



What people think,
feel and do

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Opinium

Black History Month – Legacy of the Slave Trade Report



Key findings

9 December 2020

Project details

PROJECT NUMBER	OP15584
PROJECT NAME	Black History Month – Legacy of the Slave Trade Report
CLIENT COMPANY NAME	Opinium
SAMPLE	2,000 nationally representative UK adults (18+) 750 nationally representative ethnic minorities (18+)
FIELDWORK DATES	16th - 21st of October 2020

Introduction

During Black History Month 2020, Opinium launched a study asking questions on the following four broad subject areas to the British public:

1. Attitudes towards Black History Month and teaching about Black History in schools.
2. Perceptions of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) UK movement.
3. Understanding contemporary takes on patriotism, and what it means to be a patriot in 2020.
- 4. Discussing the legacy of the slave trade in UK cities, with a particular focus on statues.**

This report will speak about the legacy of the slave trade in UK cities.

The study was asked to a nationally representative audience of 2,000 UK adults.

The study was also asked to a nationally representative sample of 750 ethnic minorities to ensure we have robust numbers of responses from ethnic minority groups to compare and contrast with the national level data.

Both the nationally representative data and the specific ethnic minority data will be used in this report.

Summary of key findings

- Over two thirds of Brits (**69%**) believe statues with connections to the slave trade should remain on public display
- The key reason for wanting these statues to remain on display is because removing them would erase an important part of history that cannot be changed (**65%**)
- Brits are less likely to support the removal of statues at home (only **33%** supported the removal of Edward Colston in Bristol), but are more likely to advocate removal of controversial statues/symbols abroad (**49%** supported the removal of John Hamilton in New Zealand)
- Only a third of Brits (**35%**) were aware of the vast amounts of compensation that were paid to slave owners following the abolition of slavery, and those unaware are more likely to be older
- Only three in ten Brits (**29%**) support reparations for the descendants of slaves, although this increases to **66%** for black and mixed race black and white people

What to do with all these statues?

Over two thirds of Brits believe statues with connections to the slave trade should remain on public display

The legacies of slavery can still be found in the street names, organisations and monuments in our cities and there has much debate about what should happen to these landmarks (e.g. statues, buildings) that are linked to prominent slave trade figures.

We asked UK adults what should be done with statues that embody figures with well known connections to the slave trade. Over two thirds (69%) of Brits said the statues should remain, and this decreases to 49% of black respondents.

For one in five (21%) Brits, these statues should remain where they are, on display, untouched. However, just under half of Brits (48%) say these statues should remain where they are, but with plaques added that tells the whole complex history of the statue from a neutral standpoint.

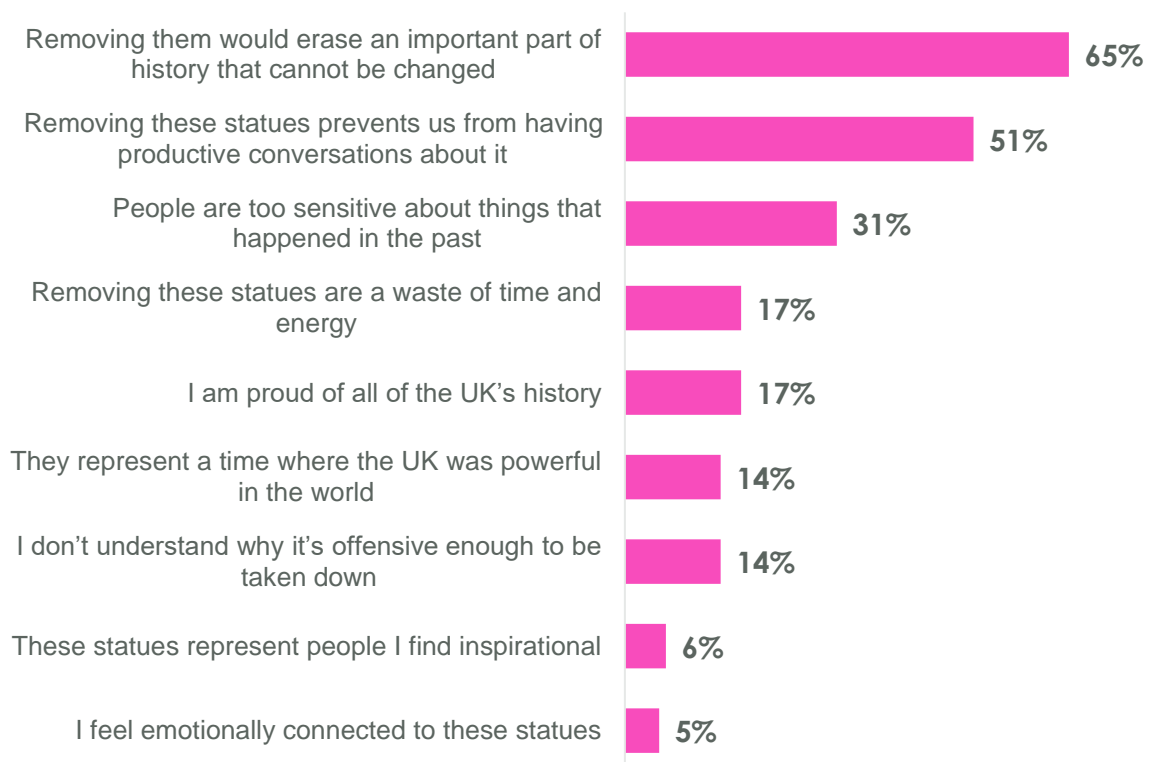
Those more likely to want the statues to remain are more likely to be older, age 55 or older (79%), compared to those who're middle aged 35-54 (67%) and those who are younger 18-34 (57%). Although we should note it is significant that well over half of all age groups would like statues to remain.

