

Year 8: The British Empire: why do people disagree about it so much today?

1. Key Words:

Empire: An 'empire' is a group of countries ruled over by a single monarch or ruling power.

Triangular Trade – the way goods and people (slaves) were traded across the Atlantic during the British Empire.

Colonisation – the process of taking over and ruling another country.

Slavery: a system where people are forced to work without pay and are owned as property by another person.

Infrastructure – the basic structures and facilities needed to operate efficiently, for example, roads, railways and bridges.

Interpretations – viewpoints of historians, which are based on evidence. These may come to different conclusions about their topic of investigation.

Sepoys – Indian foot soldiers that fought as part of the British Empire in India.

Parliamentary democracy – the system of voting and representation in Britain, which was exported around the world during the British Empire.

Migration- the movement of people to a new area or country in search of better living conditions or work.

Imperialism- the idea that Britain should increase its power throughout the world by colonising areas around the world.

Scramble for Africa: the race by European powers to colonise Africa, 1880-1914.

Benin: a kingdom in West Africa (now part of modern day Nigeria) known for its rich artistic culture and wealth, it became part of the British Empire in 1897.

Abolition: the campaign to end slavery.

East India Company: a private company granted rights by Queen Elizabeth I to trade goods such as spices, cotton and indigo. Its success meant that it informally controlled modern day India between 1757 and 1858.

The Commonwealth: formed in 1949, this is an organisation consisting of 52 countries that were previously part of the British Empire. Some members, for example, Australia and Canada continue to have the Queen as their head of state and commit to shared values of democracy, freedom of speech and rule of law.

2. Key People:

Adam Smith: 18th century Scottish economist and philosopher, famous for his book *The Wealth of Nations*. He supported the campaign to abolish slavery in the British Empire because he believed that free people were happier and therefore more economically productive.

Olaudah Equiano: born in modern day Nigeria and enslaved in childhood, Equiano was a key figure in the abolitionist movement in Britain in the 1780s.

Mahatma Gandhi: an Indian activist who was the leader of the Indian independence movement against British colonial rule. Employing nonviolent civil disobedience, Gandhi led India to independence and inspired movements for civil rights and freedom across the world.

Cecil Rhodes: British businessman and politician in South Africa, focused on expanding British interests in the Scramble for Africa. His statues are currently the focus of the recent “Rhodes must Fall” campaign at Oxford University.

William Wilberforce: British politician, philanthropist, and a leader of the movement to abolish the slave trade.



3. Timeline of the British Empire.

1600
Formation of the East India Company.

1607
The first permanent English colony in America is established at Jamestown.

1775-1783
The American War of Independence.

1801
Act of Union unites Britain and Ireland.

1833
Abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire.

1839-42
Opium Wars between Britain and China.

1947
India achieves independence from Britain.

1956-1966
British colonies in Africa gain their independence.

1997
Hong Kong is handed back to China.