

Decolonising arts brands — what it means and why you need to do it

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The copy in the notes sections of this handout has been written by Elma Glasgow, with contributions from the National Trust, Bristol Old Vic and Rambert (please note that edits have been made to their content to hit the required word count for the notes sections).

Elma Glasgow

Decolonising Arts Brands

What it means & why you need to do it

Trigger warning





Agenda

- 1 About me.
- 2 Decolonisation explained.
- 3 Why decolonise & why do it now?
- 4 Case studies.
- 5 First steps to decolonising your brand.



About me

- Consultant.
- Award-winning Power of Stories changed my life.
- Award for engagement work.
- Sit on two boards.
- Hon Commander, RAF Mildenhall.
- PR & comms background.
- Based in Suffolk
- Current projects: Arts, culture and business.



Elmaglasgowconsulting.com
Aspireblacksuffolk.org.uk

I'm Elma Glasgow, an award-winning consultant for inclusive engagement, communications and storytelling. I work on research, exhibitions, communications strategy, interviews and more.

My background is media and PR, but that largely changed in 2020 when I became involved in a nationally acclaimed and award-winning exhibition called Power of Stories by Ipswich Museums. I ran the community engagement initiative which went on to become my community interest company Aspire Black Suffolk. The exhibition featured original costumes from Marvel Studios' first Black Panther movie, historic museum objects, art and comic books.

Both the exhibition and engagement set standards in the national museum sector for its decolonised practices – the outcomes included a record in museum footfall (24,000) and attracted the museum's most diverse audience ever. More information is on the next slide.

I sit on the Norfolk and Suffolk Culture Board and the board for Ipswich Central (a business improvement district).

I'm an Honorary Commander for RAF Mildenhall, which is about developing community relationships with the air base, where 10,000 American service people are based.

I'm currently working for business organisations on an exhibition and an engagement project, and with arts organisations on inclusive events and diverse community engagement.



Power of Stories tour

3 venues, 11 months

20,00 people reached.

Feedback included:

“Loud, proud and relevant...”

“...about damn time”.

Both the Ipswich exhibition and the engagement activity were so successful that I went on to work with the Association for Suffolk Museums, local museums and Marvel to tour Power of Stories around Suffolk – it went to three more locations including the prestigious Snape Maltings ran by the charity Britten Pears Arts. We reached another 20,000 people.

The project provided a platform for previously oppressed stories from the Black community and other cultures to be shared publicly.

The tour was also very positive:

- Some events (e.g. a free event at Snape Maltings) were much more highly attended than usual by Black audiences or those of mixed ethnicity.
- Feedback from audiences was upbeat, welcomed inclusion and was dominated by issues of personal identity.
- Young people’s involvement was considered highly successful.
- A survey was carried out at Snape, and although the sample was small, there was a difference between Black and white visitors’ responses: Black audiences gave an average score of 94%. Black people felt a celebration of heritage, connection and excellence.
- Feedback included: ***“Loud, proud and relevant”*** and ***“about damn time”***.



Montgreenan Mansion, Ayrshire

My heritage

Descended from a white Scottish slave and plantation owner and a Black woman.

Sir Robert Glasgow.

Woman's name is unknown.

I would like to offer a little background to my heritage as it's connected to the topic of decolonisation. My family research so far has revealed:

My ancestors were enslaved African people. At one point, probably at the height of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, a woman had children with Sir Robert Glasgow – a Scottish plantation owner and slave owner in St Vincent. According to research, I'm their descendent. I've traced records back to him and his Scottish family, but as yet I have found no official records for the Black woman who had his children.

This gap in my history is likely a result of colonialism. Also, lots of records related to the Transatlantic Slave Trade were destroyed or lost. Plus the lack of information reflects attitudes regarding what was deemed to be valuable and what or who was not.

Society still lives by such values, with colonialism defining what/ who is 'normal'. In other words, who holds power and who is marginalised.

Decolonisation work may one day enable people like me to more easily find their Black and enslaved ancestors.



“*This history is not your fault. But it is absolutely your responsibility.*”

– Nikki Sanchez, Indigenous Media Maker, TEDX Speaker, Environmental Educator and Author

I use this quote when talking about decolonisation because the subject brings with it a lot of guilt and shame.

But negativity only serves to hinder progress. I hope this quote is empowering while holding on to the gravity of the issue. Also, this history is *everyone's* responsibility – it's what we do with it from now on that matters.

So, let's bear this quote mind as you read this handout.



Colston Statue, currently in storage in Bristol.

