blind' decade in numbers

Since 2020 — the year a quarter of the global population marched against police killings of Black people — the US racial wealth gap has barely moved (median white household: ~\$285,000; median Black household: ~\$45,000, Federal Reserve Survey of Consumer Finances, 2022). The UK ethnicity pay gap widened in 2023 for the first time in seven years.

In 2024 the US Supreme Court ended race-conscious admissions in higher education; legacy admissions, which benefit overwhelmingly white applicants, were left untouched. By spring 2025 enrolment of Black students at MIT had fallen 60% in a single year.

In Europe, the 2024 European Parliament elections returned the largest far-right bloc in the chamber's history; the new EU asylum pact, adopted the same month, legalises detention of asylum-seeking children for up to twelve weeks at the external border.

In 2025, US federal agencies dismantled their DEI offices within a single news cycle. The audit trail of corporate pledges from 2020 — \$50bn promised, under \$250m disbursed — was quietly archived.

*" If you can convince the lowest white man that he's better than the best colored man, he won't notice you're picking his pocket. Hell, give him somebody to look down on, and he'll empty his pockets for you. "*

*" Racism, of course, is the most uncivilized thing. Nothing makes the inhuman quite so quickly as treating people as means rather than ends. "*

In medicine

## The body is not 'neutral' data either

The pulse oximeter — the small clip placed on a patient's finger to measure blood oxygen — over-estimates oxygen saturation in patients with darker skin. The 2020 *New England Journal of Medicine* study that demonstrated this used data from 2014–2020; the device design fault has been known since the 1990s. During the first wave of Covid in 2020, this single device routinely under-triaged Black patients into less intensive care. The FDA convened a panel only in late 2022.

Until 2021 the standard US equation for kidney function (eGFR) included a 'race coefficient' that automatically inflated reported kidney health in Black patients by ~16% — pushing thousands off transplant waiting lists. The Albert Einstein College of Medicine estimated 30,000+ Black patients were denied earlier specialist referral as a direct result, over the decades the equation was used.

A 2016 *PNAS* paper found that *40% of US medical students sampled* believed at least one false biological claim about Black bodies — thicker skin, less sensitive nerves, denser bones. Pain prescription gaps follow. The teaching is downstream of nineteenth-century race science the curriculum never quite scrubbed.

Spirometry — the lung-function test — still defaults in many machines to a 'race correction' that mechanically reads Black and Asian lungs as smaller. Coronary-risk calculators behaved similarly until very recently. The body the textbook calls 'normal' is overwhelmingly the white male body of the 1950s anatomy class.

The permitted racism

## Islamophobia as the socially-licensed exception

In every European country where the question has been polled since 2015, hostility to Muslims is higher and more openly expressed than hostility to any other group. It is, uniquely, the prejudice that respectable centrist newspapers will print as opinion, that mainstream parties will campaign on, and that high-court judges will rationalise in dress-code rulings.

The vocabulary — 'integration', 'British values', 'laïcité', 'parallel societies' — was developed in the colonial encounter with the Maghreb, the Levant and South Asia. It was suspended for thirty post-war years and revived around the year 2000. The arguments are not new; the dictionary is the same one used about Algerians in 1950s France, Muslims in 1857 British India, and Moriscos in 1609 Spain.

The empirical test is asymmetry. A Catholic bishop who opposes same-sex marriage is described as theologically conservative. A Muslim imam who says the same thing is described as a threat to liberal democracy. A Hasidic community with strict dress codes is described as eccentric. A Muslim community with strict dress codes is described as un-French. The double standard is the point of the system.

Pre-empted

## Objections answered

The strongest version

*" Talking about race constantly is what keeps racism alive. Stop noticing it and it will fade. "*

Reply

The 'colour-blind' experiment has been run for sixty years in the United States, fifty in the United Kingdom, thirty in continental Europe. In every measurable domain — wealth, incarceration, maternal mortality, mortgage denial, hiring callbacks — the gaps either widened or held. Refusing to measure does not make a phenomenon disappear; it makes it harder to address. Doctors who refuse to diagnose do not improve survival rates.

The strongest version

*" Bringing up race in every issue is itself racist; it reduces people to their skin colour. "*

Reply

The people first reduced to a skin colour were the ones legally classified by it for four centuries of slavery, segregation and immigration law. Tracking the legacy of that classification is the opposite of imposing it — it is the only way to undo it. The originators of the category should not get to declare it over.

The strongest version

*" The real division is class, not race. "*

Reply

Treat them as orthogonal. The poorest white quintile in the US still has more household wealth than the median Black quintile (Federal Reserve, 2022). UK Bangladeshi households earning over £50,000 still face higher mortgage rejection rates than white households earning under £20,000 (FCA, 2023). Class is real and structural; it does not absorb race. A movement that refuses to see one of the two axes will lose on both.

The strongest version

*" Reverse racism / anti-white racism is the bigger problem now. "*

Reply

Racism in its operational sense — the capacity to convert prejudice into systemic disadvantage via policy, hiring, lending, policing, incarceration and the curriculum — has, since the 16th century, run in one direction. Individual hostility can run in any direction; the structural amplifier does not. A useful

test: name the country where being legally classified as white has, on average, lowered life expectancy.

The strongest version

*" This list of statistics is depressing and changes nothing. "*

Reply

Every single one of the policy reversals on this page — eGFR race correction, race-conscious admissions, redlining, sentencing reform, stop-and-search ratios — moved only after sustained public pressure following sustained public documentation. Statistics are not the cure. They are the diagnostic without which the cure cannot begin.

"Racism is a structure, not an event."

— Patrick Wolfe, on settler colonialism, 2006

Take it further

## What to do with this page

247. 01Apply the swap testNext time you read a headline, mentally swap the identity of the perpetrator and victim and see whether the verb, the adjective and the framing survive the swap. Share the result.

248. 02Audit one institutionYour employer, university, council or local press: what percentage of senior staff, board members and bylined journalists are non-white? What percentage of the area's population? Calculate the ratio.

249. 03Read one Black or Brown thinkerPick one and finish a whole book — Stuart Hall, Sylvia Wynter, Edward Said, Saidiya Hartman, Hazel Carby, Ruha Benjamin, Kehinde Andrews. Cite them by name when you talk about racism, instead of citing white commentators on racism.

# *XIII*

## **The Media Machine**

[silencedhistory.org/media](https://silencedhistory.org/media)



Timbuktu manuscripts on astronomy and mathematics

Essential Books

## The shelf they should have given you in school.

Essential

1952

### Black Skin, White Masks

Frantz Fanon

A psychiatrist's clinical study of what colonialism does to the inner life of the colonised — and to the colonist's image of himself.

Essential

1961

### The Wretched of the Earth

Frantz Fanon

The founding text of revolutionary decolonisation. Read the preface by Sartre after, not before.

Essential

1972

## **How Europe Underdeveloped Africa**

Walter Rodney

Still the clearest single-volume answer to the question 'why are these countries poor?'

Essential

1978

## **Orientalism**

Edward W. Said

How the West constructed 'the East' as something to be studied, governed and rescued — never met as an equal.

Essential

1998

## **King Leopold's Ghost**

Adam Hochschild

The Congo Free State, reconstructed from the archives the Belgian state tried to burn.

Essential

2007

## **Late Victorian Holocausts**

Mike Davis

How British free-trade ideology turned droughts in India, China and Brazil into engineered famines killing tens of millions.

Essential

2014

## **The Half Has Never Been Told**

Edward E. Baptist

American capitalism, traced to its source: the cotton plantation and the bodies that worked it.

Essential

2017

**Inglorious Empire**

Shashi Tharoor

A precise and pitiless accounting of what Britain actually did to India.

Essential

2017

**The Origin of Others**

Toni Morrison

Six short lectures on race as a tool of self-definition for those who invented it.

Essential

2019

**How to Hide an Empire**

Daniel Immerwahr

The United States as the colonial power it has always insisted it is not.

Essential

2020

**Caste**

Isabel Wilkerson

American racial hierarchy reframed as a centuries-old caste structure with Indian and Nazi cousins.

Essential

2021

**Time Shelter / Empireland**

Sathnam Sanghera

How British imperial nostalgia organises British politics today, often without naming itself.

Essential

2021

**The Dawn of Everything**

David Graeber & David Wengrow

Dismantles the Eurocentric story of 'civilisation' as a one-way escalator from savagery to us.

Essential

1903

### **The Souls of Black Folk**

W.E.B. Du Bois

The double-consciousness essay alone reorganised how race could be discussed in English.

Essential

1938

### **The Black Jacobins**

C.L.R. James

The Haitian Revolution as world history, by the Trinidadian historian who refused to let it be a footnote.

Essential

1955

### **Discourse on Colonialism**

Aimé Césaire

Sixty pages. The single most devastating short text on what Europe did to itself by doing it to others.

Essential

2014

### **An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States**

Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz

U.S. history retold from the people who were already here.

Essential

2010

### **The New Jim Crow**

Michelle Alexander

Mass incarceration as the latest phase of American racial caste.

Documentaries

## **The footage the broadcasters keep at the back of the archive.**

Documentaries

2004

### **Concerning Violence**

Göran Hugo Olsson

Archive footage from Africa's liberation wars, narrated with the words of Fanon.

Documentaries

2011

### **Hidden Colors (series)**

Tariq Nasheed

A popular survey, controversial in places, of the African presence excised from Western history.

Documentaries

2016

### **I Am Not Your Negro**

Raoul Peck

James Baldwin's unfinished manuscript, animated into one of the great essay films of the century.

Documentaries

2016

### **13th**

Ava DuVernay

The Thirteenth Amendment, the prison-industrial complex, and the legal continuity from slavery to today.

Documentaries

2003

### **The Fog of War**

Errol Morris

Robert McNamara, very late in life, almost saying what he did in Vietnam.

Documentaries

2019

### **Exterminate All the Brutes**

Raoul Peck

Four hours. The history of European expansion told without the usual flattering edits.

Documentaries

1988

### **Hôtel Terminus**

Marcel Ophüls

Klaus Barbie, the Gestapo, and the post-war Western intelligence services that put him to work.

Documentaries

2014

### **The Look of Silence**

Joshua Oppenheimer

The 1965 Indonesian massacres, revisited by the brother of one of the victims.

Documentaries

2022

### **Africa Rising (BBC) / Lumumba: Death of a Prophet**

Raoul Peck (1990)

Two complementary studies: a continent on its own terms, and the murder of one of its founding leaders.

Documentaries

2017

### **Whose Streets?**

Sabaah Folayan & Damon Davis

Ferguson, Missouri, from the inside.

Documentaries

1973

### **The Battle of Chile**

Patricio Guzmán

Filmed as Allende's government fell. The U.S. role is documented in the camera's own footage.