For those against removing statues, there are three key reasons that shape their stance. Firstly, removing them would erase an important part of history that cannot be changed (65%). Secondly removing these statues might prevent us from having productive conversations around these controversial figures (51%). Finally, almost a third (31%) simply believe people are too sensitive about things that happened in the past.

Interestingly, women are more likely to want statues to remain because removing them would erase history that cannot be changed (72% women Vs 59% men), and because it would also remove some opportunities to have productive conversations about the past (56% women Vs 46% men). On the other hand men are more likely to want the statues to stay because they believe people are too sensitive to the events of the past (27% women Vs 35% men) and because they are proud of all of the UK's history (12% women Vs 21% men).

The chart below shows the full breakdown of this question at total level:

Why should statues with connections to the slave trade remain on public display?



Base: all who want statues to remain (n=1,376)

Comparing statues and symbols home and abroad

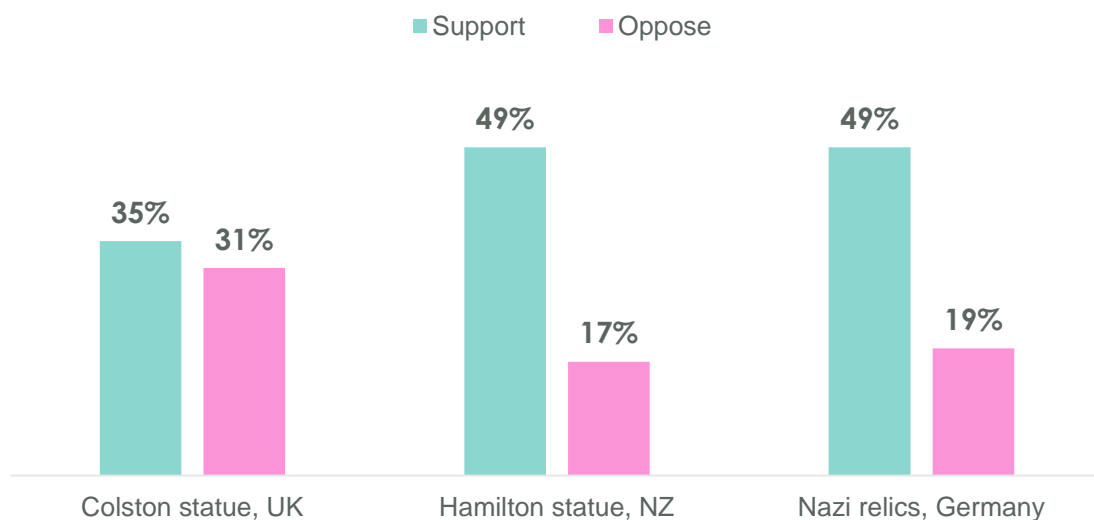
Brits are less likely to support the removal of statues at home, but are more likely to advocate removal of controversial statues/symbols abroad

Within the study we asked to what extent Brits supported or opposed the removal of statues/symbols, using an example of Edward Colston, who was famously toppled this summer in Bristol; John Hamilton, who’s statue was removed in Hamilton, New Zealand in 2020; and also using a wider example of Nazi relics and idols being removed completely from public display in Germany following WW2.

