

'The Racial Consequences of Mr Churchill': A Review

Andrew Roberts and Zewditu Gebreyohanes

Foreword by Rt Hon Sir Nicholas Soames



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Foreword

Rt Hon Sir Nicholas Soames

On 11 February, Churchill College, Cambridge, hosted a panel discussion — one of a series — on *The Racial Consequences of Churchill*, at which many factually incorrect, deeply offensive and ignorant remarks were made. This constitutes, in my view, a new low in the current vogue for the denigration in general of British history and of Sir Winston Churchill's memory in particular. This is now sadly quite common. But I never would have expected Churchill College to participate in it.

Nobody, least of all my grandmother, Lady Churchill, who was present with the Duke of Edinburgh at the opening of the Churchill Archives Centre in 1973, could ever have expected this latest trashing of his reputation.

This College, the first one at Cambridge University to be named after a person living at the time of its founding, is the National and Commonwealth Memorial to Sir Winston Churchill and was to be the embodiment of his vision of how higher education can benefit society in the modern age.

When the College was founded by Royal Charter in 1960, its purpose was to focus on science and technology, in particular for postgraduate students. Winston Churchill had been profoundly impressed by his visit to MIT and expressed the hope that a similar organisation could be founded in Britain.

In a 1958 letter to Winston Churchill, US President Eisenhower said “I have just learned of the plan to establish at the University of Cambridge a new college to be named in your honor. It seems to me that no other project could so well commemorate for posterity your contributions to your country, to the British Commonwealth, and to the Western World.” In 1959 Winston Churchill gave a speech explaining his reasons for the foundation of the college in which he said: ‘Since we have neither the massive population, nor the raw materials, nor yet adequate agricultural land to enable us to make our way in the world with ease, we must depend for survival on our brains’.

A national appeal raised the funds to build and endow the College, drawing the support of thousands of British individuals many of whom had fought in the war and many others who greatly respected him, as well as many companies and overseas donors. These included the Ford, Gulbenkian, Rockefeller, and Wolfson Foundations — as well as the Transport and General Workers' Union. To this day, Churchill College is world-renowned for its high standards of scholarship and its emphasis on visiting fellowships which has brought hundreds of distinguished fellows from around the world to the College.

That such an event could be held at this College is thus all the more shocking. Churchill was not perfect — how could anyone whose life spanned the premierships of Benjamin Disraeli through to Harold Wilson

possibly be judged as perfect according to the shifting mores of those very different epochs, let alone by the standards of today? Nonetheless, in the eloquent words of the College's third Master, Sir Hermann Bondi — an Austrian Jew who had fled the Nazis — Churchill was the one man who held barbarism at bay when Civilisation was hanging by a thread.

If there was one academic institution in the world that one would hope and expect would give Churchill a full and fair hearing — rather than give a platform to those who overlook his astonishing contribution to the defeat of the most murderously racist regime in all history — it surely should be Churchill College, Cambridge, named in my Grandfather's honour and now home to his personal papers and one of the world's most important archives. It really seems to me that Churchill College should be defending his remarkable legacy, not allowing pseudo-academic detractors to smear him unchallenged.

I am very worried, given these circumstances, about the direction Churchill College seems to be taking. Above all, that the Master of the College and Governing Body could be facilitating this kind of historical illiteracy is a travesty of what the institution is for; especially given the fact that this conference about history was composed largely of non-historians, as was made clear by the dismal confusion between Aneurin Bevan and Ernest Bevin.

While the Master now states that 'The College believes in the importance of free speech' and that Churchill's 'reputation is best served by exposing it to scrutiny and challenge as well as praise', in practice she restricted free speech by having no-one but Churchill-detractors on the panel, who in the entire 45 minutes did not utter a word of praise. So even under her own slightly vacuous rubric, she failed to stand up for her own stated principles.

The College benefits enormously from Churchill's name. If they traduce it, should they be able to have their cake and eat it?

This excellent paper by Andrew Roberts, the greatest recent biographer of Winston Churchill, and the gifted young researcher Zewditu Gebreyohanes, shows how idiotically sloppy this event was — and how far short it falls of Churchill College's founding ideals. It will, I hope, prevent such an intellectually dishonest event from being organised at Churchill College in the future — and, one might hope, elsewhere.

Introduction

On 11 February 2021, Churchill College, Cambridge – in collaboration with the Churchill Archive Centre, which is part of the College – hosted the second event in its year-long series ‘Churchill, Race and Empire’. It featured a panel discussion entitled ‘The Racial Consequences of Churchill’, during which a series of factually incorrect and profoundly offensive remarks were made by the three panellists – Dr Onyeka Nubia (Nottingham University), Dr Madhusree Mukerjee and Professor Kehinde Andrews (Birmingham City University) – and also by the Chair, Professor Priyamvada Gopal (Churchill College, Cambridge), about Sir Winston Churchill and concerning several major historical events. This paper will analyse and highlight the many historical inaccuracies of the assertions that were made at the conference:

1. On Churchill And The Defeat Of Hitler

All three panellists argued that the importance of Churchill’s role in the victory over Nazi Germany has been vastly inflated, and dismissed him as being of relatively minor importance during the Second World War. Prof. Andrews suggested that Churchill had no effect on the war’s outcome, and premised this conclusion on the fact that Churchill did not physically fight in the front line.

“I mean, was it Churchill out there fighting the war? ’Cause I’m pretty sure it wasn’t; I’m pretty sure he was at home. I’m pretty sure that if Churchill wasn’t there, the war would have still ended in the same way, right?”

It is of course true that Churchill, as the head of the British Government rather than a soldier, did not personally fight, any more than Roosevelt, Truman, Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini or Tojo did. He was 64 years old at the outbreak of the war, far beyond the age eligible for frontline service. If Prof. Andrews was attempting to impugn Churchill’s physical courage, he perhaps ought to consider the five campaigns on four continents where Churchill did see action between 1895 and 1916. Churchill’s physical courage was undoubted, but it was also used as an indictment against him. He was accused of being reckless and irresponsible. Churchill did however travel 110,000 miles outside the United Kingdom between 1940 and 1945, often in unheated, unpressurised aircraft and sometimes under threat of ground or air attack; he went up onto the Air Ministry roof during the London Blitz; he visited the fronts in North Africa, Italy, France and Germany; and wanted to watch D-Day from HMS *Belfast*. This idea was opposed by many and it took King George VI to stop him by insisting that if Churchill went, he would also go.