Documentaries

2019

### **When They See Us**

Ava DuVernay

The Central Park Five — a four-part dramatisation that is, in evidence, a documentary.

Films

## **Fiction that does the work history class wouldn't.**

Films

1966

### **The Battle of Algiers**

Gillo Pontecorvo

A film studied by both liberation movements and counter-insurgency staff colleges. Both groups understood what it was about.

Films

1969

### **Burn! (Queimada)**

Gillo Pontecorvo

Marlon Brando as a colonial agent provoking and then crushing a Caribbean slave revolt.

Films

1987

### **Cry Freedom**

Richard Attenborough

Steve Biko and South African apartheid, dramatised within reach of mainstream Western audiences.

Films

1997

### **Lumumba**

Raoul Peck

The most accurate dramatic film made about the assassination of Patrice Lumumba.

Films

2006

## **The Wind That Shakes the Barley**

Ken Loach

The Irish war of independence, with Black and Tan reprisals filmed in full.

Films

2013

## **12 Years a Slave**

Steve McQueen

Solomon Northup's 1853 memoir, restored to American screens with the violence the originals declined to show.

Films

2014

## **Selma**

Ava DuVernay

The march on Montgomery, including the parts of Lyndon Johnson the country prefers to forget.

Films

2016

## **Hidden Figures**

Theodore Melfi

Three Black women mathematicians at NASA. The film is gentle; the underlying facts are not.

Films

2018

## **BlacKkKlansman**

Spike Lee

A real 1970s police investigation of the Klan, edited so that the present cannot pretend to be elsewhere.

Films

2018

## **Black Panther**

Ryan Coogler

A blockbuster that took a clear position on reparations and stolen artefacts, and that the global audience understood instantly.

Films

2019

### **Atlantics**

Mati Diop

Senegalese migration and class, told as ghost story. Cannes Grand Prix.

Films

2022

### **The Woman King**

Gina Prince-Bythewood

Dahomey's Agojie, on the eve of the colonial wars.

Articles & Essays

## **Long-form journalism that survives the news cycle.**

Articles

1955

### **Notes of a Native Son**

James Baldwin

The essay, and the collection it gives its name to, remains the gold standard of American writing on race.

Articles

2014

### **The Case for Reparations**

Ta-Nehisi Coates · The Atlantic

The single most-cited modern argument in English for material redress.

Articles

2018

### **How Britain stole \$45 trillion from India**

Jason Hickel · Al Jazeera

A short summary of Utsa Patnaik's research; a number that has not been seriously refuted.

Articles

2019

### **The 1619 Project**

Nikole Hannah-Jones et al. · NYT Magazine

An attempt to reset the American origin story around the arrival of the first enslaved Africans.

Articles

2020

### **The Empire's New Clothes**

Pankaj Mishra · LRB

On the British political class's inability, in a crisis, to think outside imperial idiom.

Articles

2021

### **Why We Need a Decolonised Curriculum**

Kehinde Andrews

On the political stakes of what universities choose to teach.

Articles

2023

### **The illusion of moral decline**

various · post-Gaza coverage

A flood of post-October 2023 essays in which Western journalists begin, in real time, to lose faith in their own institutions' framing.

Articles

ongoing

### **Africa Is a Country**

editors

A continuous corrective to lazy Western coverage of the continent.

# *XIII*

## **Failures of the Left**

[silencedhistory.org/left-failure](https://silencedhistory.org/left-failure)



*Frantz Fanon, Martinican psychiatrist and anti-colonial theorist, in a 1950s photograph.*

This essay is written from the inside. The authors of this archive consider themselves of the left, in the broad sense that the word still has any honest content: opposed to inherited hierarchies, in favour of universal dignity, against the concentration of wealth, against war. It is precisely from that position that the following has to be said.

## 1. The labour movement that drew the colour line

The European and American labour movements, at the moments of their greatest industrial strength, repeatedly chose racial solidarity with their bosses over class solidarity with workers of colour. The American Federation of Labor excluded Black workers for decades. White Australian unions invented the White Australia policy. The French Communist Party, even at its most powerful, would not commit to Algerian independence until late, and many of its base voted for the war. 'Workers of the world unite' tended, in practice, to mean workers of certain nationalities.

## 2. The Soviet experiment and its blind spots

The Soviet Union, for all its real contributions to anti-colonial struggles, ran a continental empire of its own in which Russian was the language of advancement, Central Asian republics supplied raw cotton on quasi-colonial terms, and entire peoples (Crimean Tatars, Chechens, Volga Germans, Koreans) were deported overnight under Stalin. The vocabulary of internationalism did not, by itself, dissolve the habits of empire.

## 3. The third-world wave and its romance

The Western new left of the 1960s and 1970s gave anti-colonial movements crucial political cover. It also, in its weaker moments, romanticised them. The same student who had a poster of Che on the wall in 1969 was often, by 1990, working at an NGO that required the formerly colonised to write grant applications in donor English. The guerrilla had been useful as an icon. The actual person from Mozambique or Vietnam who refused to be an icon was rarely as celebrated.

## 4. The NGO-isation of solidarity

Beginning in the 1980s, much of what called itself the Western left reorganised itself into a development industry. Solidarity became service delivery. Service delivery required indicators. Indicators required headquarters. Headquarters were in Geneva, London, New York and Washington, and were almost entirely staffed at decision-making level by white Westerners. The formerly colonised became 'beneficiaries', a word that does most of the work the word 'native' used to do.

## 5. The clean hands problem

The progressive Western voter is structurally able to support, simultaneously: a welfare state at home, a defence budget that bombs the formerly colonised abroad, a consumer economy whose every shelf is loaded with goods produced under conditions they would call slavery if they saw the factory, and a moralism about human rights that is then aimed, almost exclusively, at countries the West has reasons to dislike. These are not separate positions. They are one foreign policy.

## 6. Identity as substitute, identity as evasion

The recent Western turn to identity politics has produced real gains — in representation, in cultural visibility, in language. It has also, in its corporate form, allowed institutions to update their logos without redistributing a single dollar. The same investment bank that ran the slave trade insurance market in 1830 can today fly a Pride flag, post a Juneteenth message, and finance the next coup against a democratically elected left government in the Global South — all in the same fiscal year, with no internal sense of contradiction.

## 7. The Gaza moment

The Western liberal consensus's response to the destruction of Gaza after October 2023 was, for many people who had given that consensus the benefit of the doubt, the end of the benefit. Centre-left governments — in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France — supplied weapons, vetoed ceasefires, criminalised protest, and adopted the language of the bomber while continuing to describe themselves as the conscience of the international order. The performance was not believed outside the West, and is now, increasingly, not believed inside it either.

From the Archive — A working principle

A left that cannot be cross-examined by the people it claims to defend is not a left. It is a self-help group for the conscience of the comfortable.

## What a serious left would do

A serious left in a former colonial power would, at minimum: campaign for unconditional reparations and the return of looted objects; oppose every coup, sanction and bombing regardless of the political colour of the target; treat migrants and refugees as full citizens-in-waiting rather than humanitarian props; tax accumulated colonial wealth where it sits; abolish the visa hierarchy; cancel unjust sovereign debt; and stop assuming that the formerly colonised require Western tutelage in any domain whatsoever, including the domain of left-wing politics.

None of this is radical. All of it is overdue. The fact that almost no mainstream Western left party currently supports more than one of these positions is the measure of the failure this essay is trying to name.

How it works

## The Western left's recurring failure modes

Each pattern is named here not to discredit the left but to make it possible. None of these failures is universal among left-wing actors. All of them are common enough to require naming.

24. Step 01 Tankie selectivity A wing of the left can only see oppression when it is performed by the United States or its allies. The Uyghurs, Tibetans, Ukrainians, Syrians under Assad, Iranians under the clerics, Venezuelans under Maduro: their suffering is filed as Western propaganda.

Anti-imperialism collapses into campism.

25. Step 02 Brocialism / class-only reductionism Race, gender, sexuality and disability are demoted to 'divisive distractions' from the real (class) struggle. The effect is to ask everyone non-white, non-male and non-straight to wait their turn — a wait that has lasted, in the case of the British Labour Party, about 124 years.

26. Step 03 The NGO-ification of dissent Movements that began as confrontational organising are professionalised into 501(c)(3) charities, grant-dependent on Ford, Open Society or DFID, with

KPIs replacing politics and white American executive directors administering Black struggle from D.C.

27. Step 04 Aesthetic decolonisation without economic decolonisation Museums rename their galleries. University departments rewrite reading lists. Endowments built from slavery and empire stay invested. The visible layer of the institution shifts; the balance sheet does not.

28. Step 05 The 'good migrant' migration politics Centre-left parties advocate for the integration-ready, English-fluent, university-educated migrant while supporting the deportation pipelines, asylum cuts and Channel-crossing criminalisation that target the rest.

29. Step 06 The silence on Gulf labour and Chinese internal colonialism Anti-imperialism that exempts non-Western perpetrators is provincial, not principled. The kafala system kills South Asian workers building stadiums; Uyghur cotton subsidises fast fashion. Both deserve the same scrutiny applied to Western firms.

30. Step 07 Performative solidarity replacing material transfer Black squares on Instagram. Land acknowledgements without land return. Pride sponsorship by arms manufacturers. The gesture economy substitutes for the redistribution economy.

Receipts

## The double standard, by issue

A working test: apply your political reaction to the second row and ask whether it survives in the first. If not, the principle is not a principle.

*" The Western left has long taken for granted that the West will be the world's adult, and the formerly colonised its student. That assumption is itself the most stubborn colonial inheritance. "*

*" A revolution is not a dinner party... it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. "*

Pre-empted

## Objections answered

The strongest version

*" This essay just helps the right by attacking the left. "*

Reply

The opposite. A left that cannot self-criticise gets eaten by a right that can. Every functional reform tradition — abolitionists, suffragists, the civil rights movement, the trade union movement at its best — was constituted by internal argument as fierce as anything its enemies threw at it. Performing unity is not the same as having it.

The strongest version

*" You are demanding ideological purity. Coalitions need flexibility. "*

Reply

What is being demanded is consistency of standard, not uniformity of position. A coalition can disagree on tactics; it cannot survive disagreeing on whether a given group of dead civilians counts as dead civilians. The bar here is low, and the Western left, in 2023–25, did not clear it.

The strongest version

*" Identity politics is necessary because economic politics on its own has not delivered for marginalised groups. "*

Reply

Agreed — and that is exactly why economic and identity politics must travel together, not substitute for one another. The failure mode named here is not the existence of identity politics. It is its corporate hollowing-out: the logo update without the redistribution. A serious identity politics rebuilds the wage, the union, the union hall and the school. A marketing one does not.