Decolonisation explained

Process of recognising, challenging and dismantling colonial frameworks, values, taboos and perspectives.

In this context, decolonisation means: the process of recognising, challenging and dismantling colonial frameworks, values, taboos and perspectives. It aims to correct a narrow colonial mindset which impacts everyone, the economy and the environment and create a more equitable society and community cohesion (all historically marginalised groups are affected by colonialism).

This work goes beyond the brand – after all, everything you do and say is your brand nowadays.

Examples of the colonial mindset:

- Stereotypes, e.g. Black people are aggressive.
- Extractive behaviour, e.g. the occupation and cultivation of land while ignoring local values; and expecting minority communities to share cultural knowledge for free.
- Higher salaries for men.
- Company boards that are dominated by one type of person, resulting in similar decisions and outcomes.
- First Nation peoples' social structures are ignored and oppressed.
- Minority culture and history is only taught and celebrated in a tokenistic way, e.g. only during Black History Month.
- Branding which lends itself to Colonial times.
- Racist imagery.
- Use of colonial language, e.g. 'Oriental', 'Far East', 'native' or 'nitty gritty'.



Why decolonise the arts?

- Rooted in Transatlantic Slave Trade.
- Comparable to WWII Holocaust.
- Moral duty. Set better standards.
- Huge educational influence on society.
- Has power to heal divisions.
- Risk looking irrelevant due to non-diverse audiences.

There are economic and ethical reasons to decolonise the Arts:

- Much of the British Arts sector is built – literally in many cases – on the money generated by the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Where the heritage sector is now sharing these links, the Arts is yet to begin doing this in earnest.
- The Arts plays a significant role in influencing attitudes, be that on a local, regional, national or global level. It's ideally positioned to help society become more compassionate and equitable.
- Decolonisation will help make the Arts more accessible to marginalised groups, e.g. people of the global majority, working class people, and disabled people. This can support society's wellbeing as a whole and heal divisions.
- Without decolonisation, the reputation of any type of brand risks being negatively impacted as audiences are more tuned into injustice and inequality nowadays.
- The graphic on the slide is from an event pioneered in New York in 2019, where a theatre performance is dedicated to audiences who identify as Black.



Why now?

- Rapid changes in social values.
- Young people leading change.
- BLM & Covid accelerated change.
- Audiences rejecting traditional views.
- High profile arts brands are stepping up.
- Colonialism is linked to climate change.
- Multi-ethnic consumers have £4.5bn disposable income (Black Pounds Report '22).
- 2.5m households are mixed ethnicity (ONS Census, 2021).

- Economically, it's important to be more equitable in your marketing and other areas of work: multi-ethnic consumers in the UK have £4.5bn to spend (Black Pound Report '22);
- The UK's demographic is changing: 2.5 million households identify as mixed ethnicity (ONS, 2021 census), and expect to be represented in the Arts and by brands.
- Increasingly funding organisations and investors want to support organisations which can demonstrate meaningful, equitable practices.
- There is growing competition from arts organisations led by people of colour and other minority groups.