Prof. Andrews' claim that "If Churchill wasn't there, the war would have still ended in the same way" is also refuted firmly by the historical evidence, including all accounts provided by Churchill's contemporaries. One of the most prominent figures who attested to Churchill's crucial role in winning the war was the Labour leader Clement Attlee, who remarked that:

"Without Churchill, Britain might have been defeated. I do not say we would have been defeated. But we might have been. [...] The absence of anybody of his quality was so blatant that one cannot imagine what would have happened if he had not been there."¹

Attlee posited that Churchill "was the greatest leader in war this country has ever known".² The primary reason he gave for this was that Churchill "was able to solve the problem that democratic countries in total war find crucial and may find fatal: relations between the civil and military leaders".³ This was a problem that neither Asquith nor Lloyd George had been able to solve during the First World War, which was beset by seemingly irreconcilable tension between what Churchill called the 'frock-coats and brass hats'.⁴ Churchill's ability to prevent a repetition of the internal conflicts which had bedevilled the Great War is generally regarded as having enabled the mounting of a cohesive, well-coordinated and ultimately effective response to German aggression.

The views that Attlee expressed about Churchill and about his unparalleled capabilities as a war leader are widely held amongst reputable historians. Given that Attlee – the leader of the Labour Party and an avowed socialist – held beliefs on many political issues of the day beliefs that were diametrically opposed to Churchill's, it is of particular note to historians that he should have offered such praise, especially publicly.⁵ His pronouncement lend weight to the traditional assessment of Churchill as a great war leader and the critical figure in the creation of Western grand strategy in the Second World War.

It was also Churchill – with his dogged determination to defeat the Nazis, the threat from whom he had been warning against for almost a decade – who kept Britain in the war in 1940 in the wake of Holland, Belgium and France's surrender.⁶ There were plenty of senior figures in the British Government who were willing to countenance making peace with Hitler in 1940, but Churchill was not.^{7 8} The twelve months between the evacuation of Dunkirk in May and June 1940 and Hitler's invasion of Russia in June 1941 allowed the Free World to rearm. Only after Operation Barbarossa on 22 June 1941 did Soviet Russia, which had hitherto been providing the Germans with supplies, join Britain in the fight against the Nazis.⁹

Dr Mukerjee's claim that "Of course it was the Soviet Union that defeated the Nazis" ignores the fact that in 1939, 1940 and for half of 1941, the Soviet Union was allied to the Nazis, who would not have invaded Poland had it not been for the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939. Moreover, she fails to acknowledge the fact that had Britain and the United States not

1. Stansky, P., (ed.) 1973. *Churchill: A Profile*. London: Macmillan. p.206
2. Stansky, 1973. p.188
3. Ibid.
4. Robbins, K., 2014. *Churchill*. Oxford: Routledge. p.130
5. McKinstry, L., 2019. *Attlee and Churchill: Allies in War, Adversaries in Peace*. London: Atlantic Books. p.29
6. Jenkins, R., 2001. *Churchill*. London: Macmillan Press. pp.602–603
7. Beevor, A., 2012. *The Second World War*. London: Orion Publishing. p.108
8. Jenkins, R., 2002. *Churchill*. London: Macmillan Press. pp.599–600
9. Shirer, W.L., 1990 [1959]. *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*. Simon & Schuster. pp.668–9

been bombing Germany and fighting her in North Africa and Italy from 1942 onwards, then 100% of the Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe would have been directed against the USSR rather than 70% of them. Through Lend-Lease, the programme initiated in 1941 whereby the US provided the Allies with significant military supplies and assistance, the USSR obtained a further 400,000 jeeps & trucks; 14,000 airplanes; 8,000 tractors; 13,000 tanks; 1.5 million blankets; 15 million pairs of army boots; 97,000 tonnes of cotton; 2.4 million tonnes of petrol products; and 4 million tonnes of food.¹⁰ Incidentally, it was using American – not Soviet – trucks that the Red Army was transported to and entered Berlin in 1945.¹¹ It was certainly not the USSR on its own that defeated the Nazis; particularly in air and naval warfare, the British and the Americans provided the overwhelming amount of the effort.

Indeed, Dr Mukerjee's assertion stands in direct contrast to the view of the Soviets themselves. The following is an excerpt from the memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev, Stalin's successor, who during the Second World War was a commissar serving as an intermediary between Moscow and the military commanders:

"I would like to express my candid opinion about Stalin's views on whether the Red Army and the Soviet Union could have coped with Nazi Germany and survived the war without aid from the United States and Britain. First, I would like to tell about some remarks Stalin made and repeated several times when we were "discussing freely" among ourselves. He stated bluntly that if the United States had not helped us, we would not have won the war. If we had had to fight Nazi Germany one on one, we could not have stood up against Germany's pressure, and we would have lost the war. [...] When I listened to his remarks, I was fully in agreement with him, and today I am even more so."¹²

Less well-known but also critical to the Allied victory was what became known as 'reverse Lend-Lease', whereby Britain, the Empire and Commonwealth supplied food, equipment and services to the US.¹³ The sheer extent of Britain's contributions to the US through reverse Lend-Lease is detailed in the following statement to Congress, made by Foreign Economic Administrator Leo Crowley in April 1944:

"The United States Eighth and Ninth air forces daylight missions from Britain would not have been possible without reverse lend-lease. Our Fortresses and Liberators take off from huge air bases built, equipped and serviced under reverse lend-lease at a cost to them of hundreds of millions of dollars. Many of our pilots fly Spitfires built in England, many more are flying American fighter planes powered by British Rolls Royce Merlin engines, turned over to us by the British. And many of the supplies needed by our Air Force are procured for us without cost by reverse lend-lease. In fact our armed forces in Britain, ground as well as air, receive as reverse lend-lease, with no payment by us, one third of all the supplies and equipment they currently require, Britain furnishes 90% of their medical supplies and in spite of her food shortage, 20% of their food."¹⁴