The strongest version

*" Western leftists are doing what they can in their own countries. Lecture your own. "*

Reply

This essay is, by both authorship and audience, doing exactly that. Its primary readership is Western left-coded people. Its primary critique is of Western left institutions. The accusation of lecturing 'other people' is the deflection move — directed at a text addressed to the deflector.

The strongest version

*" China / Russia / Iran are also bad, so any internal critique of the West gives them propaganda wins. "*

Reply

By this logic no Western left criticism of any Western policy is ever permissible, because some adversary somewhere is worse. This is the position that produced Western complicity with every coup, war and sanction of the last 70 years. 'Whataboutism in reverse' — what about how this makes us look — is the most reliable solvent of principle on record.

From the Archive — A working principle

A left that cannot be cross-examined by the people it claims to defend is not a left. It is a self-help group for the conscience of the comfortable.

A polite empire is still an empire.

A diverse boardroom is still a boardroom.

Take it further

## What to do with this page

63. 01Apply the swap test to your own sideTake the position your party / outlet / commune holds on the most recent foreign-policy story. Swap the identity of the perpetrator. Does the position survive? If not, it was a tribal reflex, not a principle.

64. 02Read one critic on your own sidePick a writer who is broadly aligned with you politically but who is harsh about your faction's blind spots — Adolph Reed, Asad Haider, Olúf█mi O. Táíwò, Vivek Chibber, Naomi Klein on her own movement. Sit with the discomfort.

65. 03Fund a movement, not an NGORedirect a recurring donation from a brand-name international NGO to a frontline organisation accountable to the community it serves — a tenants' union, a migrant-worker centre, a Palestinian, Sudanese or Kurdish solidarity group.

References

## Sources & Further Reading

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# *XIV*

## **Selective Outrage**

[silencedhistory.org/left-hypocrisy](https://silencedhistory.org/left-hypocrisy)

This chapter is not an argument against the left. It is an argument from inside it. The political tradition that produced anti-colonial solidarity, the civil rights movement, anti-apartheid organizing, and most of the actually-existing critique of empire is also, in its Western and well-fed wings, the home of a quieter, more self-congratulatory racism that deserves its own page.

Call it the racism of the open hand. Its first principle is: be merciful to the person who needs you. Its unstated second principle is: do not tolerate the person who does not.

§ 01

## The White Savior Reflex

There is a particular kind of Western progressive who finds purpose in helping. Helping abroad, helping refugees, helping the visibly suffering. The work is often real, the donations often useful. But underneath the helping is a structural assumption: that the relationship will always run in one direction. The Western helper will never be the helped. The 'beneficiary' will never be the equal.

The clearest sign of this dynamic is what happens when the formerly-helped grows up, gets rich, starts a company, builds a movement, or simply stops being grateful. The warmth, very often, evaporates. The same person who could be praised as a heroic recipient of aid becomes, the moment they ask for parity, ungrateful, demanding, or 'difficult.'



*The White Savior Reflex*

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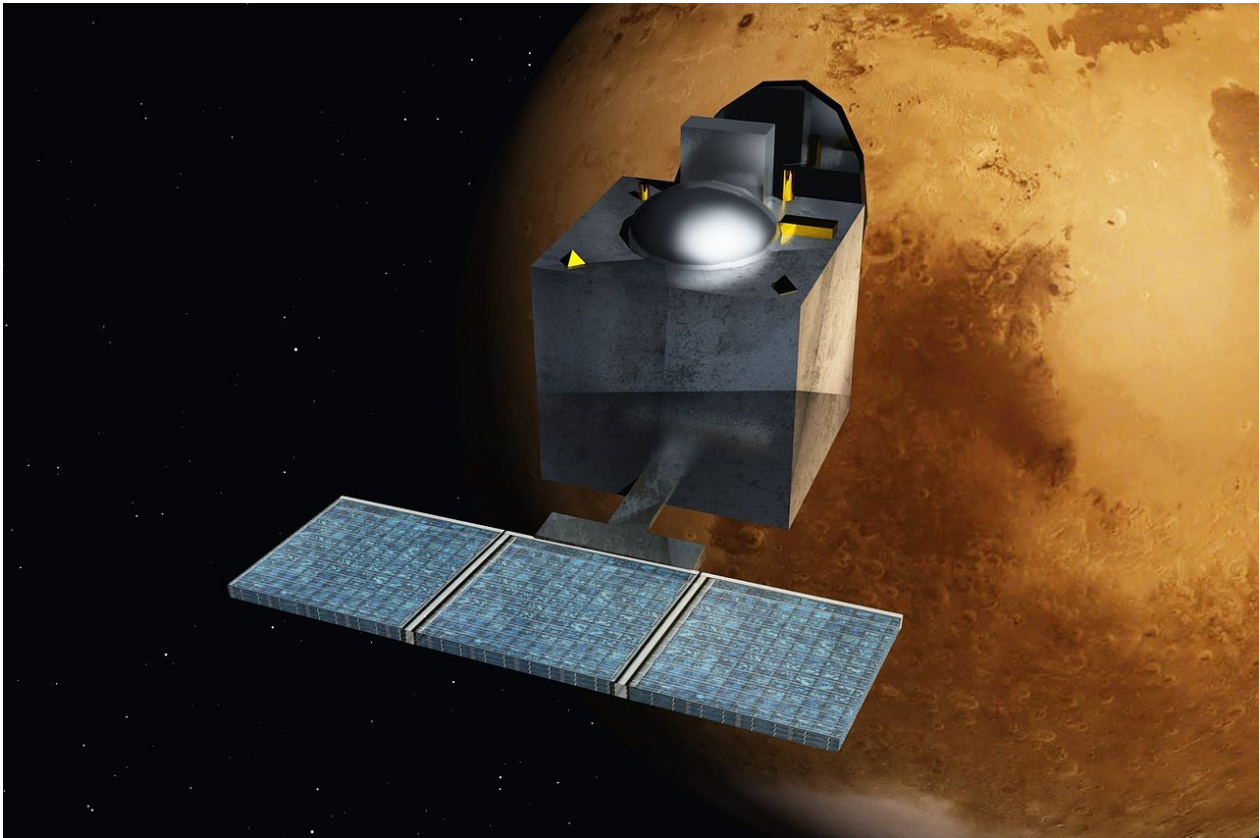
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§ 02

## The Permission to be Modern

When a Western progressive imagines a 'good' non-Western country, they typically picture handicrafts, sustainable agriculture, colorful festivals, deep spirituality, and a wise old grandmother teaching her granddaughter. They do not picture a chip fabrication plant in Hsinchu, a payments platform in Nairobi, a vaccine factory in Pune, or a teenage girl in Tehran doing competitive mathematics.

The implicit rule is: you may be authentic, or you may be modern, but you may not be both. To be modern is to become a copy of us — and copies are always inferior to originals. This is racism in the costume of multicultural appreciation.



*The Permission to be Modern*

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§ 03

## Selective Outrage

The same Western publications that write thousand-word essays about the misogyny of a particular Iranian, Saudi, or Afghan policy will quietly ignore comparable or worse statistics from a politically friendly country. The treatment of women becomes a serious moral question only when the women in question can be used as a rhetorical weapon against a regime the West already wants to weaken.

Likewise, civilians killed by an enemy regime are 'victims of slaughter.' Civilians killed by a friendly regime — or by Western weapons — are 'collateral damage' or, increasingly, simply uncounted. The bodies are the same. The headlines are not.



*Selective Outrage*

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§ 04

## When Solidarity Has Conditions

Genuine solidarity does not require the other person to be poor, wounded, or grateful. It does not require them to share your aesthetic preferences, your political vocabulary, or your taste in tea. It does not give you a veto over how they organize their own society. It does not pause when they criticize you.

What much of the Western left calls 'solidarity' has, in practice, been a series of conditional contracts: we will support you if you are oppressed in the right way, by the right people, with the right slogans, and if you allow us to remain the protagonist of the story. The Cuban Revolution, the Vietnamese resistance, the Palestinian struggle, the Bolivarian project in Latin America, the Iranian revolution of 1979, and most recently the rise of Asian and African economic confidence have each, in turn, been celebrated and then disowned the moment they failed to take direction.



*When Solidarity Has Conditions*

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§ 05

# The Acceptable Foreigner

There is a quiet test that the Western progressive class often applies, usually without noticing. The foreigner who is grateful, soft-spoken, mildly accented, and willing to position themselves as a guest is welcomed warmly. The foreigner who is confident, technically superior, unimpressed, and unwilling to apologize for their origin is, very often, isolated, undermined, or politely informed that they would do better elsewhere.

Anyone who has worked inside a Western institution as a person from the Global South knows this test. It is not in the handbook. It does not need to be.



*The Acceptable Foreigner*

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A working definition

A society is racist not by what it does for people in trouble, but by what it does for people in *parity*.

# XV

## The Same Logic

[silencedhistory.org/factory-farms](https://silencedhistory.org/factory-farms)



*Hens confined in stacked wire battery cages inside an industrial poultry shed in Bastos, São Paulo, Brazil.*

A reader who has followed this archive this far has read about people being treated as property: catalogued, branded, transported in irons, kept in barracks, worked to death, discarded. The same reader probably eats lunch without thinking. This is not a moral failure of the reader. It is a measure of how successfully the industrial food system has hidden itself. The hiding is not incidental. It is the system's main investment.

## **A genealogy, not a comparison**

To say that the colonial plantation and the modern abattoir share a logic is not to equate the suffering of an enslaved person and the suffering of a pig. It is to notice that the techniques are descendants of one another. The first moving disassembly line in human history was the Cincinnati hog-slaughter line of the 1860s. Henry Ford credited it as the direct inspiration for the Detroit assembly line. From the slaughterhouse, the line went to the car factory; from the car factory, to the armaments factory; from the armaments factory, to the extermination camp. The German industrial system that murdered six million Jews ran on a technology pipeline that had begun in the killing of animals on contract, at speed.

## The shared vocabulary of justification

Every system that needs to do unbearable things to a population eventually develops the same set of cognitive moves. The Spanish in the Americas argued the indigenous might lack souls. The English in Ireland and India debated whether the colonised had adult intellects. The American South called enslaved Africans 'three-fifths' of a person. Nazi propaganda described Jews as vermin. Today, when challenged about a chicken, a pig or a cow, the most common move is the same: *they are not really like us*. The category 'animal' has become what 'savage' once was — a holding pen for any creature whose suffering can be made administratively invisible.

## Who runs the abattoirs

The same populations that the colonial labour market was built on now staff the worst jobs in the meat industry. In the United States, meat-packing is disproportionately worked by Latin American migrants, often undocumented, often refugees from U.S.-supported coups in Central America. In Europe, the slaughter lines run on Eastern European, North African and South Asian labour. The injury rate in U.S. meat-packing is roughly three times the average for manufacturing. The system needs a worker who can be replaced, intimidated and silenced. That is the same job specification it has had since the seventeenth century.



