

First, I'd like to thank the [] fellows group for having me, and Alana and my dad for organizing this.

I.

The central argument of this paper revolves around the thought of the right-wing British politician Enoch Powell, a man who is best known for his vitriolic speeches against non-white immigration into Britain in the late 1960s and 70s. I hope to show that as well as speaking out against the possibilities of a peaceful, multiracial Britain, Powell linked the acceptance of non-white 'New Commonwealth' immigration to the historical imagination of the British public. Britain was losing itself, Powell insisted, to a (quote) "misinterpreted past...and therefore misinterpret[ed] present."¹ Powell controversially argued that the British Empire had never really existed in any coherent form—rather, it was a political charade or myth invented by the Conservative government at the end of the last century. Britain's immigration policy and Commonwealth development aid were, in Powell's mind, the last relics of this myth of empire.² The nation, on these political issues, had to free itself from (quote) "the long servitude of her 70-year-old dreams."³

My doctoral work on Powell stems from my interest in the uses of history and memory in the legitimacy of state power and in the construction of political community. In the face of decolonization and major losses in British power, the substantial grassroots anti-immigrant movement that Powell inspired worked to redraw the borders of the British community. The 1960s—and 1968 in particular—was a watershed moment. 'Britain' was, at this moment, reconstituting itself after empire. Though race remained centrally important throughout, the nature of belonging, from empire to nation, had to profoundly change.

In this paper, I hope to give you a sense of how different British groups imagined their historical relationship to the British state and Britain's imperial past. More than anything, Powell's political work emphasizes that memory is an *active political action*—a fight or

¹ Enoch Powell, *Freedom and Reality* (London, 1969), p. 250

² South European Service Radio Broadcast by Enoch Powell, 15 March 1965 (Churchill Archives Centre, POLL 4.1.27)

³ Powell, *Freedom and Reality*, p. 253

an intellectual war. Powell, as statesman, viewed himself as the nation's storyteller. He was a man who saw himself as trying to balance the moral questions of a nation's history with the limits of that state's power. In Powell's thinking, political action was determined by the moral memory that a nation chose to reinforce. Politics was not, then, a question of ideals or truth; rather, the politician's role, like the soldier, was to ensure the security, the psychological health, and the material interests of 'the people.' Importantly, in this Powell was not alone but part of a broad and diverse political negotiation tied to the British state's changing wealth and power and the changing nature of international power at this time.

In the academic discipline of history, the study of collective memory became popular in the 1980s and 90s and was largely dominated by an interest in cultural identity and cultural practices. Historians looked to collective memory—or how the past was collectively remembered—to understand transformations in literary work, art, and national identity. Since then, efforts to understand the *state politics* of memory have tended to see it as a flat top-down process. No doubt, those who hold power always try to construct a narrative of the past that legitimizes their authority. But it is essential to note, as one historian put it, that (quote) “states don't remember, people do.” In my research, I attempt to unpack the ways in which historical memory is a contested political field—a field in which we can see the working out of the moral obligation of citizen to state and state to citizen. In postwar Britain, especially, this is highly inflected by the politics of class consciousness.

The Kenyan Asian Refugee crisis of the late 1960s serves as a particularly useful point of analysis on the issue of the politics of memory – as it marks a clear moment of transition, involving as it does the first piece of British legislation that is avowedly racial, the patrial clause of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1968, and subsequently marking for many both in Africa and Britain the death of the progressive potential of Britain's imperial legacy in the New Commonwealth. Those who spoke of the Kenyan Asians were often explicitly in dialogue with Powell's arguments against the contemporary legacies of empire, especially after the crisis served as an impetus for much of Powell's

rhetoric in his ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech. This still infamous speech warned of a Britain overwhelmed by non-whites, quoted racist slurs and, within days of its delivery, inspired over one hundred thousand people to write to Powell in support of his arguments.

Though largely ostracized by the Conservative leadership after this speech in April of 1968, still Powell’s preoccupation with history, race, and political identity had a lasting influence on the contestation over Britain’s imperial past, especially in its relation to immigration law. Our understanding of the past, as Powell was well aware, works to define who belongs and who does not, in 1968 as it does today. Analogously, the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, in its destruction of the equality of the British citizen, worked to transform how the imperial past could be imagined.

