

### Exploring Decolonization

The idea of “decolonizing” has been the subject of much recent scholarship and discussion on a global level. This issue of Multicultural Moments examines and gives examples of decolonization, presenting new efforts at Montgomery College to explore decolonization.



#### What is Decolonization?

- Decolonization is the “process by which colonies become independent of the colonizing country” ([Britannica Encyclopedia](#)). Based on this definition, the focus of decolonization is the lives and freedom of the formerly colonized Indigenous people. In their 2012 work, “[Decolonization is Not a Metaphor](#),” Tuck and Yang argue that decolonization is “not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools.” Instead, decolonization should lead to the “repatriation of Indigenous land and life.” This argument distinguishes decolonization from other initiatives (such as Culturally Responsive Teaching, antiracism training, and diversity programs) designed to promote equity and social justice.
- In a 2020 *New York Times* opinion piece, “[Colonialism Made the Modern World, Time to Remake It](#),” Adom Getachew explains that “acknowledging that colonial history shapes the current inequalities and hierarchies that structure the world” is the first step in decolonization, which sets the stage for the next phase: “reparations and restitution.” You can access the [full article](#) using your Montgomery College M#.
- The video, “[What is Decolonisation?](#)” (ExchangeHE, 2020), presents the following four points about decolonization as summarized by Distinguished Professor Lesley Le Grange of Stellenbosch University in South Africa:
  - There is more than one definition of decolonization.
  - Decolonization does not have to be destructive; it can be creative.
  - Decolonization is a process, not a single event.
  - Decolonization does not mean returning to a time when the world was different.

**Global Decolonization Movements.** Decolonization has a global history that reaches back centuries.

- The Council of Foreign Relations presents a chapter called “How Did Decolonization Reshape the World?” that includes a timeline of decolonization by nation from the end of WWII through the 21<sup>st</sup> century. You can view [this timeline](#) and learn about how some nations rebuilt after colonization.
- Students at the University of Cape Town in South Africa sparked the **Rhodes Must Fall** movement in 2015. Targeting the statue of Cecil Rhodes, [a controversial British businessman](#) whose influence as Prime Minister of the Cape Colony made way for policies that eventually led to apartheid, was symbolic of the movement that challenged the lingering inequalities in higher education and society post-apartheid. The movement spread to other South African universities and [eventually reached](#)

[Oxford](#) in England. Read more about the origins of the movement in the 2015 NPR interview [Why South African Students Say the Statue of Rhodes Must Fall](#).

- In Australia, [protestors challenge the narrative](#) around “Australia Day,” which celebrates the arrival of British sailors to start a penal colony in 1788. Instead, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons march to mark “Invasion Day” or “Day of Mourning,” rallying against the celebration of when their land was taken and their people abused.
- In the U.S., removal of statues has been one aspect of the decolonization movement; however, other movements have focused on land repatriation. After decades of protests and pressure, the return of more than 1,000 acres of redwood forest to the Esselen tribe in California and a bison range to the Salish and Kootenai tribes in Montana are two examples of land repatriation. A 2021 *Yale Environment 360* article, [How Returning Land to Native Tribes is Helping to Protect Nature](#), describes these efforts and their impact on the environment.

**Operationalizing Decolonization in Higher Education.** Dismantling colonial structures is a significant endeavor and a complex task, and much higher education institutions have been working to understand and address the goal of decolonization within their own structures.

- In a 2019 blog post, [“Do Not Decolonize If You Are Not Decolonizing.”](#) Nayantara Sheoran Appleton (2019), Senior Lecturer at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand, cautions institutions against using the term “decolonize” if they are not engaging in “any real structural changes.” She offers the following alternatives to describe meaningful work that does not reach the level of decolonizing:
  - Diversify the syllabus and curriculum
  - Digress from the canon
  - Decentre knowledge and knowledge production
  - Devalue hierarchies
  - Disinvest from citational power structures
  - Diminish some voices and opinions in meetings while magnifying others
- In 2020-2021, Villanova University hosted a six-month series on Decolonizing History. The series featured panel discussions with experts from a range of disciplines offering perspectives on six topics: *Decolonizing the Curriculum, Decolonizing Land, Decolonizing the Church, Decolonizing Empire and Decolonization, Decolonizing Art, and Decolonizing COVID-19*. [You can view recordings of these panels here](#).

Montgomery College received a Maryland Open-Source Textbook (M.O.S.T.) grant to explore decolonization at Montgomery College. Faculty and staff can participate in a series of workshops to contribute ideas to how we operationalize decolonization at MC. The content and ideas from these workshops will be used to create an Open Education Resource (OER) in the form of a Pressbook. [Read more information and sign up for the workshops here](#).

*May we avoid blaming or bias based on our circumstance and continue to be grateful for the gifts of the global community.*

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