*Garment workers at sewing machines inside a Bangladeshi factory — long rows of women bent over textile lines.*

# Who pays the environmental bill

Industrial animal agriculture is one of the largest single drivers of Amazon deforestation (for soy and cattle), of antibiotic resistance, of zoonotic pandemic risk, and of fresh-water depletion. Almost none of the cost is paid by the consumers in the rich economies who eat the output. It is paid by the indigenous communities whose forests are cleared, by the farm workers exposed to industrial pesticides, by the rural poor who live downstream of slurry lagoons, and by the next zoonotic pandemic, which will not arrive at first-class.

On the Record — The disappearance of fish

Industrial fishing fleets owned predominantly by China, the EU, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and the United States have stripped the West African coast so thoroughly that artisanal fishing communities from Senegal to Ghana have collapsed. The young men who can no longer feed their villages are then described, when they reach European shores, as 'economic migrants'. The food was taken from them on the water.

Source — FAO; Our World in Data

# The honest question

The honest question is not whether one form of suffering is 'as bad' as another. Suffering is not a competition. The honest question is whether a moral framework that depends on a permanent invisible underclass — colonial subject, slave, prisoner, migrant, animal — can ever, structurally, deliver the dignity it promises to anyone. The answer this archive arrives at, reluctantly and repeatedly, is that it cannot. The logic has to be confronted at the root, or it will keep finding new bodies.

~80B

Land animals killed for food each year worldwide

1–3T

Aquatic animals killed each year (range)

~80%

Of antibiotics used in the U.S. go to livestock

26%

Of ice-free land used for animal agriculture

The plantation never closed.

It changed species.

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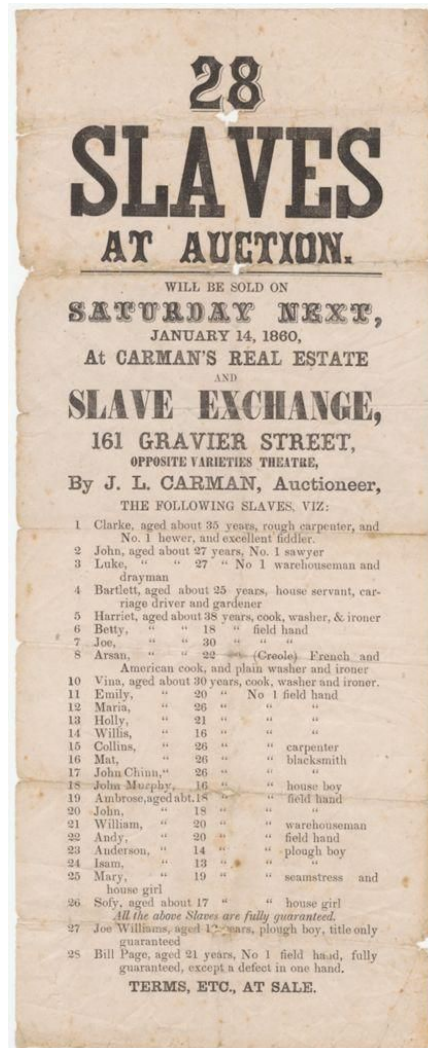
# *XVI*

## **On Reparations**

[silencedhistory.org/reparations](https://silencedhistory.org/reparations)

The standard Western objection to reparations runs as follows: it was a long time ago, the perpetrators are dead, the victims are dead, the money cannot be untangled, and besides, we have all moved on. Every clause of this sentence is false.

It was not a long time ago. The Haitian indemnity was being paid until 1947. British taxpayers were paying off the loan used to compensate slaveholders — not the enslaved — until 2015. The Belgian state took over the Congo in 1908 and did not relinquish it until 1960. The Algerian war ended in 1962. The South African Native Land Act was repealed in 1991. Apartheid is, in living memory, younger than most of the people who say racism is over.



*Charleston, S.C., slave auction advertisement, 1769*

The perpetrators are not all dead. The institutions are alive. Lloyd's of London underwrote slave ships and still exists. Barclays' founding capital came from the slave trade and it still exists. Major universities — Harvard, Yale, Oxford, Cambridge, Glasgow, Brown, Georgetown — were founded or significantly endowed by slaver money and they still exist. The British monarchy, the French Republic, the Spanish state, the Belgian state, the Dutch state, the German state and the government of the United States all still exist. The ledger has institutional continuity even when individuals do not.

The victims are not all dead either. The descendants of the enslaved live in the United States, the Caribbean, Brazil and across Europe. The descendants of the colonized live in every formerly colonized

country and across the diaspora. The inherited wealth gap, the inherited land dispossession, the inherited educational disadvantage and the inherited health disparities are not metaphors. They are quantifiable, measurable, ongoing.

## The Numbers

Sources: peer-reviewed economic history; see Patnaik, Inikori, Darity, Robinson.

\$45 trillion

Wealth drained from India by Britain, 1765–1938 (Patnaik).

21 billion gold francs

Modern equivalent of the indemnity Haiti was forced to pay France from 1825 to 1947.

£20 million

Paid by Britain in 1833 — to slaveholders, not the enslaved. Equivalent to ~£17 billion today. Loan finally repaid by UK taxpayers in 2015.

\$14 trillion

Estimated wealth gap owed to descendants of U.S. slavery (Darity & Mullen, 2020).

12.5 million

Africans deported across the Atlantic. Roughly 2 million died in the Middle Passage.

≈\$300B / year

Net financial flow from poor to rich countries, mostly through illicit transfers, debt service, and unequal trade (UNCTAD, GFI).

## What Reparations Actually Look Like

Reparations are not a cheque in the mail. The serious literature describes a combination of measures, scaled to the harm and to the institutions that benefited from it:

- **Return of stolen objects.** The Benin Bronzes. The Parthenon Marbles. The Maqdala treasures. The Koh-i-Noor. Human remains held by museums and universities. The principle is simple: it is not yours.
- **Cancellation of illegitimate debt.** Most of the debt owed by countries in the Global South to Northern creditors traces, directly or indirectly, to extraction. Cancelling it is not generosity. It is closing the file.
- **Land restitution.** Particularly in settler-colonial states: South Africa, Namibia, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States. Land taken by force, treaty fraud, or state-backed dispossession.

- **Direct financial transfers.** To affected nations and, where traceable, to descendant communities. CARICOM's 10-point plan is the most developed contemporary proposal.
- **Institutional and educational reform.** Honest curricula. Public archives opened, not destroyed. The end of the IMF/World Bank conditionality regime that has functioned, for decades, as a softer continuation of colonial economic control.
- **Climate reparations.** The countries that industrialized first on extracted wealth now face the smallest climate consequences. The countries that were extracted from face the largest. The bill for this is also owed.



*Benin Bronzes at the British Museum*

## Precedent Already Exists

The argument that reparations have never been paid before is false. Germany has paid more than €80 billion to survivors of the Holocaust and to the State of Israel. The United States paid reparations to Japanese-Americans interned in 1942. The Canadian government has paid reparations for the residential school system. Britain paid £19.9 million to surviving Kenyan victims of Mau Mau-era torture in 2013. France has acknowledged the Algerian war torture and paid compensation in specific cases. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission included a reparations framework.

The principle is established. What is missing is not legal precedent. What is missing is political will.

## The Standard Objections, Answered

**"My family arrived after the slave trade."** Almost no one paying tax today personally fought in the Battle of Waterloo, yet that battle is on the coinage and in the national mythology because it produced the modern British state. You inherit the state your taxes fund. You inherit its assets and its debts. Citizenship is the legal mechanism by which you became eligible for both.

**"Africans sold other Africans."** Some did. The European powers provided the demand, the weapons, the credit, the maritime infrastructure, and the legal categories that turned a person into a piece of property. A buyer who pays a fence does not become innocent of receiving stolen goods. And the question 'who benefited?' has a single answer: the cities of Liverpool, Nantes, Bristol, Lisbon and Newport, Rhode Island, not Ouidah or Cabinda.

**"Other cultures had slavery."** True. None of them industrialised the practice into a hereditary, race-based, transcontinental, four-century system whose physical and financial traces remain quantifiable today. The Atlantic system is qualitatively different and is the one whose proceeds built the modern global economy. The argument that other people once did similar things does not extinguish a specific bill.

**"It would be impossible to administer."** Germany administers Holocaust reparations. The U.S. administered Japanese-American internment compensation. South Africa ran a TRC. The Canadian residential-schools settlement paid out around \$5 billion. The administrative claim is a stalling tactic, not a difficulty.

**"Where would the money come from?"** From the same place every other fiscal priority comes from: a political decision. The 2008 bank bailouts in the US and UK alone exceeded the most ambitious total reparations estimates for the Atlantic slave trade. The UK's COVID furlough scheme spent £70 billion in eighteen months. The question is never affordability; it is always priority.

## Recent and current claims

- **CARICOM Ten-Point Plan (2014– )**. Fifteen Caribbean states have jointly demanded a formal apology, debt cancellation, return of cultural objects, an indigenous-peoples development programme, a public-health initiative addressing the disease legacy of slavery, an illiteracy eradication programme, and a technology-transfer commitment from the former European slave powers. As of 2026 no European state has begun substantive negotiation.
- **The Herero and Nama claim against Germany**. In 2021 Germany formally recognised the 1904–08 genocide and pledged €1.1 billion over thirty years — but as 'development aid' rather than reparations, and without consulting descendant communities. Litigation continues in U.S. and German courts.
- **Haiti vs. France**. In 2003 President Aristide formally demanded return of the 21 billion gold-franc indemnity Haiti was forced to pay France for its own freedom. Within a year, a U.S.–

French-backed coup removed him. The claim has been raised repeatedly since by Haitian civil society and, in 2022, in a New York Times investigation that quantified the long French extraction.

- **Evanston, Illinois (2021).** The first U.S. municipality to pass a reparations programme — \$10 million in housing grants for Black residents affected by city-sanctioned redlining. The constitutional challenge was rejected in 2024.
- **The Chagos Islands.** In 2024 the United Kingdom finally agreed to cede sovereignty of the islands to Mauritius after fifty years of refusal — but kept the U.S. military base on Diego Garcia and offered no return of the Chagossians evicted in 1971. A reparation that returns the territory and not the people is half a reparation.
- **Belgium and the Congo.** In 2022 King Philippe expressed 'profound regret' for the Congo Free State, but neither Belgium as a state nor the royal family have admitted legal responsibility, paid reparations, or returned the roughly 84,000 objects in the Royal Museum for Central Africa at Tervuren.
- **Universities (2020–).** Glasgow, Cambridge colleges (Jesus, Trinity), Princeton Seminary, Georgetown and Harvard have publicly investigated and in some cases begun small reparative programmes for their documented slave- trade connections. The largest such investment to date is Harvard's \$100 million — roughly 0.2% of its endowment.