Since as far back as the Suez Crisis in 1956, Powell denied Britain’s ability to maintain imperial ambitions. By the late 1960s, as Shadow Defence Secretary, he called for British withdrawal East of Suez – arguing against any involvement with America’s war in Vietnam.⁴ Powell’s turn away from empire would involve a very specific articulation of the meaning of sovereignty, one linking (quote) “the dimension of time...the sense of having belonged together in the past, and the expectation of belonging together in the future”⁵ (unquote) to the political process. This he opposed to the Commonwealth and to the (quote) “mad theory of universal democracy.”⁶ Against the Whiggish, or progressive notion of British history as a moral crusade that Powell believed epitomized both imperial and Commonwealth political thought, Powell emphasized the political significance of the immutable nation. The Commonwealth, Powell maintained, shared no historic culture and no moral community. With this, Powell would offer a political argument against internationalism, against the whole notion of international rights existing outside the confines of a specific polity or political process – against the rise of

⁴ Powell, *Freedom and Reality*, p. 170

⁵ German Service Radio Broadcast by Enoch Powell, 17 June 1965 (Churchill Archives Centre, POLL 4.1.27)

⁶ Letter fro Enoch Powell to Iain Macleod, for circulation among members of the Policy Study Group for consideration at their meeting, 15 Feb 1957 (Churchill Archives Centre, POLL 3/2/1/2)

the politics of human rights. This he deemed an American invention. Here emerges Powell's conservative critique of American imperialism.

Importantly, the expansion of the Commonwealth from 'Old' to 'New'—with the membership of India, Pakistan, Ghana, Malaysia, and Nigeria by 1960—had required a transformation in its public meaning. What had once represented the natural rise of settler colonies to independence—or the natural political proclivities of the British race around the globe—could, by 1960, represent for some of its supporters the future possibilities of an (quote) “intimate inter-relationship” with (quote) “inherent moral ends” of a “Euro-Afro-Asian Commonwealth.”⁷ This new endpoint required a rewriting of Britain's imperial history that legitimized Britain's role at independence;⁸ it also, just as importantly, required a move to define the ties of the Commonwealth, both literally and metaphorically, as something other than the ties of a racial family. Instead of blood and iron, Britain was to be a (quote) “first-rate moral leader, setting an example for the rest of the world.”⁹

Just a month after his 'Rivers of Blood' speech, when the reverberations of the speech were already dramatic but their meaning not yet clear, Powell was asked in a radio interview if Britain had failed to restrict Commonwealth immigration prior to 1962 due to a (quote) “false sense of moral superiority” over, for instance, the United States.¹⁰ To this Powell answered, (QUOTE)

...the deeper and political cause was the myth of the Commonwealth. We in this country, and particularly the Conservative Party as the ex-imperial party wanted passionately to go on believing that we had a great Commonwealth of Nations, now nobody else took any notice of this and therefore it was only by our own actions that we could continue to assert that there was any unity at all.¹¹ (UNQUOTE)

And so Britain asserted an unreal unity, according to Powell, via immigration.

⁷ Patrick Gordon Walker, *The Commonwealth* (London, 1962), p. 381, 382

⁸ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British saw their Empire* (Oxford, 2001), p. 189

⁹ Dilip Hiro, *Black British, White British* (Middlesex, 1971), p. 189

¹⁰ Interview of Enoch Powell, 22 May 1968 (Churchill Archives Centre, POLL 4.1.28)

¹¹ *Ibid.*

(QUOTE) ...the sole remaining unity after the destruction even of the unity of the crown was our inability in this country to distinguish between the citizens of one commonwealth country and another commonwealth country. Alone of all Commonwealth countries could we do this, and so we claw[ed] desperately to this theoretical shred of reality in this otherwise bogus mythical self-consoling invention of the British Commonwealth.¹²

(UNQUOTE) Finally, Powell agreed with his interviewer, that this came close to a problem of moral superiority: the myth of the Commonwealth was a (QUOTE) “peculiarly British humbug,” a “self-consoling invention,” that had been the cause of (QUOTE) “why this fantastic thing”—unrestricted immigration—had been allowed to happen.¹³ He emphasized that the efforts to project a self-satisfied moral purpose outside the confines of the polity would inevitably fail. Morality did not exist outside community—likewise it could not be expressed by a community and projected outside of itself—rather morality existed in contractual relations *between* individuals *inside* the structures of habit and expectation. Like the Conservative philosopher Michael Oakeshott, for Powell the market represented the most fundamental theatre of this human interaction. The market was the life of the moral community through which the individual could exist. Thus by the mid-1960s Powell was embattled on two political fronts which he believed deeply joined in meaning, against the (QUOTE) “whole theory of trade unions” as well as the introduction of prices and incomes policy and against Britain’s (historical) responsibilities to the Commonwealth.¹⁴

II.