10. U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Russia. World War II Allies: U.S. Lend-Lease to the Soviet Union, 1941-1945. [online] Available at: <<https://ru.usembassy.gov/world-war-ii-allies-u-s-lend-lease-to-the-soviet-union-1941-1945/>>
11. House of Commons, Russia (British Empire War Assistance). Deb. 16 April 1946, Vol. 421. cc.2513-9. [online] Available at: <<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1946/apr/16/russia-british-empire-war-assistance>>
12. Khrushchev, N.S., 2004. *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, Vol. 1. Pennsylvania: Penn State Press. pp. 638-639
13. Schreiber, O., 1951. Tenth Anniversary of Lend-Lease: How America Gave Aid to Her Allies. *The Australian Quarterly*, 23(3). pp. 64-67.
14. Committee on Foreign Relations, 1944. *Extension of Lend-Lease Act: Hearings Before the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Seventy-Eighth Congress, Second Session*. Washington: Government Printing Office. p. 3

No historian has ever claimed that Churchill alone, nor Britain alone, won the war. It was unequivocally an Allied victory. This victory, in turn, relied on invaluable support from the Empire and Commonwealth, as well as on the contributions of the resistance fighters in Czechoslovakia, Poland and elsewhere. Yet Churchill, and Britain at large, played a crucial and indispensable role in ensuring the victory, and to deny this role betrays a palpable ignorance of the basic facts of the Second World War and of modern world history.

Whilst not directly questioning Britain's role in ending the war, Dr Nubia then challenged the significance of Churchill's involvement within it, saying:

“Winston Churchill was part of a collection of individuals. ... He was – I'm not saying a lame duck, but he was part of a policy that was in fact being organised by Lord Beaverbrook, by Aneurin Bevan, by Clement Attlee, and individuals such as that nature, and his position stood on the basis that he was a member of the Conservative Party; this is what helped to strengthen his position.”

(By Aneurin Bevan, Dr Nubia presumably meant to refer to Ernest Bevin, who was appointed by Churchill as the Minister of Labour and National Service; Aneurin Bevan did not enter office until Clement Attlee replaced Churchill as Prime Minister in 1945.)

Churchill did indeed owe his position to the fact that he came from the party that won the largest number of seats in the previous general election, but rather than being something worth Dr Nubia remarking on, that is the common practice under the British Constitution, and had been for over two centuries before Churchill became prime minister. In the 1935 General Election, the Conservatives won 432 seats. Despite that, Churchill insisted on forming a National Government, bringing both Labour and Liberal politicians into his coalition and his war cabinet.

Although of course all Cabinets are 'a collection of individuals', Churchill was recognised as *primus inter pares*, and was never overruled on a matter of war strategy. Neither Beaverbrook (who was out of the Government for more of the war than he was in it) nor Bevin (who did not attempt to impose himself into strategy-making) can be said to have done anything more than help Churchill in useful and important localised ways. Churchill was the master of his Government, and Dr Nubia's comments show a remarkable ignorance of the huge literature on the subject of wartime Cabinet government over the years.

In fact, Churchill was tremendously strong-willed, independent-minded and self-confident, and his role as the leader of both cabinet and nation was clear. To attribute his major decision-making successes as being collective decisions is disingenuous, beyond the strictly constitutional fact that the Cabinet agreed to what he did (often after the fact when situations were fast-moving). Indeed, if anything, the common charge is that Churchill took on far too important a role in government. He created the new position of Minister of Defence for himself, which he

held concurrently with the office of Prime Minister throughout his entire wartime premiership.¹⁵

Linked to the claim that Churchill was an insignificant figure in the Allied victory is the accusation, put forward by Dr Mukerjee, that Churchill constructed a vainglorious and self-aggrandising narrative of his role in the war:

“Churchill mythologised himself: you have to remember he lost the post-war election, and then he wrote this massive history. Oh, it’s called history but it’s actually a memoir of the Second World War [...] that places him at the centre, and England at the centre of the action. That’s the source of the Churchill mythology.”

Churchill never claimed that his six-volume history of the war was intended as an omnipotent general history; he made it clear that it was his own story. “This is not history,” he said. “This is my case.” Yet anyone who has actually read it and seen the multiple generous references to almost everyone on the Allied side will recognise that it is the precise opposite of vainglorious. Churchill was at the centre of his book for two rather obvious reasons: he was writing from a personal perspective, and he would have featured centrally in any book written about the Second World War because, as we have established above, he played such an enormous role in decision-making, diplomacy and the war strategy.

Considering how soon after the war it was written, with access to his own documents but not to those of other countries or to the personal papers of his colleagues, it is surprising how much of the book was a factually accurate account of the struggle, albeit not a complete historical account, which he never intended it to be.¹⁶ Moreover, many accounts of Churchill’s greatness as a war leader, such as those offered by Attlee and quoted above, predate the publication of the book. To disparage the books as works of fiction and as “the source of the Churchill mythology” is unfair and unfounded.

2. On Churchill's popularity

Dr Mukerjee prefaced her argument about Churchill’s allegedly self-aggrandising volumes by saying “You have to remember he lost the post-war election”, implying that Churchill sought to recover a broken reputation by writing them. Prof. Andrews similarly questioned Churchill’s popularity when he said:

“It’s actually interesting because at the time [...] I mean Churchill wasn’t even that popular at the time [...] I mean, he was never elected and after this war effort where he supposedly single-handedly led the world against the Nazis he actually lost the election. And so this [...] is a kind of historical re-placing him back on his pedestal.”

This view is flawed and ahistorical. Contrary to Prof. Andrews’ claim, Churchill was hugely popular during the war, as is evident from the Gallup polls of the period. In July 1940, Churchill’s approval ratings as recorded

15. Gilbert, M. 1991. *Churchill: A Life*. London: Heinemann. pp.641, 672

16. Keegan, J., 1985. *The Second World War*, Vo. 1. Harmondsworth: Penguin. Introduction

by Gallup stood at 88% in answer to question ‘How satisfied are you with the Prime Minister?’¹⁷ Remarkably, support for Churchill remained above 80% throughout the war – dipping briefly for a single month to 78% – and thrice reached an astounding peak of 93%: in December 1942, and in June and August 1943.¹⁸ No other British PM has ever attained comparable results, and Churchill’s record is testament to the high regard in which the British public held him.