*Rhodes Must Fall protest*

## A model order of magnitude

A 2023 study published in *The Lancet Planetary Health*, drawing on Hickel, Sullivan and Subramaniam's input-output modelling, estimated that the Global North owes the Global South \$192 trillion in compensation for unequal exchange in the period 1990–2015 alone — that is, after formal decolonisation. The figure for the period 1492–1990 is, on the same methodology, multiples larger. Brookings, Oxfam and the UN Conference on Trade and Development have produced parallel estimates in the tens to low hundreds of trillions.

The size of the bill is a function of the size of the harm. Critics call it 'impossible'. The honest reading is that the harm itself was previously considered impossible, until it was done.

Receipts

## Reparations already paid — and to whom

The precedent is settled. The principle is not in dispute — only the direction the cheques travel.

*"The reparation movement is not asking for charity. It is asking for the return of property still in use."*

You cannot inherit the wealth and refuse the debt.

That is not how inheritance works.

Take it further

## Move the cheque the other direction

56. 01Support a named claimPick one ongoing claim — CARICOM, Herero-Nama, Chagossians, Haiti, Evanston — and follow it for a year. Share its updates. Visibility is leverage.

57. 02Audit your university or employerUniversities, insurers, banks and merchant houses founded before 1900 almost certainly have a documented slavery or colonial chapter. Ask publicly what the institution has done about it. 'Nothing yet' is an answer worth printing.

58. 03Back return-of-objects campaignsWrite to the trustees of the British Museum, the Quai Branly, the AfricaMuseum at Tervuren, the Met. Ask, by accession number, what is being returned this year. Make holding it expensive.

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# *XVII*

## **Education**

[silencedhistory.org/education](https://silencedhistory.org/education)

Ask a graduate of a British secondary school what they learned about the British Empire. Most will tell you about the abolition of the slave trade, the Industrial Revolution, and a vague sense that India was, on the whole, grateful for the railways. Ask the same question of a Belgian, a French, a Spanish, an American or a Dutch graduate, and the answers will differ in the particulars but not in the shape: the empire was big, it was complicated, mistakes were made, but the underlying enterprise was civilizing, and besides, that was long ago.

This is not an accident. It is the result of a century of careful curriculum design by ministries of education that have, again and again, concluded that the full history would damage national self-esteem. The damage to the descendants of the colonized is, evidently, considered less urgent.



*Old colonial-era textbooks*

## The Techniques of Forgetting

The whitewashing of imperial history is not done by lying — at least, not usually. It is done by a more sophisticated set of techniques:

5. 01 Passive voice 'Mistakes were made.' 'Lives were lost.' 'Cultures were disrupted.' Nobody specific ever does anything specific to anyone specific.
6. 02 The bad apple Atrocities are attributed to rogue individuals — Leopold, a particular general, an over-zealous district commissioner — rather than to the systems that produced and rewarded them.

7. 03The civilizing balance sheet'Yes, but also railways / English / Christianity / the rule of law.' As if a railway built with forced labor to extract resources is a gift to the people it bypassed.
8. 04The contextual shrug'You can't judge the past by today's standards.' This is selectively applied. We have no trouble judging Nazi Germany by today's standards. We have a great deal of trouble judging the British Raj.
9. 05The chronological cliffHistory 'ends' in 1945, or 1960, or whenever the empire formally folded. The continuing financial, political and cultural consequences are filed under 'current affairs' and never connected to the chapter on empire.
10. 06The hero substitutionWilberforce gets a chapter. The enslaved who liberated themselves in Haiti do not. Lincoln gets a chapter. Nat Turner does not. The colonial subject is allowed into the story only as a grateful recipient of white emancipation.
11. 07Map amnesiaThe maps in school atlases zoom in on the metropole and shade the colonies in a single pastel block. Borders were 'established' and 'agreed', never drawn with a ruler through a village by a man who had never been there. Where the empire is shown, it is shown as territory acquired, never as land taken from someone.
12. 08The euphemism vault'Pacification', 'punitive expedition', 'settlement', 'plantation', 'protectorate', 'reservation', 'transportation', 'indentureship', 'mandate', 'discovery'. Each word is doing the work of three darker words it has been hired to replace. Vocabulary, here, is policy.
13. 09The exam-board firewallEven when teachers want to teach more, exam boards reward the safe answer. A British GCSE student who writes a strongly anti-imperial answer on Empire is, in practice, marked harder than one who hedges. Pedagogy bends, slowly, around assessment.
14. 10The white saviour as the lessonWhere colonial violence is taught, the framing is often the European who opposed it: Wilberforce, Casement, the missionary, the journalist. The agency of the colonised is reduced to suffering. The story of how they freed themselves — Haiti, Vietnam, Algeria, India, Ghana, Mozambique, Zimbabwe — barely registers.
15. 11The 'we' problemBritish textbooks say 'we' when describing British actions in 1815 and 'they' when describing British actions in 1919 once those actions have become inconvenient. The first-person plural is rationed by national pride.
16. 12The university-press paywallMost of the best historical work on colonialism (Patnaik on India, Elkins on Kenya, Hochschild on the Congo, Davis on famines) costs £25–£80 a copy or sits behind academic journal subscriptions. The honest history exists; the public access to it has been priced for the comfortable.

## A Comparative Ledger

Country

Routinely Skipped

Routinely Emphasized

United Kingdom

The Bengal famine. The Mau Mau detention camps. The Amritsar massacre. The Tasmanian genocide. The actual content of the slave trade. The Boer concentration camps. The partition of India.

The abolition of the slave trade (as a British achievement). The 'rule of law.' Magna Carta. Victorian engineering. The Second World War as moral apex.

#### France

The Haitian indemnity. The 1945 Sétif massacre. Systematic torture in Algeria. The Paris massacre of 17 October 1961. The Rwandan genocide and French complicity. The ongoing CFA franc.

The Republic. The Revolution. Universalism. Laïcité. France as the home of human rights.

#### Belgium

The Congo Free State as a death camp. Lumumba's assassination. The role of Belgian schools in producing the Hutu/Tutsi ethnic categories that fueled the Rwandan genocide.

Leopold as a 'visionary.' Belgium as a small, peaceful, civilized country.

#### Spain

Potosí. The destruction of the Aztec and Inca civilizations. The Mayan codices. The encomienda system. The Philippines.

The 'discovery' of America. The Reconquista. The Siglo de Oro.

#### Germany

The Herero and Nama genocide and its direct methodological lineage to the Holocaust.

The Holocaust (correctly, in detail) — but as if it had no colonial prehistory.

#### United States

The full scale of Indigenous genocide. The structural continuity from slavery to convict leasing to mass incarceration. The 1898–1946 occupation of the Philippines. CIA-backed coups across Latin America, Africa and Asia.

The Founding Fathers. Westward expansion as adventure. The civil rights movement as a completed project.

#### Netherlands

The Banda massacre. The four-year war against Indonesian independence. The Atlantic slave trade.

Tolerance. The Golden Age (without naming where the gold came from). Anne Frank.

#### Portugal

The 5.8 million enslaved Africans Portugal transported. The Tarrafal concentration camp. The 1961 Mueda massacre in Mozambique. The Wiriyamu massacre (1972). The PIDE secret police. The Salazar dictatorship's wars to keep Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau.

The 'Age of Discoveries.' Vasco da Gama. Camões. Fátima. Lusotropicalism — Gilberto Freyre's myth of Portugal as a uniquely gentle coloniser.

#### Italy

The gassing of Ethiopia. The Cyrenaican concentration camps. Graziani's Addis Ababa massacre (1937). The Italian invasion of Greece and Yugoslavia.

Italian unification. The Renaissance. Resistance to fascism (without acknowledging that the fascism was Italian and the colonialism preceded it).

#### Russia

The Circassian genocide (1864). Stalin's deportations of Crimean Tatars, Chechens, Ingush, Volga Germans, Koreans. The Russification of Central Asia. Soviet-era resource extraction from the 'periphery'.

The Great Patriotic War. Pushkin. Universal brotherhood of Soviet peoples (rhetorically). The civilising mission of Moscow over its eastern frontier.

#### Japan

The Nanjing Massacre as systematic, not anomalous. The comfort-women system. Unit 731 vivisections. Forced labour from Korea, Taiwan and China. Annexation of Korea (1910).

The atomic bombings (correctly, but as if Japan was only ever a victim). The post-war 'economic miracle'. The samurai. The emperor as cultural unifier.

#### Australia

Frontier massacres (400+ documented). The poisoning of waterholes. The Stolen Generations. Aboriginal deaths in custody. The White Australia policy (1901–1973). Pacific 'blackbirding'.

Gallipoli. The ANZAC spirit. The bush legend. Federation in 1901 (without naming what it excluded).

#### Canada

Residential schools and the documented thousands of dead Indigenous children. The Sixties Scoop. The numbered Treaties and how they were systematically broken. Chinese head tax. Komagata Maru. Japanese internment.

Peacekeeping. Multiculturalism. Health-care universalism. A self-image defined largely in contrast to the United States.

*" History is written by the victors. But increasingly, the vanquished are learning to read. "*

#### Pre-empted

# Objections answered

The strongest version

*" Schools can't teach everything. Curricula are already overloaded. Something has to be cut. "*

Reply

Nobody is asking to add hours; we are asking to reallocate them. A British GCSE that spends six weeks on the Tudors and two paragraphs on Bengal is not over-stuffed — it is mis-prioritised. The question is not what to cut. It is why the cuts always fall in the same direction.

The strongest version

*" Students are too young for graphic colonial history. We have a duty of care. "*

Reply

The same curricula teach the Holocaust, the trenches, and the transatlantic slave trade as an event Britain ended. The 'duty of care' applies asymmetrically: hard truths about Europe's victims are age-appropriate; hard truths about Europe's actions are 'too much.' That is not pedagogy. That is editing.

The strongest version

*" Teaching colonial history will make minority students feel like victims and white students feel guilty. "*

Reply

Honest history makes minority students feel seen and white students feel adult. Not telling the truth produces, on one side, the feeling of being gaslit by the curriculum, and on the other, the brittle defensiveness of someone who suspects they were sold an edited copy. Both are worse than the discomfort of facts.

The strongest version

*" This is just woke ideology being pushed into classrooms. "*

Reply

Patnaik's \$45 trillion is not an opinion. Las Casas's eyewitness account is not an opinion. The Nuremberg Laws cite American Jim Crow precedents — that is not an opinion. Calling documented economic and legal history 'ideology' is the rhetorical move that lets the existing ideology — the flattering one — go on uncontested.

