



## Push To Change Council Name Conflates Past With The Present

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Moreland City Council's decision to [change its name](#) after it discovered links to a Jamaican sugar plantation of the same name that employed slaves in the 18th century is part of a broader movement of decolonisation sweeping across the West.

Proponents of decolonisation believe that racism is endemic in Western societies today, and that this racism derives from the same "white supremacy" that was used to justify the enslavement of black people in the 17th and 18th century.



For those who are demanding decolonisation, colonialism is much more than a historical wrong from which we can learn and progress. Instead, it is an enduring and pervasive feature of the present, which is retarding true equality, still causing pain to the colonised and preventing the equal distribution of power. They are conflating the past and the present, behaving as if colonisation is a contemporary problem of immense urgency that must be resolved before society can be truly just.

In the past few years, decolonisation has manifested in attacks on statues across Britain, the US and Australia under the banner of Black Lives Matter and similar social justice groups. Mobs have taken to the streets to persecute stone and metal for the real and imagined sins of racism of those so depicted. In Sydney's Hyde Park, the statue of Captain Cook briefly had its own mounted horse guard to protect it from activists.

Last week, the statue of [Thomas Jefferson was banished](#) from New York City Hall. It does not matter that he penned the words, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Facts are irrelevant to this movement, which chooses emotion and superstition over reason, caprice over common sense, and barbarism over civilisation.

Decolonisation also reveals itself in feverish attempts to rename places. It is extraordinary that no one in Moreland had been bothered in the slightest about the name, even though the connection to the sugar plantation had already been established.



Police guard a statue of Captain James Cook in Hyde Park during protests in 2020. CREDIT: DOMINIC LORRIMER

This is a masterclass in virtue signalling from some members of Moreland City Council, who clearly believe that they are morally superior to the “racist” men and women of the British Empire. They are suggesting that if we continue to use the name Moreland, we are as equally racist and guilty as our predecessors. We are being unjustly compared to slave-owning colonials who lived and died some 300 years ago.

Perhaps the council needs to be reminded that while it is true that the British did follow Arabs and Africans into the slave trade, they were also the first to leave it, and with it the hideous racism behind it. Mayor Mark Riley and his fellow councillors should remember that the British Empire made history by being the first major power to abolish the slave trade and slavery in the name of the Christian notion that all human races are equal in the eyes of God.



Decolonisation is the wrong relationship to have with our history. One of the problems with how the progressive left approaches the past is that it views it solely through the narrow lens of identity politics, deliberately choosing to ignore the complexity of history as a series of events, some good, some bad, some that are struggles for freedom and some that are struggles for progress.

Naturally, the fixation on race and gender requires that we develop a blind spot about everything else, such as the fact that while the Scottish surgeon Dr Farquhar McCrae's father might have owned a Jamaican plantation called "Moreland", McCrae emigrated to Australia, where he devoted his life to tending to the sick. Instead of condemning McCrae as a racist, Riley and his fellow councillors should be thanking him for the service he rendered to fellow human beings.

They should also be thanking Farquhar McCrae for their jobs because if it were not for him, there would be no Moreland City Council over which to preside. As direct beneficiaries of his investment in the area, they should be doing their level best to preserve and improve it on behalf of the ratepayers who elected them.

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