



## “Decolonising Math”: Durham University Asks Professors to Consider the Race of Mathematicians Before Relying on their Work

### Description



We [previously discussed](#) the view of University of Rhode Island and Director of

Graduate Studies of History [Erik Loomis](#) that “Science, statistics, and technology are all inherently racist.” Others have agreed with that view, including denouncing math as [racist](#) or a “[tool of whiteness](#).” Now, as part of its “decolonization” efforts, Durham University is calling on professors in the math department to ask themselves if they’re citing work from “mostly white or male” mathematicians. [According to the Telegraph](#) and [The College Fix](#) a guide instructs faculty that “decolonising the mathematical curriculum means considering the cultural origins of the mathematical concepts, focusses, and notation we most commonly use.” It adds:

“[T]he question of whether we have allowed Western mathematicians to dominate in our discipline is no less relevant than whether we have allowed western authors to dominate the field of literature. It may even be more important, if only because mathematics is rather more central to the advancement of science than is literature.”

Some professors have objected to being asked to consider the race or gender of mathematicians rather than their underlying theories or formulas.

In the Telegraph article, [Exeter University Social Science Professor Doug Stokes](#) is quoted as saying that “[t]he idea behind decolonising maths is that because everyone should be regarded as equal, the status of their beliefs must also be equal.” He denounces that view as “judgmental relativism is an inversion of science that is based on what is real rather than making everybody feel included.”

But all ideas are not equal, particularly math. Some literally do not add up. Math is inherently objective and based on provable tenets or theories. As I discussed earlier, it is a shame to see math treated as a

field of privilege when many of us view it as a field of pure intellectual pursuit and bias neutrality. Either the math is there or it is not. The race of the mathematician will not change the outcome.

The Durham University guide insists that academics need to not only consider what theories to apply but the race of the theoreticians to “decolonize” math. It does not state how a failure to do so will impact on a professor’s retention or advancement at the university.

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