"Until the lion learns to write, every story will glorify the hunter."

— African proverb, often cited by Chinua Achebe

Take it further

## Decolonise one classroom

83. 01 Audit your school's curriculum Get the actual syllabus. Count the pages on empire vs. on Tudors / Founding Fathers / Napoleon. Send the count to your school board. The math wins the argument before the politics begin.

84. 02 Replace one reading Suggest one book for the reading list: Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Olusoga's *Black and British*, Dunbar-Ortiz's *Indigenous Peoples' History*, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. One book opens a generation.

85. 03 Fund a teacher Teachers who want to teach this often pay for the books themselves. Buy your kid's history teacher a copy of the source you wish you'd been taught from. Write the note. They remember.

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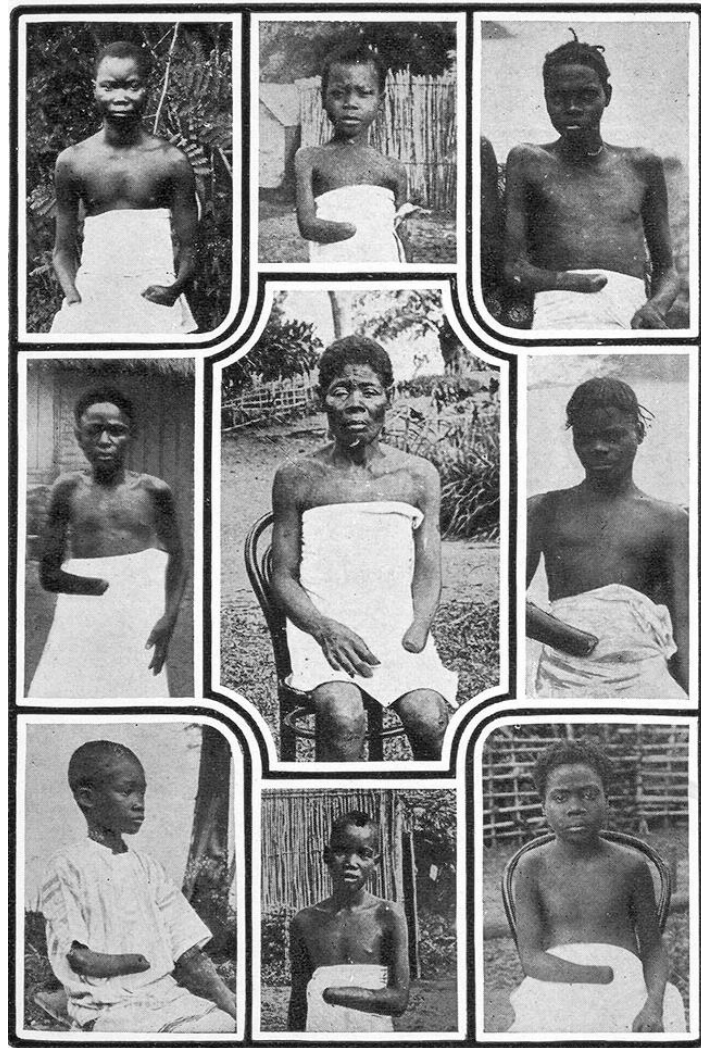
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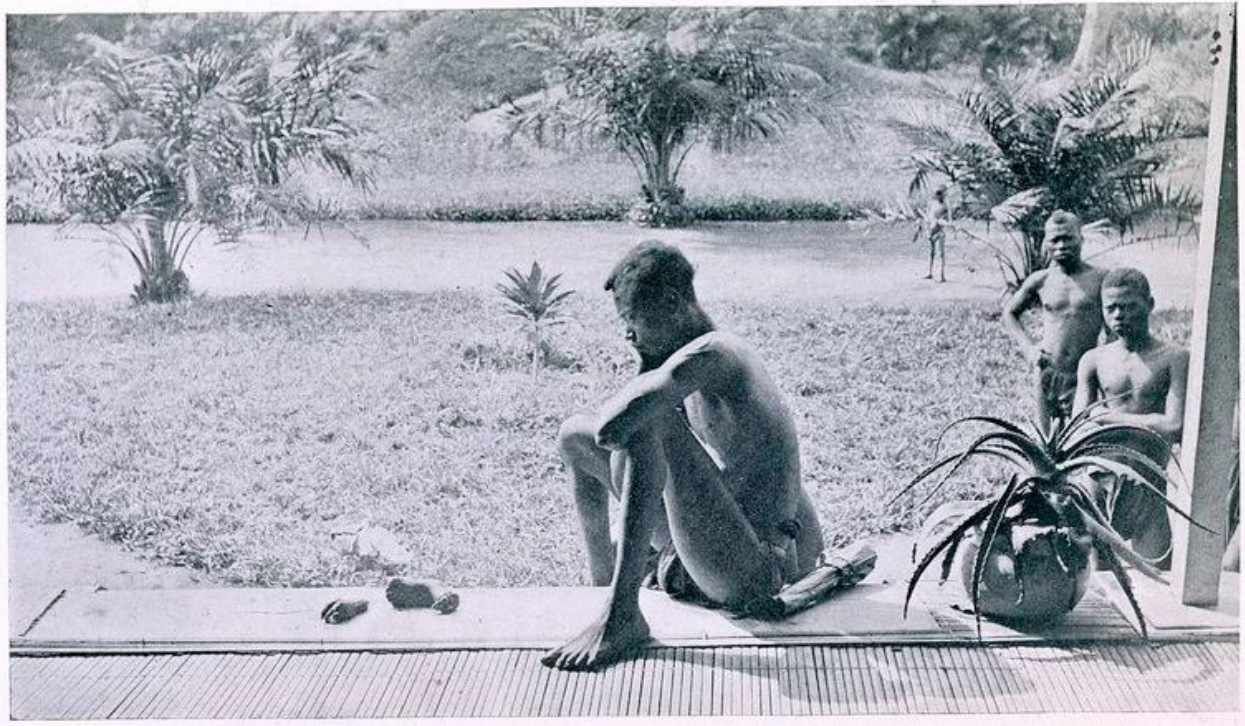
*XVIII*

# Archive Gallery

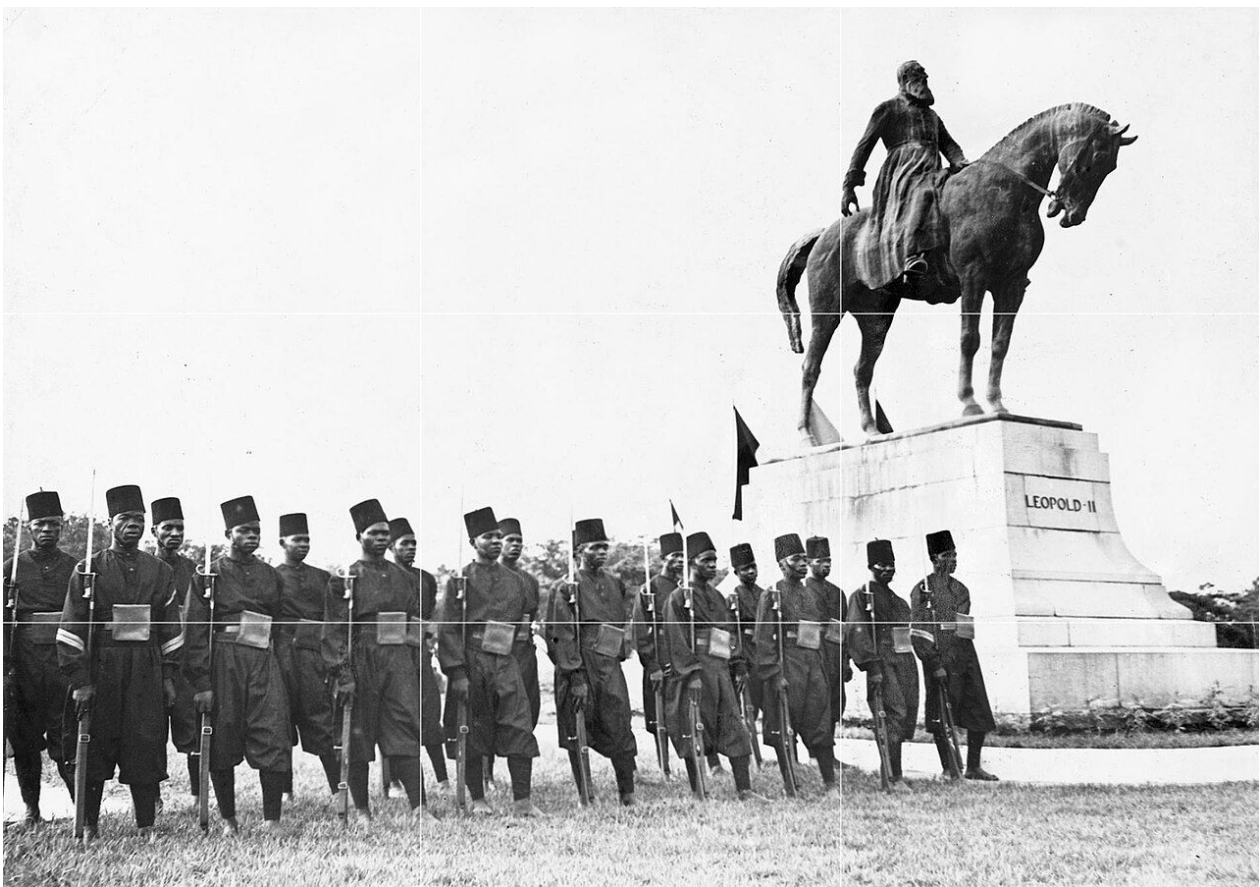
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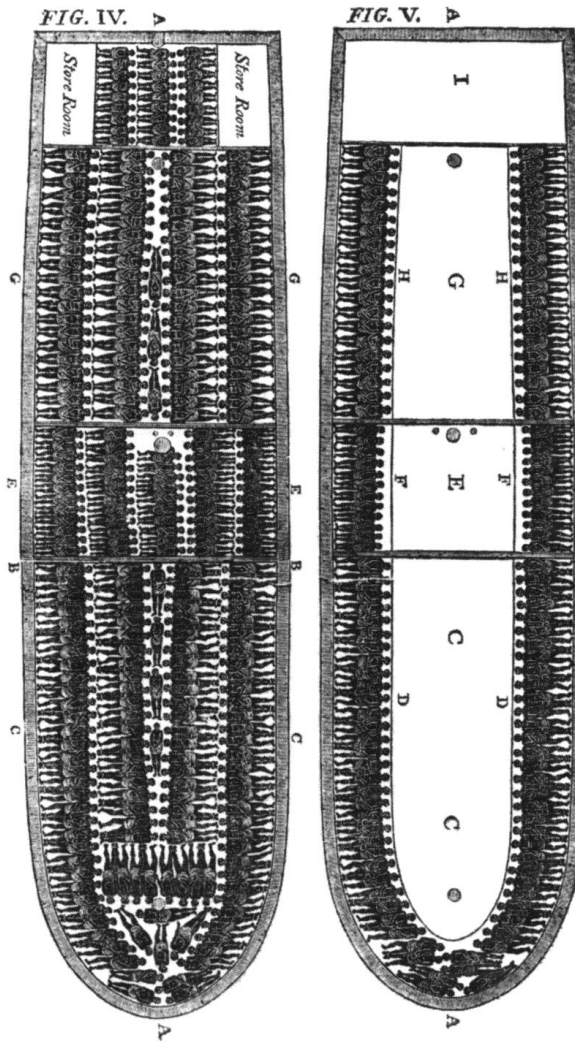
*Mutilated Congolese children*



