

© 2014 Pearson Education, Inc. or its affiliate(s). All rights reserved.



What was decolonized between 1945 and 1990? What did decolonization actually change?

If we only view decolonization as a historical event (or series of events) that involved a shift in political control, we can largely say that decolonization is over. In most of the world, political authority has been transferred from imperial powers to local governments. There are places where formal or *de facto* empire lingers – the US in Puerto Rico, Britain in the Falkland Islands, and France in Martinique and Guadeloupe, for example. But these are exceptions, when considered in global perspective. One might also argue that new kinds of formal colonial rule have emerged, like China in Tibet, Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, or Russia in Ukraine, for example. But these, too, are exception to the general pattern in the world's political order, and ones that are sometimes critiqued as violations of that order.

On the other hand, if we view decolonization as a process of unraveling the legacies of colonialism, many scholars, politicians, and activists argue that there is a lot of work to do. We can start this discussion, then, by moving beyond political sovereignty to ask what elements of colonialism are still widespread and powerful in the world today.

## ECONOMIC NEO-COLONIALISM

## CULTURAL COLONIZATION

DECOLONIZING THE CURRICULUM

## CONCLUSION

## Economic Neo-colonialism

One influential argument is the idea that the global economy continues to be dominated by a small group of powerful nations – former colonizers – that use their clout to dominate others, in particular former colonies. As evidence, scholars and activists point to the fact that the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, on which many smaller nations rely for funding and loans, are dominated by Europe and the United States. The terms for loans and support are therefore dictated by former imperial powers. Similarly, most big corporations doing business in the former colonies are managed by businesspeople in the US, Europe, and Japan and most of their shareholders are in these regions.

This picture is complicated now by the rise of China. Formerly a country that was more of an informal colony than anything else, China is today a global economic superpower whose government and corporations are deeply invested in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, and elsewhere. People in many of these regions are currently debating among themselves whether China is a fair partner or just a new imperial power. India, too, has moved from being a colony to being an economic powerhouse today.

## Key Terms:

Neo-Colonialism

---

Postcolonialism

---

Curricular  
Decolonization

*World Bank Headquarters in  
Washington, D.C., 2011*





# Cultural Colonialism

Gayatri Chakravorty  
Spivak, 2007

Another place to look is by exploring postcolonialism, a body of thought that (despite its name) argues that colonialism is still around. Many of the principal theorists in this area are people who grew up in colonies or former colonies – like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (from India), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (from Kenya), Franz Fanon (from Martinique), and Edward Said (from Palestine), among others. These scholars have argued that colonialism still exists.



In particular, postcolonial theorists argue that systems of hierarchy, difference, and inequality that characterized colonialism are still very present. They argue that imperial ideas (or ideas from imperial societies, especially in Europe) still dominate the world, and are even resurgent. These include racism and eugenics, for instance.

But they also argue that colonial ideas can be found in ideas about science, in how people must dress to get jobs and who gets those jobs, in where important institutions including the United Nations and World Bank are located, and even in what gets taught in history classes.

Among the important ideas among these scholars is the observation that colonialism “colonizes the mind”, and that merely changing governments doesn’t liberate people from the ideas and beliefs they were taught. For example, most books published in Africa are still published in English or French (or sometimes Arabic), and these are still seen by many as higher-value or more civilized languages than people’s everyday languages!



Robert E. Lee Monument in Richmond, Virginia  
following protests against racial inequality





## Decolonizing the Curriculum

---

Finally, many anti-colonial activists and educators have pointed out that colonialism is implicit in what gets taught and how it is taught. Everywhere in the world, the school and university model is largely based on what Europeans were practicing when they were imperial powers. The very disciplines – history, anthropology, even biology and engineering – are based on a European system of organization. Even the rules of what constitutes ‘evidence’ were developed from these models.

Moreover, much of the academic power is based in the US, Europe, and Japan. The largest and most influential African Studies association in the world is not in Africa. It is in the United States. More books on the history of Southeast Asia are published in the US and Europe, by US and Europe-based scholars, than in Southeast Asia itself.