One can only assume that what Prof. Andrews really meant by “he was never elected” – a statement which is plainly false, as he won the 1951 election – is that Churchill was not elected to his wartime role as Prime Minister. It is certainly the case that Churchill, as any other politician, could not have been elected during the war simply because general elections were suspended for the war’s duration, by the agreement of all the major political parties. David Lloyd George similarly became Prime Minister during the First World War without a general election being held, just as Lord Palmerston was during the Crimean War.

Dr Mukerjee and Prof. Andrews’ emphasis on Churchill’s losing the 1945 election is misleading because under the British system, people vote in constituencies rather than under a presidential system. The Conservatives – with the notable exception of Churchill – had from the time of Neville Chamberlain been perceived as appeasers of Hitler, making them hugely unpopular.¹⁹ The Labour Party, with its pledge to establish a flourishing welfare state, seemed to many to offer hope, prosperity and a bright future ahead: the “New Jerusalem” Attlee promised was something which, after the depressing years of war, appealed to a weakened and tired nation.²⁰ Wherever Churchill went during the election he was mobbed with enthusiastic crowds. The Labour Party itself fully acknowledged Churchill’s enduring personal popularity and, during the campaign, made sure repeatedly to emphasise to voters the contrast between Churchill as an individual and the Conservative Party he represented.²¹

If Churchill had been genuinely unpopular he would not have won his Woodford constituency with a majority of 17,200 in that election, winning 73% of the vote, a plurality of 5,000 more votes than he had won in the previous election in 1935. When he entered the Commons chamber after the election, he did so to “to the most rousing cheer of his career” and was received with great enthusiasm by MPs from all corners of the House. Between 1900 and 1964, Churchill was a Member of Parliament for all but two years, which would not have been possible for someone who was genuinely unpopular.

There were undeniably periods before the war when Churchill’s popularity dipped and he was a source of political controversy. He switched parties not just once but twice. He was First Lord of the Admiralty during the First World War, and he was held personally responsible for the Dardanelles fiasco of 1915.²² He supported King Edward VIII during the Abdication Crisis of 1936, almost the only major politician to do so.²³ He divided opinion during the General Strike and was often criticised for his opposition to Appeasement. Yet none of this detracts from his

17. Lamb, R., 1991. *Churchill as War Leader*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing. p.74

18. Davenport-Hines, R., 2012. *Ettie*. London: Orion Publishing. p.334

19. *Ibid.*

20. Lynch, M., 2008. *Britain 1945–2007*. London: Hodder Headline. p.4

21. Lynch, 2008. p.4

22. Gilbert, 1991. p.309

23. Gilbert, 1991. pp.569–570.

immense wartime and post-war personal popularity, which the Churchill College panellists sought to deny against all the freely and easily-available evidence.

3. On the West and Nazi Ideology

One of the most extraordinary claims put forward during the discussion was by Prof. Andrews:

“If you chart the West to 1492, when Columbus sailed the ocean blue, that is kind of the main springboard through which everything else comes from. What is the first act of Europe, in the Americas? It is the largest genocide that has ever existed on the planet, killing up to – the midpoint estimate of people who died in the Americas is 17 million people. [...] I actually don’t understand the science of this, but apparently there were so many people killed, the temperature of the earth actually rose.”

It is hard to know where to start with this baffling statement – replete with wild, unsubstantiated assertions and gross historical elisions.

Prof. Andrews must be unfamiliar with the definition of genocide, which is “the deliberate and systematic extermination of a national, racial, political, or cultural group”. Christopher Columbus was an explorer, not a genocidal conqueror. Deplorably, Columbus and his men trafficked inhabitants of America and the West Indies into forced labour; moreover, the foreign diseases he and his men (entirely unwittingly) brought to the New World devastated the indigenous populations.^{24,25} Yet there is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that Columbus either desired or attempted to exterminate the indigenous populations. The figure of 17 million Prof. Andrews offered is entirely unsubstantiated, as is the baffling claim that “the temperature of the earth [...] rose” as a result of the alleged genocide.

Prof. Andrews used the fictitious event of the Columbus genocide as a premise for the argument that the Holocaust should not be seen as an out-of-the-ordinary occurrence, but rather as a feature of the West as a whole, saying:

“It’s not an outlier at all, it’s the complete logic of the West. Just the only difference is that it was brought to bear in Europe with people we would consider white, right? If you actually think about the mechanics of what the Holocaust was – genocide, killing millions of people because they’d been deemed racially inferior – we’d seen that before; this was not new. This was not a novel thing; this is kind of the foundation of what the West is.”

Yet the Holocaust was indeed an outlier: the worst crime in the history of Mankind. To attempt to contextualise it amongst other genocides and massacres in history is to belittle and even normalise it, which is in itself a dangerous and indeed sinister thing to do. The six million Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust were both far more than any other racial group to suffer in history, but also the industrialised manner of their deaths – with millions killed by gas – made the action all the more horrific. Prof. Andrews provided no proof to support his shocking claim

24. Morison, Samuel Eliot (1991) [1942]. *Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company. pp.482–485

25. Noble David Cook, 1998. *Born to Die: Disease and New World Conquest, 1492–1650*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 9–14

that “killing millions of people because they’d been deemed racially inferior” was a phenomenon that had been seen in the West before. The Soviet Union did, of course, also carry out mass murders before, during and after the Second World War, but it is doubtful that Prof. Andrews was referring to that.

Indeed Prof. Andrews went on state that:

“The British Empire was far worse than the Nazis. It lasted far longer; it killed far many more people; and in fact, in many ways, as you mentioned, the Nazis were copying large elements of the British Empire. And that’s just fact. But you state something like that it’s like heresy, right? Because we’re not having a rational conversation; we’re not having a conversation about actual history.”

Yet there is not a single metric by which the British Empire can be compared with Nazism, which was in essence a murderous twelve-year explosion fuelled by the ideology of Nazism. And the attempt to claim the British were worse than Nazis appears as little more than puerile invective, more befitting the playground than the seminar hall.

By total contrast, the British Empire, which was slowly built over the course of several centuries, was not only to benefit Britain but also – especially by the Victorian era and certainly thereafter – to further global civilisation and social advancement. The British wanted the best for the peoples of their Empire, which was why the population of India almost trebled and the amount of land under cultivated there increased eight times under their rule. They cannot be mistaken as genocidal tyrants on any objective analysis.