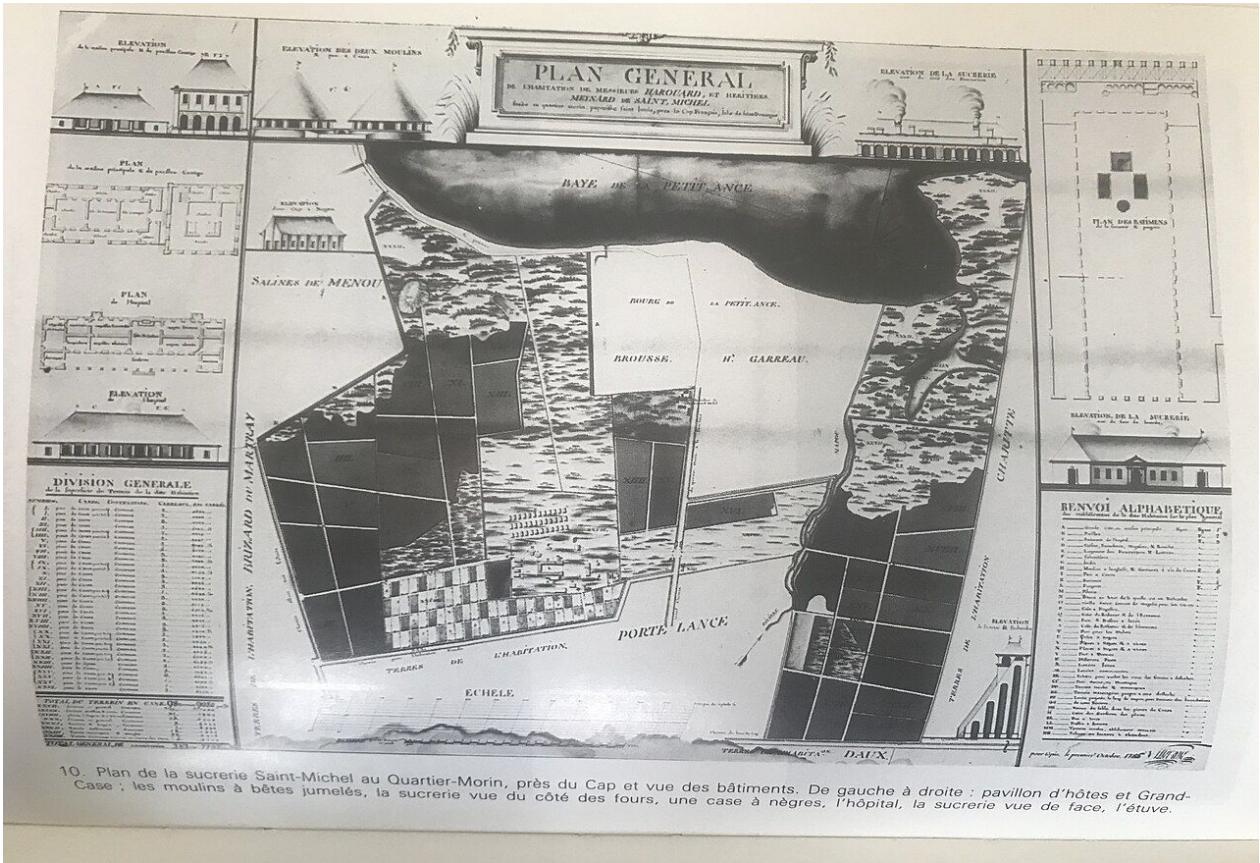
*Nsala of Wala*



*Chicotte punishment*



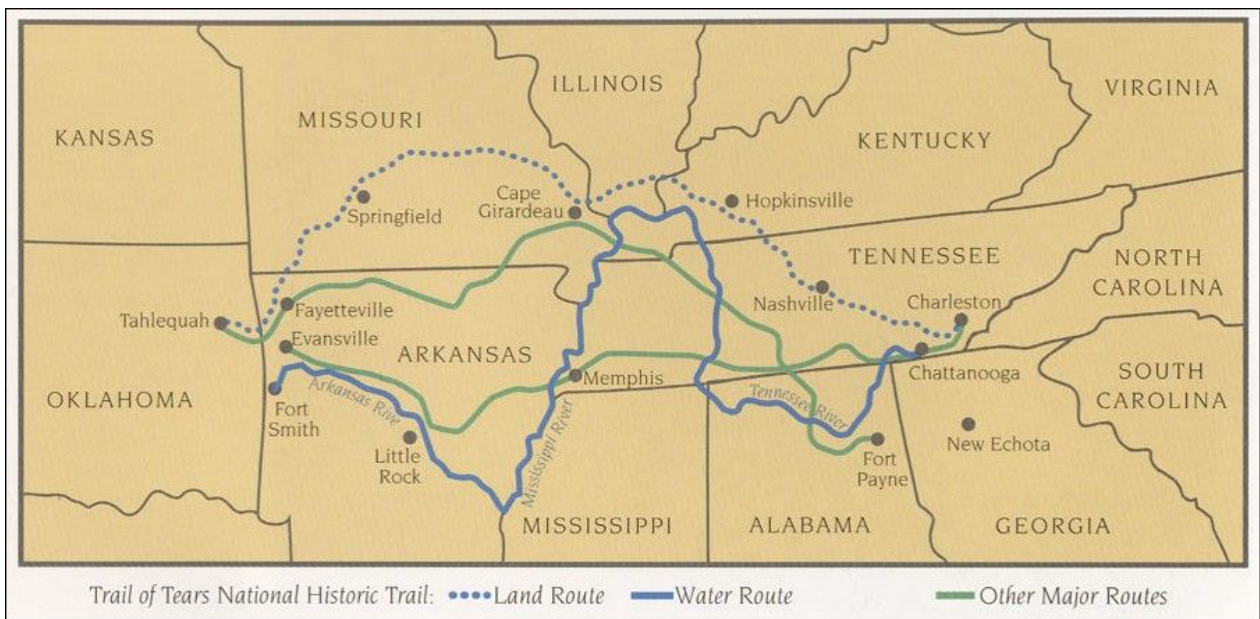
*Diagram of the slave ship Brookes*



Haitian Revolution scene



Bartolomé de las Casas



Trail of Tears painting



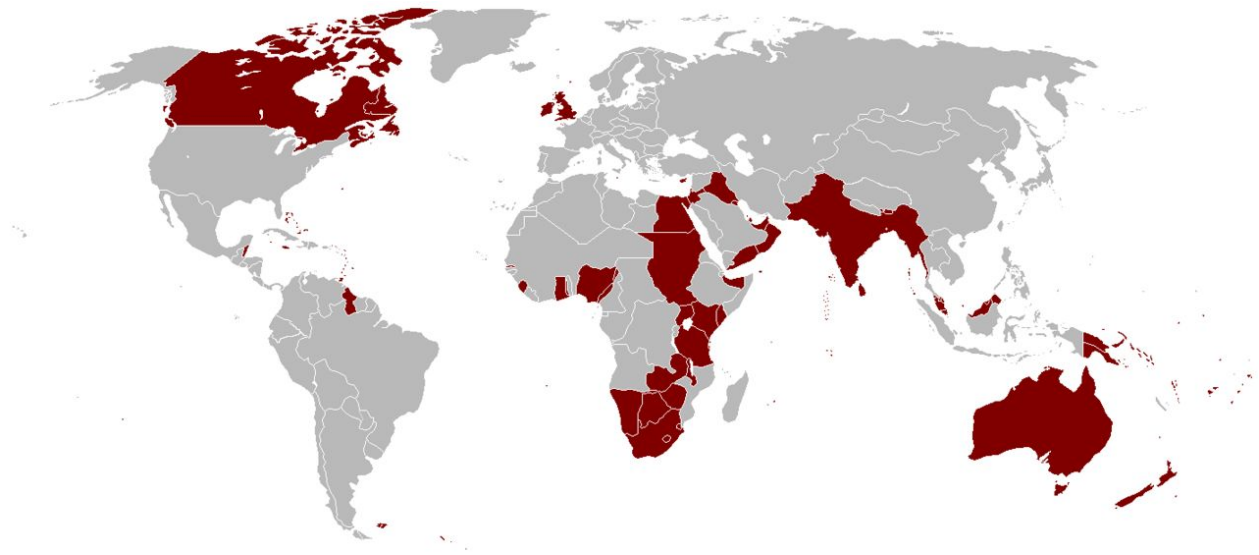
*Truganini*



*Herero survivors*



*Bengal famine*



*British Empire map*



*Banda Islands*



*Algiers*



*Frantz Fanon*



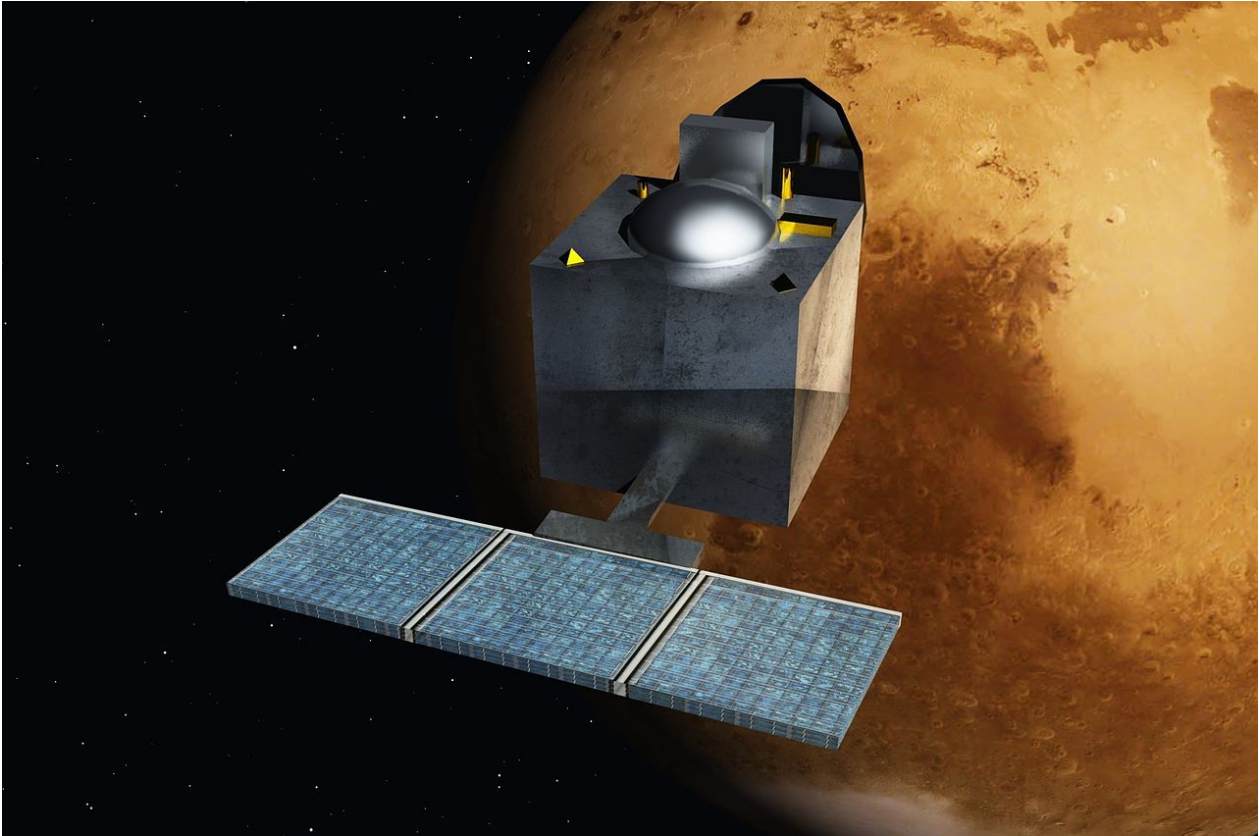
*Edward Said*



*IMF headquarters*



*Lagos skyline*



*India Mars mission*



*The Obamas*



*Textbooks*

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# *XIX*

## **What To Do**

[silencedhistory.org/action](https://silencedhistory.org/action)

This is the page that, on most websites about historical injustice, becomes a list of slogans. We have tried to make it something else. The recommendations below are deliberately small, deliberately concrete, and deliberately addressed to different positions in the system. If you find none of them apply to you, you are probably not looking carefully enough.



*Civil rights marchers walking from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, March 1965*

01

## As an individual

- →Read writers from the countries your country has harmed. Start with Fanon, Said, Rodney, Davis, Cabral, Galeano, Achebe, Adichie, Olusoga.
- →When you find yourself surprised that a person from a Global South country is excellent at their job — interrogate the surprise. It is the racism speaking.
- →Stop using 'developing' and 'developed' uncritically. The honest words are 'over-exploited' and 'over-exploiting.'
- →Refuse the charity frame. Solidarity is not pity. The person you are 'helping' is not a project.
- →Support repatriation of looted objects in your local museum. Write to the curators. Make it expensive to keep them.

02

## As a parent or teacher

- →Find out what the official curriculum skips. Teach it anyway.
- →Replace 'discovery' with 'invasion.' Replace 'civilizing mission' with 'extraction regime.' Words decide what is thinkable.
- →Make sure the heroes in your house and your classroom are not all from the same continent.
- →Take children to the parts of your city's history that the official tour skips — the docks, the warehouses, the streets named after slavers.

03

## As a worker or institution

- →Find out where your employer's founding capital came from. Most pre-1900 European and American institutions of any size have a slavery or colonial chapter. Ask publicly.
- →Push for hiring, promotion and supplier-diversity practices that survive contact with reality, not just HR slide decks.
- →If you work in publishing, media, academia or culture: stop asking writers from the Global South to explain their existence to a Western audience. Pay them to write what they want to write.
- →If you work in finance, ask why your firm's risk models systematically downgrade entire countries.

04

## As a citizen of a former colonial power

- →Support political parties and candidates that take reparations, debt cancellation, and the return of looted objects seriously. Make it an issue at elections.
- →Support visa and asylum policies that do not treat people from formerly colonized countries as a security threat by default.
- →Refuse the argument that your country 'cannot afford' reparations. Your country can afford whatever it decides is a priority. Wars, bank bailouts, monarchies and Olympic Games all happen on the same budget.
- →Tell the truth about your own history out loud, in public, repeatedly, even when it is unwelcome — especially when it is unwelcome.

05

## As a citizen of a formerly colonized country

- →Refuse the framing that your country must prove itself to a Western audience to be considered modern. You owe them no audition.

- →Support local writers, local archives, local universities, local journalism. The cultural memory cannot be outsourced.
- →Build economic relationships horizontally — South to South — that do not run through Northern intermediaries.
- →Demand the return of what was taken. Loudly. Patiently. Without apology.

An open letter

## A call to our white Western friends.

This page is written to you, specifically. Not to attack you. To recruit you.

If you are white, and Western, and you have made it this far into the archive without closing the tab, you are already not the problem we are most worried about. The people we need you to reach are the ones who would have closed it on page one — your father at dinner, your colleague on Slack, the uncle at the wedding, the friend who is "just asking questions," the well-meaning liberal who agrees in principle and changes the subject in practice. That conversation is yours. We cannot have it for you, and a stranger from Lagos or Lahore cannot have it for you either. The messenger matters.

### What actually works

38. 01Lead with their values, not yours.If they care about the rule of law, talk about treaties broken. If they care about free markets, talk about extraction, tariffs, and stolen patents. If they care about family, talk about families separated by partition, by deportation, by the slave ship. Meet them where their conscience already lives.
39. 02Use their own history.The Irish under the British. The Boers in British camps. The Highland Clearances. The Holocaust. Most Western families have, somewhere, been on the receiving end of an empire. Find that thread and pull on it before asking them to see anyone else's.