RAMBERT



**BRISTOL
OLD VIC**



Case studies



RAMBERT

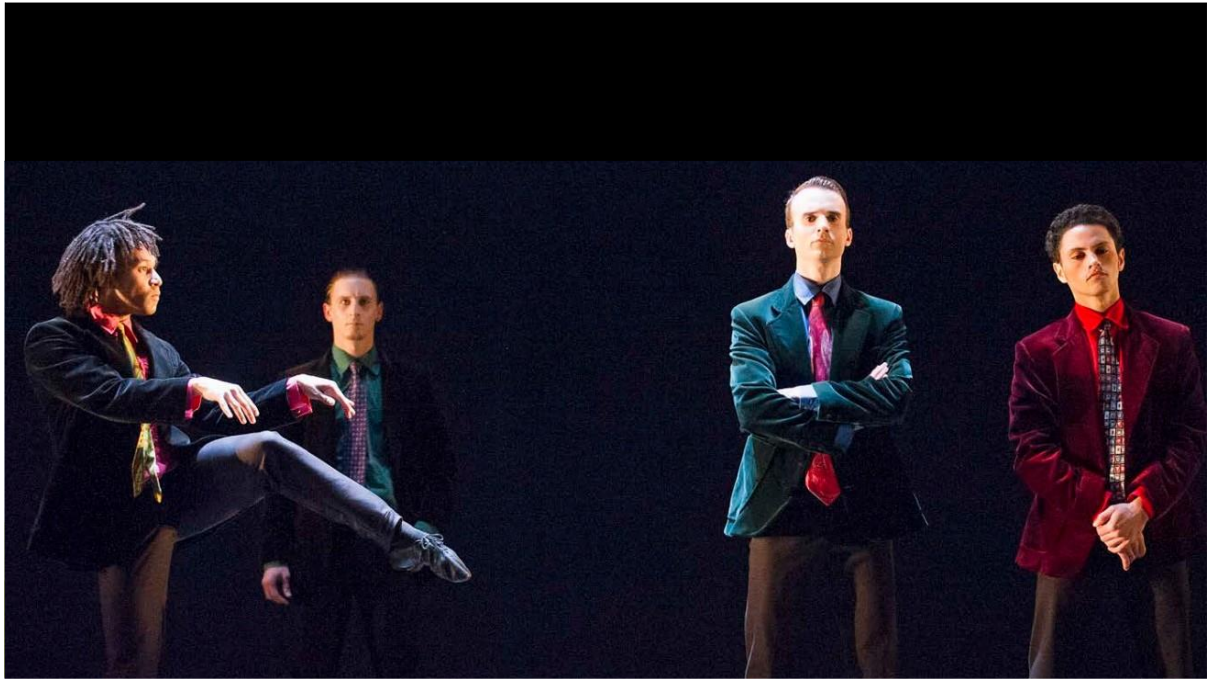
New GCSE and A Level Dance resource packs for teachers and students.

A Linha Curva and Rooster.

Rambert is at the heart of GCSE and A Level Dance yet they recognised there are some things that are problematic about works from their past repertoire that are on the syllabus. They want to ensure they are inspiring, engaging and relevant to everyone.

To address this issue, last year Rambert set up Learning Hubs – bringing together alternative forms of expertise – to help them create new resources. These were two half days where they convened academics, teachers, community leaders, former dancers and Rambert staff. They were facilitated by experts outside the organisation, including Elma Glasgow.

Helen Shute and Benoit Swan Pouffer, the Chief Executive and Artistic Director, deliberately chose not to be in the sessions because they didn't want to inadvertently influence or inhibit the conversations with their presence and input but they had someone there to take notes so they could listen, reflect and consider how to move forward armed with contributions and insights.



Focusing on *A Linha Curva*, *Ghost Dances* and *Rooster*, they watched extracts, looked at materials from the Rambert archive (photographs, programmes, press and marketing materials) and at existing study notes.

They had lengthy discussions which focused on the most effective ways of broadening the context for students who might come to study it, especially those with protected characteristics under the 2010 Equality Act.

The new resources – put together by a range of brilliant and daring voices and not the usual gatekeepers – weave in PHSE discussion points to support teachers to facilitate conversations. They saw this as a great opportunity to empower teachers to explore these issues while studying these works.



**National
Trust**

Pioneering decolonisation 2020 report:
'Connections between Colonialism and
Properties now in the Care of the
National Trust Houses with links to the
Transatlantic Slave Trade'.

Dyrham Park in Gloucestershire.

In 2020, the National Trust published pioneering research which examined links with their houses and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

'Connections between Colonialism and Properties now in the Care of the National Trust' has attracted a great deal of respect as well as opposition. But it's been a powerful catalyst for decolonisation in the heritage sector.

Dyrham Park in Gloucestershire has a long history and many connections to the British Empire and colonialism. The connections can particularly be seen in the activities of three families: the Wynters, the Poveys and the Blathways.

Together, their stories cover 100 years of imperial ambitions, from the early Transatlantic Slave Trade to the foundations of a colonial empire. The National Trust is sharing the property's colonial history through its collection and exhibitions.

An exhibition in 2021, '**Colonial Dyrham**' explored the property's connections with colonialism. It looked at its global connections and showcased contemporary responses to these histories through words, music, images and poetry. It also created a space where visitors could share their reflections. It was part of a partnership with the University of Leicester called 'Colonial Countryside', which aimed to teach people about the colonial connections of properties like Dyrham Park.



'A view of the port of Bridgetown, Barbados with extensive shipping'

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BRISTOL OLD VIC

Decolonisation activity at Bristol's Old Vic.
Most recent project: A Monumental Task (AMT).

