



Asking Britain To Apologise For Its Empire Is Lunacy

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Emily Thornberry's call for Theresa May to apologise for Britain's "historic wrongs" has caused bemusement here in Australia and doubtless other Commonwealth countries.

What exactly is it that the shadow foreign secretary is ashamed of? The British Empire gave the citizens of Commonwealth countries law and order, democracy, honest government and free trade. It suppressed slavery, internal warfare and a plethora of barbaric practices.

The British Empire gave its citizens the opportunity to travel and trade. It gave them education and employment. It promoted freedom of speech, freedom of religion and equality before the law. Britain helped save the world from fascists and hyper-nationalist domination.

It is lunacy to hold people responsible for the crimes of their ancestors. Should the Italians apologise for having invaded England in Roman times? Should the French apologise for 1066? Will Ms Thornberry apologise to all Ulster Catholics for the wrongs committed by her Protestant



ancestors who took part in the anti-Catholic “Plantation of Ulster” push in the 1600s?

What is driving this mea culpa mania? It seems to be a combination of ideas, beliefs and fears which are manifesting themselves in a pathological and ultimately self-destructive aversion to and rejection of the positive aspects of British Empire and western civilisation. Until as recently as the 1960s, academia saw the Empire as one that had committed crimes and was flawed, but in general was well meaning and a force for good. Now, the opposite view has become the unquestioned orthodoxy.

Rarely, if ever, do historians acknowledge that western civilisation has done more than any other to relieve the plight of the poor and oppressed. There is moral revulsion at the very idea of one culture being seen as better than another. Averse to the capitalism associated with the Empire, they also appear to be exponents of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s theory of the “noble savage”, whose perfect existence in a paradisiacal state was corrupted by civilisation and private ownership.

Perhaps Ms Thornberry should reconsider her vocation entirely if she is so ashamed of the institutions of which she is a part.

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