Dr Mukerjee’s claim that Hitler wanted “a copy of the British Empire, [...] only to the East” is equally ludicrous, because under the British Empire, the inhabitants enjoyed legal rights against injustices. Such an ideas were anathema to Hitler, whose own short-lived murderous European empire allowed its subject peoples no legal protections, simply based on their racial backgrounds.

4. On Churchill’s Racial Views

The specious parallel between the British Empire and the Nazi regime was taken a step further with the claim that Churchill himself espoused views in line with the genocidal ideology that underpinned the Nazis’. Prof. Andrews set out this view twice during the discussion, saying:

“Racial science: the stuff which Churchill firmly believed in, right? The superiority of the Aryan race; the idea that white people would civilise the barbarians – those ideas are the very same ideas through which the Nazis came to power. They’re not even parallel; they’re the same, right? Same science, same people, same mechanics, same all of it.”

“This idea that Jewish people get racialised into the sub-humans who the Nazis then dispose of, that very much is eugenics, and that very much is the racial science which, again, Mr Churchill was absolutely supportive of. So, the idea of these as separate things is completely nonsense. So, once you understand the

Nazis are actually the product of modernity and far closer to Churchill than we would like to [inaudible], then that should make us rethink all of our assumptions. What was the project? What was going on? What was the aim? When Britain won [...] when the Allies won the war, when we declared the end of racism,²⁶ what did we actually do? All we really did was we shifted from an old version of white supremacy to a new version of white supremacy.”

Prof. Andrews was of course right to assert that what the Nazis practiced in their efficient and methodical genocide of the Jews – in their attempted extermination of Jews as a race – was based on Hitler’s profound belief in the “racial science” of eugenics. He was totally wrong, however, to present Churchill as an avowed eugenicist. This oft-repeated canard is based on the fact that Churchill flirted briefly with the notion of eugenics for eighteen months during his time as Home Secretary: having read a pamphlet about Indiana’s state-administered ‘sterilisation of degenerates’, which seemed to him to present a persuasive and humane argument for eugenics on the grounds of mental incapacitation, Churchill in 1910 argued for the inclusion of this policy in the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act.²⁷ Though horrific by today’s standards, Churchill considered sterilisation to be preferable to the pre-existing practice of confining the mentally ill in institutions, because this would at least enable them to live their lives in relative liberty. However, he quickly came to realise the implications such a policy would have on civil liberties – of which he was a staunch defender – and quickly and firmly abandoned the idea. He was not one of those many intellectuals who used eugenics to justify class or racial oppression in the inter-war period. He is also often accused of personally attending eugenics conferences, which is completely untrue.

There is a key distinction to make between the eugenic views he then considered and the eugenic views which formed the basis of the Nazi ideology. Whereas the Nazi conception revolved primarily around race, Churchill never showed support for racial eugenics: the belief that measures should be taken to control the reproduction or population size of certain groups on the basis of race.

Related to the unfounded claim that Churchill ever believed in racial eugenics is the claim that he was a “white supremacist”, which was made by both Dr Nubia and Prof. Andrews. To Dr Nubia, Churchill was a product of his time: an era in which, Dr Nubia argued, there was a widespread belief in what would today be regarded as white supremacy:

“It is an ethnicity or an ethnic identity that is framed on a European hegemony, but we might now say was a white supremacist philosophy. They called it in their time an Anglo-Saxon idea of superiority. These are the terms that Churchill uses predominantly, as well as English, in his thirty-seven books written on the question of English identity. [...] Within his books speaking about the English-speaking world, he talks about how the [...] Anglo-Saxon race, the English race, have achieved that position on the basis of ethnicity, culture, language, and dominance, and he speaks about how this ethnic group with their own identity might have something spiritual about them that

26. It is fanciful for an historian to imagine, as Prof. Andrews evidently does, that the Second World War was driven, even ostensibly, by a desire to end racism. Certainly, the British were committed to ending atrocities being perpetrated on the grounds of race, in Germany as in any country or colony, but ‘racism’ in its modern-day conception was simply not recognised at the time. It is therefore unclear to what event Prof. Andrews is alluding when he claims that “we declared the end of racism” following the Allied victory.

27. Addison, P., 2006. Keeping the Record Accurate – Churchill and the Sterilisation Issue. *Finest Hour*, 131. p.22

sets them above their cousins, the Germans. [...] These strong ideas about ethnicity and race are particular to a kind of Anglophile, Eurocentric, white supremacist perspective.”

Although Churchill did indeed publish thirty-seven books, the only ones that were “written on the question of English identity” were his four-volume *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, from which discussion of skin colour is entirely absent. Dr Nubia was unable to produce a single quotation from Churchill’s many books – for which Churchill won the Nobel Prize for Literature – to justify his claim that they further a “white supremacist” cause. In fact analysis of all of his writings, speeches, letters and papers reveals that Churchill referred to the term “Anglo-Saxon race” on only two occasions, both of them in an historical rather than racial context.²⁸

Churchill believed that the English race as an “ethnic group with their own identity might have something spiritual about them that sets them above their cousins, the Germans”. That did not mean that Churchill therefore had a “white supremacist perspective”. This is because Churchill’s view was not focussed on skin colour, which does not differ between Britain and Germany, but instead on a rather nationalist perspective.

Churchill had a habit of using certain phrases to mean something other than their conventional definition. ‘Race’ is one example of this; throughout his life, Churchill made repeated reference to “the British race”, although of course in reality the British do not constitute a race but rather a people or nationality. When making assessments about the past it is important to contextualise, not just in relation to the time and place in which something was said or done but the spirit in which it was said, because otherwise the statement can be distorted unrecognisably, as Dr Nubia has done here. Understanding a statement as it was intended by the speaker and received by the original audience requires, in turn, a profound understanding of the individual in question and of the context. None of the participants in the discussion are Churchill historians of any note, so it is perhaps understandable that they failed to grasp these nuances.

Dr Nubia and Prof. Andrews are mistaken in their conclusion that, to quote the latter, Churchill was “the perfect embodiment of white supremacy”. There is no evidence that Churchill approached the question of the superiority of nations and peoples from a racial angle. To him the question was about peoples, nationalities, ideologies, power blocs, and the degree to which they were civilised, rather than about different racial groups in the present-day sense of the phrase.