How can we move past this hierarchy and disparity? Recently, some scholars have begun to call for a ‘decolonization of the curriculum’. There are various ideas as to what this might mean, but Professor Meera Sabaratnam, at the University of London, argues that such a move would require three transformations.

- First, helping students to interrogate assumptions about how the world is or was. Decolonization does not call for abandoning certain ideas or languages, but rather problematizing them. What does it mean when we talk about “primitive societies” or “primitive civilizations,” and to whom do we apply these terms? What do students learn from this?
- Second, considering who we refer to as experts. Who do we see as people of authority and knowledge? Is it usually the same type of people? Or a diverse community? And can students see themselves or people like them as experts?
- Finally, asking whether the professors are thinking of their students and their needs? Are our lesson plans culturally relevant to them? Are faculty helping students understand the world today, including the origins of the inequalities that exist all around us? And are they helping students move from learning a new topic in class to meaningfully contributing to the world beyond the classroom?

# Conclusion

---

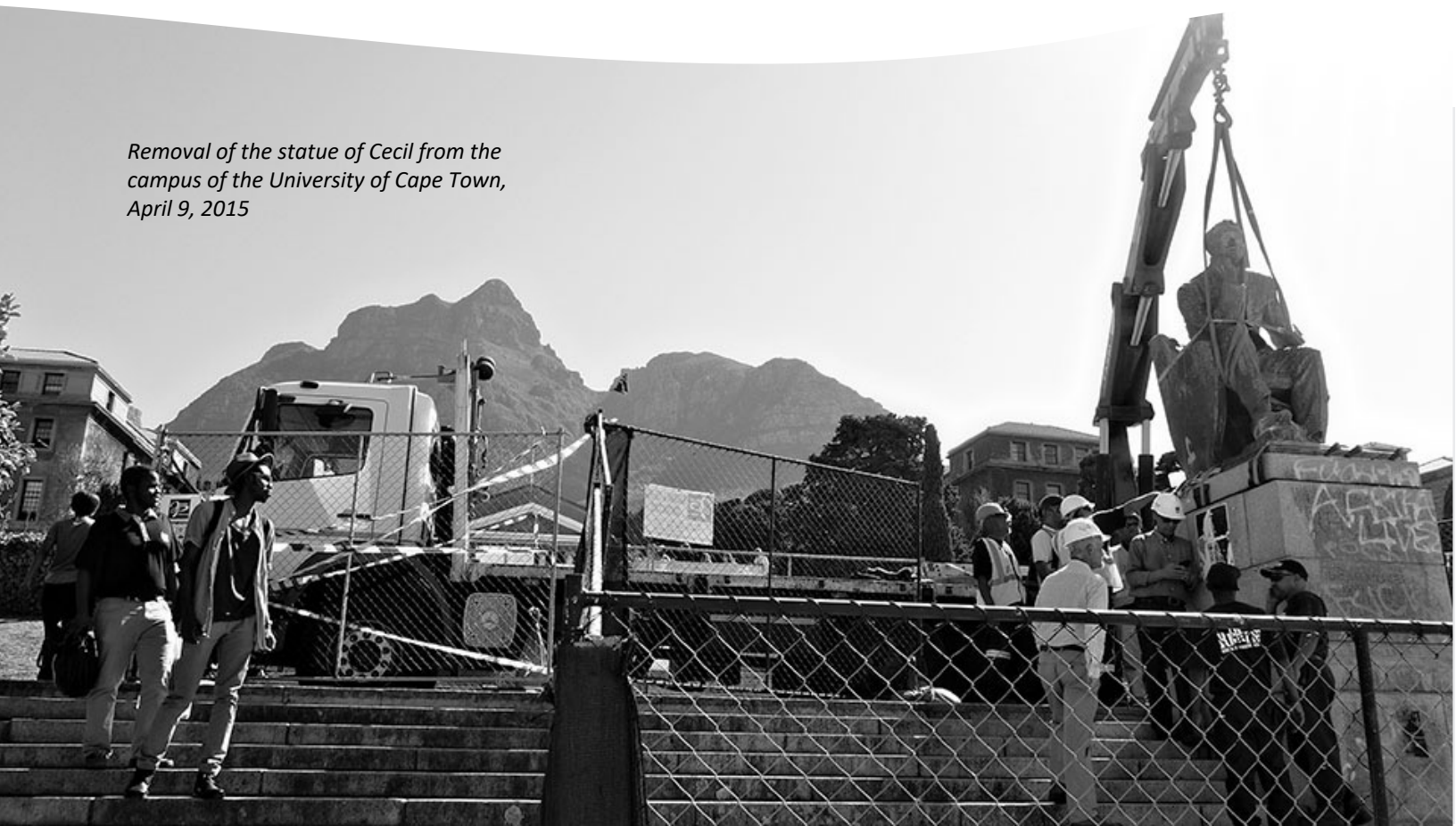
The arguments for a continuing decolonization outlined in this reading deserve our attention, although there are also critics of all of them. There are some who still argue that these views risk abandoning some powerful ideas that could also prove capable of helping to solve global problems as well.