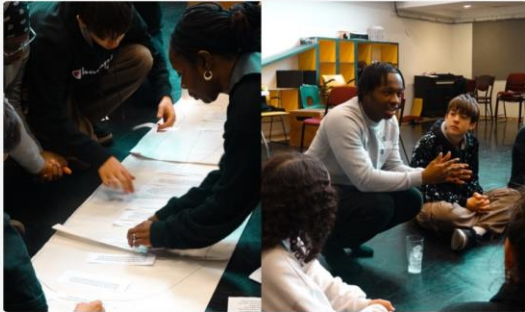
Bristol Old Vic's 257-year-old theatre has a colonial past. It was built in 1766 at a time when Bristol was financially benefitting from the Transatlantic Slave Trade and was funded in part by people who were directly and indirectly benefiting from the transportation of enslaved African people.

Since 2017 Bristol Old Vic has been working towards understanding what that means for them and their place in the city they serve. The Heritage work helps the organisation to accept that this is the space they operate in and while the building roots them in a place, they are now building pathways into the city.

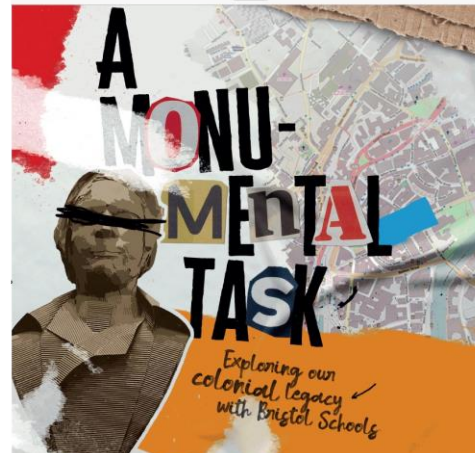
In 2021, the organisation received funding from the Heritage Fund for a three-year project titled Unscripted. The principle aim of the project is to work with historic collections in an unprecedented way, taking historic materials out of an archive and placing them in their original context to inspire performative work and equip participants with the skills to share their own stories. They recruited a full-time Heritage Manager to deliver this project.

The theatre has been developing its practices and using non-traditional approaches, e.g. community co-creation, understanding how to engage with new audience, exploring decolonial performance such as removing the hierarchical structure between audience and the stage.

PRESS RELEASE




BRISTOL OLD VIC LAUNCHES EXHIBITION OF MAJOR PROJECT WITH BRISTOL SCHOOLS ON THE 'STATUE DEBATE'



Running until the end of this year, **A Monumental Task (AMT)** is an exhibition and schools project, which explores how Bristol comes to terms with its colonial past particularly focused around the Colston Statue toppling that created a lot of national attention and was a contentious issue in the Bristol community and also within families between generations.

The organisation wanted to provide an opportunity for young people to explore their own thoughts about the recent events and find ways to understand the range of feeling on the subject. AMT has also provided new democratic performance practices, taking theatre off stage and into the community and used for purpose.



First steps


- ▶ Research your history.
- ▶ Tell stories with authenticity.
- ▶ Embed across all areas...
- ▶ Creative practices.
- ▶ Supply chain.
- ▶ Marketing.
- ▶ Staff recruitment/ development.
- ▶ Community engagement.

Now, spend some time brainstorming ideas for your organisation's first steps in decolonisation.


Remember, this long-term work, which will probably be inherited by future employees for many years. There are hundreds of years of structure to change, after all and goes much deeper than what we consider to be 'branding'.

So, forgive yourself for feeling daunted or overwhelmed.

This slide offers suggestions of areas of work for you to consider in your brainstorming.



Workshop



Downloadable worksheet for Android

Idea for activity, e.g. Inclusive performance for global majority people.
Tactics, e.g. reduce ticket prices, offer free tickets, publicise at grass roots level, engage with communities.
What success looks like, e.g. more diverse audiences in the long term.
Barriers/ risks, e.g. bad press.
Delivery date, e.g. Spring 2024

Download the worksheet via the QR code or create worksheet based on this table on this slide.

Resources

- aspireblacksuffolk.org.uk
- elmaglasgowconsulting.com
- blackoutnite.com
- creativeequitytoolkit.org
- runnymedetrust.org/blog
- incartsunlock.co.uk
- backlight.uk/black-pound-report
- conciouadnetwork.com
- adassoc.org.uk/BRiM

Finally, here is a list of online resources.

Also, explore some of the activity happening in the museum sector – the Museum Association is worth following. I think you'll find it inspiring.

Any questions?

Contact me:

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www.elmaglasgowconsulting.com

www.aspireblacksuffolk.org.uk



I offer consultancy, audits, strategy development and coaching for inclusive marketing, communications and storytelling. Please follow me on LinkedIn, sign up to my newsletter or drop me an email.