HOW DID BRITAIN'S EMPIRE CHANGE THE LIVES OF KENYAN TEA WORKERS?

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

A new documentary about Kenya's tea plantations has brought attention to the history behind a drink enjoyed around the world. The film focuses on the Kikuyu people, whose farming traditions go back centuries. During British colonial rule, many Kikuyu people were forced off their ancestral land while their labour helped make plantations profitable. The documentary follows workers, activists and families who are still seeking justice and the return of land. It also explores how some of the inequalities created during colonial rule have continued under modern companies and governments. One of the film-makers discovers that her own grandfather was involved in colonial abuse, making the story personal as well as political. Kenya became independent in 1963, but independence did not automatically solve every problem created by colonialism. The film asks viewers to think about how products bought in other countries can be connected to histories of land seizure, forced labour and resistance.

WHY IS THIS INTERESTING?

Tea can seem like an ordinary part of daily life, but its history can involve empire, land loss and exploitation. This story connects the British Empire to the experiences of real families in Kenya. It also shows that independence may end colonial rule without immediately removing every unfair system left behind.

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN

"Why did land become such an important issue in colonial Kenya?"

Source: The Guardian

https://www.theguardian.com/film/2026/sep/28/kikuyu-land-review-kenya-tea