



Decolonising Imperial Heroes: Cultural legacies of the British and French Empires

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The heroes of the British and French empires stood at the vanguard of the vibrant cultures of imperialism that emerged in Europe in the second-half of the nineteenth century. Their stories are well known. Scholars have tended to assume that figures such as Livingstone and Gordon, or Marchand and Brazza, vanished rapidly at the end of empire.

Yet imperial heroes did not disappear after 1945, as British and French flags were lowered around the world. On the contrary, their reputations underwent a variety of metamorphoses in both the former metropolises and the former colonies. This book develops a framework to understand the complex legacies of decolonisation, both political and cultural, through the case study of imperial heroes. We demonstrate that the ‘decolonisation’ of imperial heroes was a much more complex and protracted process than the political retreat from empire, and that it is still an ongoing phenomenon, even half a century after the world has ceased to be ‘painted in red’.

Whilst *Decolonising Imperial Heroes* explores the appeal of the explorers, humanitarians and missionaries whose stories could be told without reference to violence against colonized peoples, it also analyses the persistence of imperial heroes as sites of political dispute in the former metropolises. Demonstrating that the work of remembrance was increasingly carried out by diverse, fragmented groups of non-state actors, in a process we call ‘the privatisation of heroes’, the book reveals the surprising rejuvenation of imperial heroes in former colonies, both in nation-building narratives and as heritage sites. This book was originally published as a special issue of the *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*.

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