

Choosing Modules: Risks and Rewards

Annotated Bibliography

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Introduction

The historical profession in the UK is tackling questions of how we teach history and who teaches it. This bibliography aims to help history students look ‘under the hood’ of the profession, by surveying recent conversations about how we teach and study colonialism and slavery, how we incorporate diverse new histories into our curriculum, and how we can build more supportive and inclusive history departments.

Equality, diversity and inclusivity in the UK historical profession

The Royal Historical Society is the main UK learned society for historians and advocates for historical research, education and teaching in the UK.

As university history departments build increasingly global, diverse curriculums, the Royal Historical Society has commissioned a series of studies and reports reflecting on the profession’s own limited diversity and structural inequalities. For new university students, these reports are a key window into ongoing conversations about the profession’s engagement with inequalities.

The Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History: A Report and Resource for Change (2018), together with a recent *Update* report published in June 2024, set out data on inequalities in the employment, equal rights and treatment, and curriculum provision, affecting Black, Asian and other Global Majority

historians, histories and students in UK universities. The data emphasized the underrepresentation of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students and staff in UK university history programmes and the significant racial bias and discrimination experienced by BME historians. Two Roadmaps (2019 and 2020) set out practical steps for addressing this inequality and discrimination. The 2024 *Update*'s statistics showed an increase in UK BME students studying history, but more limited growth in BME history academic staff numbers.

The Royal Historical Society also undertook two surveys on gender and sexuality equalities in UK history departments: *Promoting Gender Equality in UK History: A Second Report and Recommendations for Good Practice* (2018) and *LGBT+ Histories and Historians* (2020). The Gender Equality report found evidence of widespread gender-based discrimination, including in academic hiring and workloads. The report argued for gender-aware recruitment and mentoring, gender-neutral language, transparent workload allocation and policy training. The LGBT+ research evidenced common experiences of harassment and discrimination in UK universities, as well as underrepresentation of LGBT+ histories in teaching provision. The report outlined steps that staff and students can take to improve working and studying conditions in departments and to expand the current curriculum with examples of good practice.

Teaching race, slavery and colonialism

You may have noticed discussion of historical 'wars' in the UK and internationally about how historians, universities, museums and schools teach and represent histories of slavery, empire and race. British history has been shaped by the legacies of imperialism, the slave trade, migration and race, and reckoning with these historical legacies is central to contemporary political questions on, for example, migrant rights, social inequality and foreign policy. Historians have engaged in sustained discussions about how to teach and research these heavily scrutinized issues.

Amanda Behm, Christienna Fryar, Emma Hunter, Elisabeth Leake, Su Lil Lewis and Sarah Miller-Davenport, 'Decolonizing History: Enquiry and Practice', *History Workshop Journal*, 89 (2020), pp. 169–91.

This conversation between six professional historians explores the contested meanings of the term 'decolonization'. Calls for decolonizing the history curriculum are growing, but it is often unclear what this actually means. Is it enough to diversify reading lists? Or do historians need to rethink what we teach more fundamentally, including centring histories of race and empire within histories of Britain? Do we need to decolonize the structures of history departments and ways of researching to make this possible? This

conversation between a diverse group of lecturers reflects on the ways that we might more fundamentally engage with questions of empire, race and globalization.

Catherine Hall, 'Doing Reparatory History: Bringing "Race" and Slavery Home', *Race & Class*, 60:1 (2018), pp. 3–21.

A leading figure in the field, Hall reflects on these wider national conversations about the legacies of slavery and colonialism to ask: can historical work repair the damages of past wrongs? She uses the bicentenary of the British abolition of the slave trade in 2007, and the national debates that were sparked by its commemoration, to explore how historical memory and national mythologies are contested and how British historians can work to address deep historical injustices even while being beneficiaries of the legacies of slavery and colonialism. Hall argues that history-writing can be one way of challenging deeply embedded historical assumptions that, for many politicians and members of the public, justify the disavowal and strategic ignorance of past injustice.

Approaches to teaching and learning in emerging historical fields

Many historians are reflecting on how we can work with students, archives and museums to remake curriculums and build access to diverse histories together. This can include rethinking search terms, catalogue entries and museum labels, designing tours and routes through collections that highlight hidden histories, and redesigning course content. All of these connected projects are practical efforts at building diverse, representative, anti-racist and anticolonial history education, and students often play a crucial role in shaping these projects.

Ruth Mather, 'Teaching on a Moving Train: Curriculum Bias & Radical Curriculum Change', *History Workshop Online Magazine*, 22 June 2015.

In this blog, Mather reflects on a collaborative curriculum-rewriting project with A-level history students in response to sustained student criticism of the sidelining of women's history in the curriculum. Students debated why the curriculum had been designed with systemic underrepresentation of women, barring a few queens and the suffragettes. The students designed new lesson plans that drew together histories of gender, class and ethnicity. Mather argues that these co-designed models demonstrate how addressing curriculum bias isn't about just 'adding and stirring' new topics but about supporting students to question and analyse power structures in history and within their own education.

Claire Holliss, '20th Century Queer History in the Archives and the Curriculum', *History Workshop Online Magazine*, 25 May 2022.

Holliss, Head of History at a sixth-form college, reflects on her experience of reworking A-level coursework to centre on women, Black British communities and LGBT+ people. In this magazine article, Holliss explains how she designed the coursework to integrate key local archives that allow her students to engage with BME, trans, queer and women's histories of organizing and activism. She uses the example of the Hall-Carpenter Archive on LGBTQ+ rights activism to demonstrate the possibilities for students in writing coursework on marginalized histories. This article demonstrates new A-level teaching strategies and showcases the ways that archives of marginalized communities can help students to think critically about how and why they study history.

Joseph Dumit, 'Writing the Implosion: Teaching the World One Thing at a Time', *Cultural Anthropology*, 29:2 (2014), pp. 334–62.

This reflective commentary from a multidisciplinary lecturer digs at a core question: why do we want to stick to 'comfortable' ways of thinking? How do we confront studying a violent world and deal with the huge amount of information and emotions that this involves? Dumit sets us an 'implosion project' as an exercise in thinking through the messy ways we analyse the world. He suggests taking an object, process, or fact, and analysing how it exists both in the world and in history: How was it produced? How has it travelled? Who knows about it, and who doesn't know? Where in the world does it appear and how, and who claims ownership over it? Dumit shows how this exercise develops student research projects on histories of knowledge.

Conclusion

Historians have always grappled with the question of what to research and teach, and how to research and teach it. In recent years, following the Black Lives Matter and the Rhodes Must Fall movements, this work has taken on political and social urgency and has often generated public controversy. At the same time, professional historical work is changing fast: many UK university departments are facing cuts to programmes and staff, while US higher education institutions are under sustained attack from the Trump administration. In both these countries, these pressures will likely challenge what history gets taught and researched, and who is able to access historical education at university.