



# Diversity, 'hidden' histories and the Centenary of the First World War in Britain

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# Context

- Census of England and Wales, 2011: 80.5% of population identified as White British; 59.3% identified as Christian.
- David Cameron, Oct 2012: nothing said about centenary commemorations and relationship to diversity other than death of Walter Tull (25 March 1918).
- Baroness Young of Hornsey, June 2013: asks 'what steps [government] are taking to ensure the contribution of people from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean to British efforts in the First World War is recognised in the forthcoming commemorations?'
- Eric Pickles, Communities Secretary, Nov 2014: commemorations of First World War 'enable communities across the country to honour and take pride in the achievements of the past [and] ensure we can celebrate what makes Britain a great place to live today.'



# Concerns



- A predominately white, male government oversaw a commemorative period for a predominately white, Christian society, of an event that involved more than just white, Christian men (and where experience between white/non-white participants differed enormously)
- Intimate connection between politics and commemoration
- Andrew Mycock (2014): 'multinationality and transnationality have problematised the UK government's aspirations, as asserted by Cameron, for the centenary of the First World War to capture 'our national spirit'.





# Projects

- From Great War to Race Riots (Writing on the Wall with HLF and Centre for Hidden Histories): <https://www.greatwar-to-raceriots.co.uk>
- Trench Brothers (HDMT Music with HLF and Gateways Centre): <http://www.hmdt.org.uk/hmdtmusic/trenchbrothers/>
- Remember Together (British Future and Royal British Legion): <https://www.britishfuture.org/remember-together/>



House of Commons  
Digital, Culture, Media and  
Sport Committee

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## Lessons from the First World War Centenary

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**Thirteenth Report of Session 2017–19**

*Report, together with formal minutes relating  
to the report*

## Evaluation

- 'Diverse representation remained the exception during the centenary'
- 'Focus on ethnic minority soldiers...was still very under-represented elsewhere across the board of commemorative events.'

# Legacy

- CWGC Non-Commemoration Report, 22 April 2021
  - A legacy of the centenary?
  - Or product of contemporary political climate?
- 'Hidden'? 'Forgotten'? 'Marginalised'? What do these terms mean? Which is best?
- Can the inherent tension between collective commemoration and history of exploitation and oppression be overcome?
- What does it mean to remember ethically?

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## 'Pervasive racism' blamed for unequal treatment of black and Asian war casualties

Some were commemorated collectively on memorials, and others who were missing were only recorded in registers, rather than stone.

🕒 Thursday 22 April 2021 18:17, UK



UACHTARÁN NA hÉIREANN  
THE PRESIDENT OF IRELAND



Machnamh  
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