# New research and controversy reshape Stonehenge’s origins in school history debates



The ongoing debate surrounding the historical narrative of Stonehenge has recently intensified, particularly in educational contexts where controversial interpretations are gaining traction. A book titled “Brilliant Black British History,” authored by Nigerian-born British writer Atinuke, asserts that Britain was predominantly black for over 7,000 years before the arrival of white populations. This claim includes the provocative statement that the iconic monument, Stonehenge, was constructed by black Britons. Marketed as essential reading for school libraries, the book has found its way into classrooms across the country, despite its assertions being deemed "hotly contested" by various historians and educational experts.

The Policy Exchange think-tank's investigation indicates a broader trend in British education influenced by the Black Lives Matter movement. Following the unrest of 2020, many schools revised their curricula to incorporate more diverse perspectives. While the intent is to enrich students' understanding of history, the think tank warns that this shift has led to the presentation of radical interpretations as established fact. According to their findings, 83% of secondary schools have modified their history programmes to promote ‘decolonisation’ efforts. The think tank noted, “In some cases this had a positive effect, exposing students to varied and knowledge-rich studies… However, in too many cases this process has gone too far.”

Research from the University of Ferrara aligns with the claims made in Atinuke's book to some extent. This study, based on the analysis of ancient genomes, indicates that a majority of early Europeans, including those living in Britain during the time Stonehenge was erected, likely had darker skin. This finding challenges the conventional view of the timeline regarding the evolution of skin pigmentation across Europe and suggests a complex demographic heritage for the builders of the stone monument. As documented, approximately 92% of Europeans during the Paleolithic period presented with dark skin tones, hinting that the simplistic categorisation of ancient populations by modern racial identities may be misleading.

Further scrutiny, however, highlights the limitations of linking modern racial identities to ancient builders. For instance, some studies have put forward the idea that the individuals responsible for constructing Stonehenge had diverse origins within Britain. Analyses of ancient remains unearthed in the vicinity have shown significant isotopic variations, suggesting these individuals came from different regions, particularly west Wales, where the bluestones used in the monument's construction originated. Such findings illustrate the complexities of estimating the ethnic backgrounds of historical figures based solely on contemporary race concepts.

Additionally, the debate invites scrutiny over whether the emphasis on inclusivity in the educational narratives is overshadowing crucial aspects of British history. Alarmingly few students learn about pivotal military victories, with reports indicating that less than 10% of pupils are exposed to significant events like the Battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo. Critics argue that while enhancing the curriculum to be more inclusive is essential, it must not come at the expense of a well-rounded historical education that encompasses essential national and global narratives.

Ultimately, the discussions about the builders of Stonehenge, while illuminating in terms of race and history, also highlight the challenges faced in modern education. Striking a balance between inclusive historical representation and accurate, evidence-based teaching remains a critical task for educators. As this debate unfolds, it prompts reflection on how history is taught, who narrates it, and what legacies are preserved for future generations.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2056848/stonehenge-row-black-people-monument> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/09/18/stonehenge-built-by-black-britons-childrens-history-book/> - An article from The Telegraph reports that the children's history book 'Brilliant Black British History' by Atinuke claims that Stonehenge was built by black Britons. The book states that Britain was a black country for over 7,000 years before white people arrived, and during that time, the most famous British monument, Stonehenge, was constructed. The book is marketed as a 'must-have in any school library' and is used in schools nationwide. The Policy Exchange think-tank has contested this claim, stating that it is outside mainstream historical thinking and presented as fact.
3. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/ancient-britons-stonehenge-dark-skin-study-b2708600.html> - An article from The Independent discusses a study by the University of Ferrara in Italy, which suggests that the majority of Europeans living 5,000 years ago, including those who built Stonehenge, likely had dark skin. The study analyzed data from 348 ancient genomes and found that during the Paleolithic period, approximately 92% of Europeans had dark skin. The research challenges previous beliefs about the timing of skin tone changes in Europe and indicates that lighter skin tones became more common as humans migrated to regions with less sunlight.
4. <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/were-the-builders-of-stonehenge-black/> - An article from The Spectator examines recent studies on the pigmentation of ancient Britons who built Stonehenge. The research, conducted by scientists at the University of Ferrara, analyzed ancient DNA from 348 individuals who lived between 45,000 and 1,700 years ago. The study found a gradual shift from dark to lighter skin tones over thousands of years, with most Europeans being darker-skinned during the period when Stonehenge was constructed. The article discusses the implications of these findings on our understanding of ancient populations in Britain.
5. <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2018-08-02-new-light-shed-people-who-built-stonehenge> - A news release from the University of Oxford discusses research that sheds new light on the people who built Stonehenge. The study analyzed cremated human remains from the site and found that at least 10 of the 25 individuals did not live near Stonehenge prior to their death. Instead, their remains showed isotopic signatures consistent with living in western Britain, including west Wales, the known source of Stonehenge's bluestones. This suggests that the builders of Stonehenge had origins in different parts of Britain.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2004/jun/21/britishidentity.georgewright> - An article from The Guardian reports on research that sheds new light on the society that built Stonehenge. Tests on the remains of seven 4,500-year-old skeletons found on Salisbury Plain suggest they almost certainly belonged to the 'band of brothers' that helped erect Stonehenge. The men, whose graves were discovered in Wiltshire, were from south-west Wales, where Stonehenge's bluestones came from. This finding provides insight into the origins of the people involved in constructing the monument.
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/letter-the-stone-circles-of-black-africa-1595187.html> - A letter to The Independent discusses the claim that Stonehenge was built by Berbers, a North African ethnic group. The author argues that cultural similarities, such as the presence of stone circles in Africa, do not necessarily indicate that the builders of Stonehenge were black Africans. The letter questions the assumption that ethnic background is identical based on cultural practices and cautions against labeling Berbers as 'black' solely because they inhabit North Africa.