40. 03Refuse the word 'guilt'.Guilt is a trap. It freezes people, and a frozen person changes nothing. Talk about responsibility instead — what one does next, not what one feels now. Nobody alive today started the Atlantic slave trade. Everybody alive today decides whether it keeps paying dividends.
41. 04Name one specific fact, not a worldview.'The British took £45 trillion out of India between 1765 and 1938' is harder to dismiss than 'colonialism was bad.' One concrete number, one verifiable atrocity, one quotable line from a colonial official — that does more work than an hour of abstraction.
42. 05Don't argue to win. Argue to plant.Most people do not change their minds in the conversation. They change them three weeks later, alone, when the fact you mentioned will not leave them alone. Plant the fact. Walk away. Let it grow.
43. 06Refuse the 'but what about' detour.'But what about African slave traders / Arab slavers / tribal warfare / Mugabe?' These are not arguments; they are exits. Answer once, briefly, honestly — yes, those happened, and none of them built the global order we live inside today — and return to the original point. Do not let the conversation be steered into a maze.

44. 07Name the present, not just the past. Most resistance collapses the moment empire is filed under 'history.' Bring it forward: the CFA franc this year, the Chagossians this year, the cobalt in their phone this year, the IMF conditionalities this year. The past is easier to admit when it is not over.

45. 08Use the mirror, gently. Ask: 'If a foreign power did to your country what your country did to theirs, for three hundred years, what would you be owed?' Most people answer honestly when the question is turned around. Then sit with the answer.

46. 09Refuse the comfort of exception. 'My family came after.' 'My ancestors were poor too.' 'I personally did nothing.' All true, all irrelevant to whether the wealth, the institutions, the borders, and the passport you inherited were built on someone else's bones. Inheritance does not require participation.

47. 10Be patient with the slow ones. Not with the cruel ones. Distinguish the person who is uninformed from the person who knows and enjoys it. The first deserves a long conversation. The second deserves a short one and a closed door.

## What does not work

- ✕ Calling them racist in the opening sentence. Even when accurate, it ends the conversation before it begins.
- ✕ Performing your own enlightenment. They can smell it, and it makes you the subject of the conversation instead of the history.
- ✕ Sharing a 90-minute documentary. Send a paragraph. They will read a paragraph.
- ✕ Arguing on their preferred platform at their preferred volume. The comment section is not where minds move.
- ✕ Demanding apology before discussion. Apology is the end of the road, not the entrance.

## A note on courage

The cost of speaking is real. You will lose dinner invitations. A WhatsApp group will go quiet. A colleague will start cc'ing your manager. This is a small tax compared with what the people in these pages paid, and continue to pay, for being born on the wrong side of a border drawn by someone who never visited. Pay it anyway. The people most useful to empire have always been the ones who agreed in private and stayed quiet in public.

You are not asked to be heroic. You are asked to stop being convenient.

Take it further

## A weekly cadence — small enough to keep, big enough to count

59. 01One fact, one roomEach week, drop one concrete, sourced fact from this archive into one conversation where it does not belong. The dinner table. The group chat. The team standup. Plant and walk away.

60. 02One pound, one causeSet up a small standing order — £5, €5, \$5 a month — to a frontline group: Survival International, the Chagossian Voices, Forensic Architecture, the Equal Justice Initiative, a local Indigenous land trust. The amount is symbolic. The standing order is not.

61. 03One letter, one museumOnce a quarter, write to one trustee, MP, museum board or university chancellor about one specific looted object, one named historical claim, one ongoing extraction. Real post, signed name. The volume of mail on these files is currently almost nothing — your single letter moves the dial more than you think.

*"Decolonisation is not a metaphor."*

## A closing note.

A site like this can only do one thing: make it harder to keep pretending. It cannot raise the dead. It cannot return the stolen libraries. It cannot uncut the severed hands of the Congo or unstarve the children of Bengal. What it can do is stand in the way of the next polite, well-funded, museum-quality version of forgetting.

The descendants of empire do not need to feel guilty. Guilt is a private emotion and a poor substitute for action. What they need to do is account, repair, and step aside from the long habit of considering themselves the protagonist of everyone else's story.

The rest of the world has been waiting a very long time for the conversation to finally start on honest terms. It is starting. Slowly. Now.

Thank you for reading the whole archive. Now share it.

Begin again from the top.

← [Return to the Manifesto](#)

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**AFTERWORD**

# The archive continues online

This volume is necessarily a snapshot. The live archive at *silencedhistory.org* is updated as new sources surface and new chapters are written. If this book has been useful, share it; if it has been wrong, write to us. The work of unsilencing is not finished, and was never going to be the work of any single book.

— The editors, [silencedhistory.org](https://silencedhistory.org)