Churchill was a paternalist who believed that Britain had a profound moral duty to improve the lives of the peoples of her Empire, but it was incidental that these peoples exhibited different colours and creeds. The flaw with the “white supremacist” narrative is that Churchill generally never argued that *white people* had a responsibility to civilise people of other races; he believed *Britons* specifically had a responsibility, through the Empire, to carry out this calling. It could, perhaps, be argued that Churchill was a “British supremacist”, but this would be an unhelpful

28. Langworth, R.M., 2020. Churchill’s “Aryan stock” Quotation: Principles, Facts and Heresies. [online] 30 November. Available at: <<https://richardlangworth.com/aryan-stock>>

and relatively meaningless appellation as, by the same token, one could describe Emperor Haile Selassie as an “Abyssinian supremacist” or Emperor Hirohito as a “Japanese supremacist”. Besides, “supremacist” is not a fitting word because the role of Britain was not seen as being one of domination, but rather of trusteeship, even though the notion of empire in the 18th century was different than in Churchill’s day.

Moreover, a racist or white supremacist wants bad things to happen to non-whites, whereas Churchill dedicated much of his life to protecting Punjabi farmers from invading Afridi and Taliban tribesmen, Sudanese civilians from the Khalifa’s slave-trading, Cape coloureds from the Afrikaaner republics, Indians from the Japanese (who killed 17% of the Filipino population from 1941 to 1945), and the Basuto people from Apartheid South Africa, amongst very many other examples. As Churchill put it:

“We will endeavour [...] to advance the principle of equal rights of civilized men irrespective of colour. We will not – at least I will pledge myself – hesitate to speak out when necessary if any plain case of cruelty of exploitation of the native for the sordid profit of the white man can be proved.”²⁹

Far from holding the extreme, hateful views ascribed to him by Dr Nubia and Prof. Andrews on the question of racial identity, Churchill actively rejected racially-based injustice and was simply an ardent patriot who felt great pride in Britain’s global civilising mission. Churchill’s intentions were both noble and moral.

Ever anxious about the welfare of those in Britain’s colonies and protectorates, Churchill insisted that “our responsibility to the native races remains a real one”. Throughout his entire life – from when he was a young man onwards – his actions to this end spoke louder than his words. For instance, as the Churchill historian Richard Langworth observes:

“From his first encounter with South Africa in 1899, Churchill stood up for native rights. That was an uncommon thing among Victorian Englishmen. After the Boer War, he publicly and privately emphasized fair play for black Africans.”³⁰

Churchill was also a supporter of Indian rights in South Africa from very early on, even when this was opposed by his contemporaries, for which he was seen as a radical. He was also a philo-semitic at a time when this was uncommon. Gandhi would later praise Churchill for having stood up for Indians’ rights in South Africa in 1906.

Perhaps one of Churchill’s most courageous interventions was his condemnation of the Amritsar massacre of 1919. In an impassioned speech to Parliament on 8 June 1920, in which he called for the punishment of Colonel Dyer with whom responsibility for the incident lay, he relayed a harrowing account of how the British forces slaughtered unarmed and helpless Indians, saying:

29. Langworth, R.M., 2020. “The Art of the Possible”: Churchill, South Africa, and Apartheid (1). [online] 4 June. Available at: <<https://winstonchurchill.hillsdale.edu/south-afri-ca-apartheid-1902-09/>>

30. Ibid.

“That is an episode which appears to me to be without precedent or parallel in the modern history of the British Empire. . . . It is an extraordinary event, a monstrous event, an event which stands in singular and sinister isolation. . . . What I mean by frightfulness is the inflicting of great slaughter or massacre upon a particular crowd of people, with the intention of terrorising not merely the rest of the crowd, but the whole district or the whole country. . . . Frightfulness is not a remedy known to the British pharmacopoeia. . . .”³¹

Churchill’s speech so moved the Commons that MPs voted 247 to 37 against Dyer, who was cashiered and denied a pension.³²

Prof. Gopal ignored Churchill’s lifelong commitment to protecting the welfare of peoples in Britain’s colonies and protectorates and criticised him for what she called ‘his unwillingness to engage with the colonies.’ In fact, Churchill was Secretary of State for the Colonies in the early 1920s and always prided himself on his esteem for the colonies. One can only assume that Prof. Gopal was referring to Churchill’s staunch opposition to the granting of dominion status to India, but as Zareer Masani explains:

“He was an unashamed imperialist, like many of his generation, and staunchly committed to maintaining India’s unity within the British Empire. He had a strongly held conviction that too sudden and rapid a move to democracy and independence would tear the subcontinent apart on sectarian lines, a fear that events would justify.”³³

What stayed Churchill’s hand was his real concern about what might follow if colonies and protectorates were granted independence prematurely. It is wrong to accuse Churchill of an “unwillingness to engage with the colonies”, when in fact it was his close engagement with and interest in the colonies that led him to understand the sectarian strife which could ensue if Britain withdrew too hastily. In 1947-48, after he left office, around one million people were killed and 16 million uprooted as refugees as a result of Lord Mountbatten’s over-hasty transfer of power in India, which Churchill condemned.

Churchill did on several occasions make disobliging remarks about Indians, about the Chinese, about Palestinian Arabs, and various other groups, but it is important to understand the context in which he did so. He was very often speaking in jest in a way that would today be rightly regarded as unacceptable, but was not intended to convey race hatred at the time. For Churchill made fun of everyone and was not discerning in his victims. He certainly did not level harsher words at individuals based on whether they were white or any other colour, and often made equally disparaging remarks about Europeans, with Mussolini and the Italians, for instance, being the butt of many jokes.

It is also worth noting the remarkable dearth of offensive racist words or terms in Churchill’s entire canon, including his books, speeches, private letters. He never used the N-word, for example, when several of his contemporaries did.³⁴ At other times, and in keeping with his impetuous character, he made sweeping remarks impulsively in response to individuals or events which had displeased him, such as when he felt

31. “Hansard (House of Commons Archives)”. Hansard: 1719–1733. 8 July 1920.

