

The British Empire (2'34")

Male Host: First however the legacy & meaning of the British empire. Richard Gott is a man of the left, former *Guardian* journalist, & now historian, whose book *Britain's Empire* is "its history seen from the viewpoint of those invaded by us & who fought back." But we're gonna start inside the blood-soaked, red-coated square where Jeremy Paxman* holds aloft the tattered Union Flag & asks a different question: "What did ruling the world do to the British?" Jeremy, er, it's made us a much more multicultural, mingled country, certainly, & it's probably kept us more militaristic as a society than we'd otherwise be. What'd you single out as the kind of key things that the Empire has done for today's British?

Jeremy Paxman: I think it's had an absolutely profound influence. I think, as you mentioned already, anything that changes the very genetic makeup of a people clearly has a significant impact. I would argue that it's instrumental in the fact that we still have a monarchy, I think it's instrumental in the fact that we still belong to a union (the Scots joined forces with England when their own empire collapsed & bankrupted the country). Er, I would think it would... has serious influence upon the decisions of people like Cameron in Libya, Blair in 6 wars, Margaret Thatcher in several wars, to send... their readiness to send troops onto foreign missions of one kind or another. & we look... just come through the 10th anniversary of Afghanistan. That's the 1st American war in Afghanistan, it is the 3rd British war in Afghanistan – neither of the previous ones being conspicuous successes. So I think it's had a whole range of influences, not the least of them leaving us with the sense that we are somehow special, & that, I think, partly explains why we have such difficulty with the rest of Europe.

Male Host: & does it also mean that we are endlessly confused about who we are, & our own past, veering between a sort of pride in empire that this small collection of islands had such a large splodge of red* across the world versus hideous embarrassment about some of the things we did, & never being quite able to settle between those two poles?

Jeremy Paxman: Well, I think we are very very confused about what our identity is, & whether we should be proud or embarrassed, & there are things that we should be proud of, I would argue – Richard here would disagree, I'm sure! – but er... & there are many things of which we should be ashamed, rightly ashamed. But they... you know, they happened, our country was responsible for them, they happened, we can't deny them, so it does, I think, contribute to a sense of confused identity.

NOTES

* **Jeremy Paxman:** a BBC journalist (see picture below).

* **splodge of red:** idée de la vaste étendue de l'empire britannique, le rouge symbolisant chacun des territoires contrôlés sur les mappemondes + Cf. aussi *red-coated* au début du document, par référence à la couleur de l'uniforme britannique.