Brits are much less likely to support the removal of the Colston statue in Bristol (35% support), whereas half supported the removal of Hamilton in New Zealand and the complete ban of showing Nazi relics in public in Germany (both 49% support removal).

The chart below shows the support and oppose levels per example.

Do you support or oppose the removal of the following from public display?



Base: all respondents (n=2,000)

The fact that Brits are likely to support the removal of the Hamilton statue in New Zealand, a man who committed similar colonial atrocities across the world, like Colston, begs the question why so many more oppose the removal of the Colston statue in the UK, while supporting the removal of Hamilton statue in New Zealand.

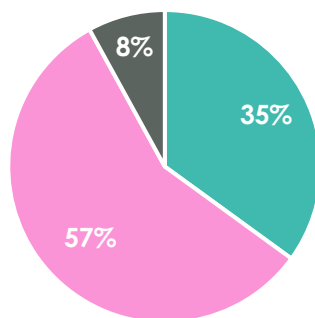
This discrepancy highlights the fact many Brits can see why such statues, like that of Hamilton, should be removed *in principle*, based on how we now evaluate in the 21st century the lives and actions of notable figures from colonial times, and as we re-evaluate how fit they are for public commemoration. Although, when we apply the same logic to a domestic statue like that of Colston, there is a much stronger resistance to removing the statue - this indicates that the emotional connection to statues in the UK is greater than the connection to statues in general (e.g. those found abroad). The *principle* of knowing the public display is wrong, is therefore trumped by this emotional connection and patriotic sentiment that is attached to the British statues of colonial era figures.

Slavery compensation and reparations

Only a third of Brits were aware of the vast amounts of compensation that were paid to slave owners following the abolition of slavey

When slavery was abolished in the UK in 1834, British slave owners received money worth billions of pounds today from the government for the 'loss' of their enslaved 'property'. This was called 'slavery compensation' and it took until 2015 for Britain to pay the debt off to former slave and plantation owners.

Only a third of Brits (35%) were aware this even happened, rising to 44% of black respondents, while a significant proportion (57%) were unaware and 8% were unsure. Those more likely to be unaware at those who are older (64% of those aged 55+). The chart below shows the full breakdown:



Awareness of compensation paid to slave owners

- Aware
- Unaware
- Unsure

Base: all respondents (n=2,000)

We also asked respondents to reflect on whether actioning this compensation for slave owners was the right thing for the government to do. Three in five (60%) said no, paying this compensation to slave owners was the wrong thing to do, and a quarter (26%) said yes, it was the right thing to do. Over two thirds (69%) of black respondents said this was the wrong thing to do.

Only three in ten support reparations for the descendants of slaves

Finally, we asked how likely Brits were to support financial reparations being given to the descendants of slaves - broadly speaking, this would involve compensation to descendants of slaves for injustices their ancestors faced and any inherited generational inequality that passed down as a result of their enslavement.

Only three in ten (29%) supported this measure, while over a third (36%) opposed the measure and a third were neutral or did not know (35%). The level of opposition rises steeply with age. Only 15% of 18-34s oppose reparations, while 35% of 35-54s oppose it, and 53% of those aged 55+ oppose it.

Black and mixed race black and white respondents are most likely to support these reparations (66%).



About Opinium

OPINIUM is an award winning strategic insight agency built on the belief that in a world of uncertainty and complexity, success depends on the ability to stay on pulse of what people **think, feel** and **do**. Creative and inquisitive, we are passionate about empowering our clients to make the decisions that matter. We work with organisations to define and overcome strategic challenges – helping them to get to grips with the world in which their brands operate. We use the right approach and methodology to deliver robust insights, strategic counsel and targeted recommendations that generate change and positive outcomes.

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