32. Manchester, W., 1988. *The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill, Visions of Glory (1874–1932)*. Boston: Little, Brown & Company. p. 694

33. Masani, 2020. Churchill and the genocide myth. *The Critic*, (online) December. Available at: <<https://thecritic.co.uk/issues/december-2020/churchill-and-the-genocide-myth/>>

34. Langworth, R.M., 2020. Hearsay Doesn’t Count: The Truth about Churchill’s “Racist Epithets”. Hillsdale College Churchill Project, [online] 2 July. Available at: <<https://winston-churchill.hillsdale.edu/churchills-racist-epithets/>>

the Indian nationalists were undermining the war effort. Churchill can be accused of paternalism, but certainly not race-hatred. No racist would describe Jawaharlal Nehru as “the light of Asia”, or the Indian Army as displaying “glorious heroism and martial qualities” in the way that Churchill did.^{35 36}

5. On Churchill and the Bengal Famine

Churchill’s alleged loathing of Indians constituted something of a running theme during the Churchill College event, and formed a central premise of Dr Mukerjee’s claim that he facilitated the Bengal Famine of 1943. Dr Mukerjee posited that Churchill’s “Malthusian ideas” and his contempt for Indians, whom she claims he saw as “rabbits” – and therefore as a “prey species” – had “everything to do with the lack of relief for the Bengal Famine”.

In the first place, Dr Mukerjee’s inference about the “rabbits” remark misrepresents Churchill’s general outlook on the matter, which was that, as Churchill put it,

“It was only thanks to the beneficence and wisdom of British rule in India, free from any hint of war for a longer period than almost any other country in the world, that India had been able to increase and multiply to this astonishing extent.”³⁷

As Dr Masani rightly observes, “Whatever the merits of India’s population explosion under stable British rule, these were hardly the sentiments of someone willing genocide by starvation on the Indian people”.³⁸ It is evident from Churchill’s constant boasts about the rapid growth of India’s population under English occupation that he really thought of the booming population as a mark of the success of the British Empire, rather than as something to be lamented, let alone to be curbed through callously withholding vital food supplies.³⁹

Dr Mukerjee repeated her claim that had “someone other than Churchill had been Prime Minister at the time, the death toll in the Bengal famine would not have been so high” and that the terrible consequences of the famine can be traced to his deliberate inaction. Yet scholars such as Amartya Sen, Arthur Herman and Tirthankar Roy who have written extensively on the subject of the Bengal Famine have comprehensively disproven the claim that Churchill was to blame. Churchill faced tremendous pressures in 1943, and it is unrealistic to imagine that anyone else in his place could have given more attention to the Famine than he did when a world war was being waged on multiple fronts with an enemy as powerful as the Axis powers.

As soon as the full extent of the Famine became known, robust efforts were made to alleviate it insofar as the strategic situation – with Japan at the gates of India – permitted. In August 1943, Churchill authorised the sending of over 130,000 tonnes of Iraqi and Australian grain to Bengal; by the end of 1944 a total of 1 million tonnes of grain had been sent.⁴⁰ Later, in October, he replaced as Viceroy of India the “lethargic” Lord Linlithgow

35. Langworth, R.M., 2018. Indians again: no Oscars for movies about war criminals. [online] 25 February. Available at: <<https://richard-langworth.com/starving-indians-deny-churchill-oscar>>

36. Langworth, R.M., 2008. Churchill by Himself: The Definitive Collection of Quotations. New York: Public Affairs. p.163

37. Masani, 2020.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. Masani, 2020.

with the dynamic and decisive Lord Wavell, instructing the latter that one of his foremost responsibilities was to end the famine, and making it clear that “Every effort must be made, even by the diversion of shipping urgently needed for war purposes, to deal with local shortages”.⁴¹ It so happened that the scope for such efforts – there were Japanese submarines in the Bay of Bengal, and a Japanese base in the Andaman Islands – was very little, but at least this disproves the monstrous accusation that Churchill wished starvation and suffering upon innocent Indian civilians because of his dislike of their ilk, and demonstrates his resolve to do anything reasonable within his power to help.

Among the internal issues which Wavell had to face which tended to exacerbate the famine were price speculation and the hoarding of supplies by “unscrupulous” Indian merchants; corruption; and the failure of regions, such as Punjab, where there were harvest surpluses to supply Bengal with the food it desperately needed.⁴² Furthermore, as Dr Abhijit Sarkar has shown, local exclusion from food relief based on the victims’ caste and religion increased the number of deaths in the famine. His studies have drawn attention to the sobering fact that all 3.5 million Indians who died in the famine were low-caste or from religious minorities.⁴³

Dr Mukerjee, being a physicist rather than a historian, might be excused for the confused account she presents in her dalliance into world history, particularly into a period as complex as this. In the words of the Pulitzer Prize-nominated Arthur Herman:

“Dr. Mukerjee, who writes for *Scientific American* and is no historian, has gotten herself entangled in three separate and contentious issues: Britain’s battle with Indian nationalists like Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose; Churchill’s often tempestuous views on India; and [the 1943-44 Bengal famine](#). Out of them, she attempts to build a plausible cause-and-effect narrative. All she manages is to mangle the facts regarding all three, doing a disservice to both historical and moral truth.”⁴⁴

In trying to pin blame on the distant Churchill, Dr Mukerjee has drawn a spurious link between Churchill’s views on Indians – which she misrepresents, and which in any case largely come from only one anti-Churchill source – and his alleged inaction during the famine, whilst conveniently overlooking the very real and immediate negative implications various domestic factors had. The truth is that Churchill should be given credit for having done his best in the circumstances. In fact, Herman makes a compelling case that were it not for Churchill, the death toll of the famine would have been much higher.⁴⁵

41. Ibid.

42. Fort, A., 2009. *Wavell: The Life and Times of an Imperial Servant*. New York: Vintage Publishing. pp.362, 364

43. Sarkar, A., 2020. Fed by Famine. *Modern Asian Studies*, 54(1), pp.2022–2086

44. Herman, A. Without Churchill, India’s Famine Would Have Been Worse. *Hillsdale College Churchill Project*, [online]. Available at: <<https://winstonchurchill.hillsdale.edu/churchills-secret-war-bengal-famine-1943/>>

45. Ibid.

6. On Britain’s Legacy

A number of unsubstantiated claims were made by the panellists about the legacy of the British Empire, one of which was the assertion by Prof. Gopal that British “colonialism” is to blame for many of the problems within India today, including the caste system:

“One thing to say about the context of India, and I think this applies in different ways to other colonies [...] Colonialism leaves a very lethal legacy and one of the legacies it leaves is that colonialism operated with the assistance of native tyrannies, and in India the white colonisers were linked with and collaborated with Brahminical supremacy. And today what we see in post-colonial India in the name of independence and sovereignty, is a repurposing of colonial and racial ideologies left behind by colonialism in its collaboration with native tyrannies.”