Nevertheless, asking these questions provides an opportunity to reflect on the past more deeply, and to make visible the legacies of colonialism that may still be present around us today. Moreover, they offer us opportunities to reflect on how we ourselves might contribute to unraveling them.

Reflecting on the arguments outlined in this reading and what you have learned about colonialism and decolonization throughout this module, consider the following questions:

- In what ways might you see the legacies of the colonial era around you today, and what might it look like for those to change?
- What do you see as the most mature, respectful, and equitable responses to postcolonialism as it pertains to your own life?
- Finally, how might learning the history of colonialism and decolonization help you make some decisions about your own place in the world today?

*Removal of the statue of Cecil from the campus of the University of Cape Town, April 9, 2015*



# Further Reading

Arday, Jason and Heidi Safia Mirza. *Dismantling Race in Higher Education: Racism, Whiteness and Decolonising the Academy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox. 60th Anniversary Edition. New York: Grove Press, 2021.

Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ wa. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: James Currey, 1986.

Langan, Mark. *Neo-Colonialism and the Poverty of 'Development' in Africa*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Moncrieffe, Marlon Lee. *Decolonising the History Curriculum: Euro-centrism and Primary Schooling*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

Nkrumah, Kwame. *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism*. London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Random House, 1978.

Stiglitz, Joseph. *Globalization and its Discontents*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003.

Uzoigwe, Godfrey N. "Neocolonialism Is Dead: Long Live Neocolonialism." *Journal of Global South Studies*, 36, no. 1 (2019): 59-87.

# Image Citations:

## Page 1:

World map of of countries that have gained independence from the United Kingdom, CC: BY SA, Llywelyn2000,  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:List\\_of\\_countries\\_gained\\_independence\\_from\\_the\\_UK\\_Flag\\_version\\_3.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:List_of_countries_gained_independence_from_the_UK_Flag_version_3.svg)

## Page 2:

World Bank Headquarters in Washington, D.C., 2011, CC: BY NC ND 2.0, Deborah W. Campos/World Bank,  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/worldbank/5613972773>

## Page 3:

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak at Goldsmiths College, University of London, 2007, CC: BY SA, Shih-Lun Chang,  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Gayatri\\_Chakravorty\\_Spivak\\_at\\_Goldsmiths\\_College.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Gayatri_Chakravorty_Spivak_at_Goldsmiths_College.jpg)  
Robert E. Lee Monument after the George Floyd Protests, July 1, 2020, CC: SA BY, Mk17b,  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Defaced-lee-statue-2020.jpg>

## Page 4:

Library, Public Domain,  
<https://pxhere.com/en/photo/706593>

## Page 5:

Removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes from the campus of the University of Cape Town, 9 April 2015, CC: SA BY, Desmond Bowles,  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:-RMF\\_Statue\\_Removal\\_04\\_Desmond\\_Bowles.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:-RMF_Statue_Removal_04_Desmond_Bowles.jpg)