Prof. Gopal fails to recognise that the caste system which gave rise to the notion of “Brahminical supremacy” had been in existence for several hundred years before the British first arrived in India in the early 17th century.⁴⁶ In fact, the British did their best to minimise the caste system and Untouchability from India, as they did – with greater success – with other long-standing Indian traditions and practices viewed as cruel, such as suttee and thugee: both abolished under the British Raj.⁴⁷ It is hardly plausible, then, that the caste system which still persists in India can be blamed on the British, not least since over seven decades have now elapsed since the country gained its independence, with no apparent weakening of the caste system. Indeed, many accounts claim it is strengthening.

Though not referring directly to caste, Dr Mukerjee echoed the idea that the division and tensions in India today can be traced to British rule, saying:

“I would say that the inferiority complex left in the Indian upper classes by 200 years of colonial rule has kind of created kind of a knee-jerk Hindu supremacy which is partially modelled [...] quite literally on a kind of Nazi ideology.”

Dr Mukerjee did not explain how Indian politics or society is “modelled” on Nazi ideology and how, even if this were the case, this would be a legacy of the British, who fought against the Nazis and played a central role in their defeat. In fact, she appears to take the Allied victory completely for granted. One can only wonder what horrors the German and Japanese might have perpetrated, in India as elsewhere, had Britain and her allies not stood resolutely against Hitler, and had Britain not taken the harsh stance it did on nationalists such as Subhas Chandra Bose: the fascist collaborator whose Indian National Army swore an oath of allegiance to Adolf Hitler and fought alongside the Imperial Japanese Army.⁴⁸

Once again, Dr Mukerjee and her associates make no mention of the millions of Indians who volunteered to fight in both the First and Second World Wars.⁴⁹ Nor does Churchill’s statement that “the unsurpassed bravery of Indian soldiers and officers, both Moslem and Hindu, shine for ever in the annals of war” fit the narrative about him being pushed by the panellists.⁵⁰ The facts and statistics disprove the accusations levelled at the British Empire. If the British were so exploitative, as Dr Mukerjee claimed, and viewed Indians as dispensable rabbits, why did they not forcibly conscript Indians into the army? If Churchill and the British government were genocidal racists on a par with the Nazis, why did over

46. Ray, R., Bhattacharya, N., and Mukhopadhyay, S., 2002. Marginalisation, a social reality among some Bengalee Christians. *The Journal of the Anthropological Survey of India*, 51. p.201

47. Pojman, L.P., 2006. *Who are We? Theories of Human Nature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.91

48. Thomson, M, 2004. Hitler’s secret Indian army. BBC (online) Available at: <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3684288.stm>>

49. Sumner, I., 2001. *The Indian Army 1914–1947*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing. pp.3, 25

50. Ibid.

2.5 million Indians join the Second World War and fight alongside the British of their own volition, the largest entirely volunteer army in the history of Mankind?⁵¹ If the Raj had been such so appalling, why did India choose to join the Commonwealth upon independence, and why has it not left? These are pertinent questions upon which the panellists did not touch. India's position as the world's largest democracy can be traced to the foundations laid for it by the British Empire: foundations from which the nation has now forged its own remarkable success.

Conclusion

'The Racial Consequences of Mr Churchill' consisted of what can be summarised as a two-pronged attack on Sir Winston Churchill in a blatant attempt to discredit him, utterly regardless of factual support or objective analysis. First, the panellists sought to undermine the crowning achievement for which Churchill is renowned, by arguing that he played an insignificant role in the defeat of the Nazis. Secondly, this victory itself was belittled through the argument that Hitler's defeat was not as momentous as has heretofore been assumed, because in fact, as Prof. Andrews stated, "All we really did was we shifted from an old version of white supremacy to a new version of white supremacy". To Prof. Andrews, Churchill was synonymous with those against whom he fought: "Same science, same people, same mechanics – same all of it". As we have demonstrated in this paper, these profoundly mistaken views were based on a litany of false premises. Without the victory over Nazism, the post-war work of the United Nations – the UNESCO 1950 statement – against racism would have been inconceivable.

It is needless to say that, like any individual, Churchill made mistakes throughout his lengthy life and career. However, he had strong moral principles, was magnanimous and above all had the courage to speak up and fight for what he believed was right, not expedient: a rare and admirable quality he exhibited from an early age.

Churchill was indispensable: without him Britain would not have been able to wage war as effectively, and may even have made peace in 1940, something which would have had catastrophic consequences for Europe and the world. In his tireless and victorious crusade against the Nazis, Churchill played a critical role in ensuring that people across the world could live with liberties – including the most basic, to life – of which many would certainly have been robbed had the Third Reich achieved its goal. This frightening reality, and the proximity in which Britain and the world stood to it prior to Hitler's defeat, is something which the panellists completely failed to appreciate.

It appears that the panellists were chosen deliberately to portray just one side of an argument without any opportunity to challenge their narrative. Panel discussions ought to be suitably balanced, and at the very least have speakers who are fair, measured and responsible in the way they use the platform they have been afforded.

What is especially perplexing is that Churchill College, the National

51. Sumner, 2001. p.25

and Commonwealth memorial to Sir Winston Churchill, should of all institutions in the land have organised an event of such clearly premeditated malice and character assassination. While most people, not just in the Britain but throughout the world, are grateful for Churchill and his contribution to Civilisation, it was at the college named after him that his reputation should have been so viciously sullied. When he was compared to Adolf Hitler, no-one intervened. In putting the opposing point of view to that of the panellists, with facts, quotations and statistics to defend it, we take solace in the fact that, as Churchill put it, “Truth is incontrovertible. Panic may resent it. Ignorance may deride it. Malice may distort it. But there it is.”



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