I will turn now to the Kenyan Asian Crisis – when thousands of Kenyan Asians attempted to immigrate to Britain within a few short months. Though the specifics of both Britain’s contemporary immigration law and the events surrounding the crisis are quite complicated, I want to quickly draw out the cause of this refugee crisis. In the late 1960s, the Kenyan Government as a nationalist campaign began to deny Kenyan Asians access to work permits and business licences. Much like the later process of “Africanization” in Uganda, Kenyan Asians were subsequently restricted to certain

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ ‘Theory and Practice,’ by Enoch Powell, no date (Churchill Archives Centre, POLL 6.2.2)

sectors of the economy and sacked from the civil service. Having been given the option of applying for Kenyan citizenship in the first two years of independence, between 1963 and 65, the majority of Asians in Kenya had opted to retain their status as British subjects. This amounted to approximately 50,000 UK citizens according to Kenyan Asian leaders (though the estimates in the political debates in Britain ranged up to 250,000).¹⁵ The colonial office under the conservative politician Duncan Sands had negotiated Kenya's independence and, with white colonials in mind, had legislated that all subjects in Kenya who did not automatically become Kenyan citizens, those who, in other words, were not native Africans, could retain U.K. citizenship and could apply for a passport issued by the UK government.

Britain's immigration law at the time was the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962. In the context of rising unemployment in post-war Britain and the beginning of a political reorientation towards Europe, this served as the first legislation to attempt to distinguish the entry rights of UK and Commonwealth citizens into Britain, or the entry rights of British subjects. It did this based on where one's passport had been issued. If your passport had not been issued in Britain, you had to apply for one of a limited number of work vouchers. This avoided putting race explicitly into the legislation, but had the effect of limiting Indian, Pakistani, and West Indian entry. Yet, importantly, it did not restrict Kenyan Asians – their passports were issued by the UK government.

Families of Indian and Pakistani descent who had for years, decades, and generations laboured under the British Empire were by the late 1960s under threat in Kenya and attempted to migrate to the United Kingdom. And so, Duncan Sands, along with Enoch Powell, began in 1967 to campaign to stop their entry. Powell argued then that Britain could not be condemned to a future like the United States due simply to an (QUOTE) “unforeseen loophole” in the law.¹⁶ Britain had absentmindedly colonized the world, he warned, and now it was absentmindedly destroying itself with the possibility of racial

¹⁵ For a discussion of the controversy over the numbers, see David Steel, *No Entry: The background and implications of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, 1968* (London: 1969), p. 141.

¹⁶ George Clark, ‘Immigration Net Loosened: Legal loophole revealed,’ *The Times*, Oct. 19 1967.

violence. Powell visited the United States in October of 1967 for the first time; the following year, Powell gathered hundreds of regular press cuttings from Detroit papers on Black Power unrest as well as press on any violence in the black community.¹⁷ Birmingham, England he argued, faced a future like that of Detroit. Pandering to the racism of his audience, Powell rhetorically linked black immigration to political anarchy and crime. By early February of 1968, just before the debates on the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill, he began warning of the threat of communalism due to non-white immigration. He lamented, (QUOTE) “So far as most people in the British Isles are concerned, you and I might as well be living central Africa for all they know about our circumstances.”¹⁸ Powell drew a divide between the government and the British people. With its commitment to the political obligations of the imperial legacy, members of the upper-class Establishment was ignoring, Powell argued, the experiences of the urban working classes in Britain.

Powell called for further restrictions on the dependents, the wives and children, of immigrants. Along with the ever-increasing restrictions put in place in Kenya, Powell and Sands campaign in Britain in no small part caused the panic in Kenya among the Asian community and the increased influx of Kenyan Asian immigration. Life under the protection of a UK passport was under threat.

The Labour Government under Harold Wilson was in power at this time. Until this point, and particularly after the Conservative Party’s turn to Europe in early 1960s, Labour claimed that they were the new party of the Commonwealth – supporting international cooperation and development. The Home Secretary, James Callaghan would by 1968, however, be heavily swayed by anti-immigration appeals among labour voters. These labour voters would in the following months, after Powell’s rivers of blood speech, make up the core of Powell’s public support. In late February of 1968, Callaghan announced that the Government would no longer respect the Kenyan Asians’ passports. Just over a week later, legislation ending this communities’ unqualified right to enter Britain went

¹⁷ ‘Immigration Data: press cuttings and Detroit press cuttings’ 1968 (Churchill Archives Centre, POLL 8.2.6)

¹⁸ “Mr Powell urges immigrant curb,” *The Times*, Feb. 10 1968.

into force.¹⁹ Planes fully booked carrying Asian émigrés were turned away. [IMAGE] Though they held a UK passport, these Kenyan Asians were in effect stateless. The Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1968 added the immigration requirement that oneself, one's father, or one's grandfather was born in the UK. This was known as the patrial clause. It was soon amended to include maternal connections, but would retain its clear racial character. Powell himself, who argued instead for a revolution in citizenship law, likened this clause a few years later to the law that a Jewish grandparent defined one's status in Nazi Germany.²⁰ Against the entry rights of some white colonials, Powell argued against citizenship through ancestry.

A heated debate in the Commons revolved in large part around the question of whether Britain was turning its back on a pledge it had given to Asian communities at Kenya's independence. This Bill cut across party lines. Iain Macleod, conservative colonial secretary before Sands, was adamant that Britain had given these communities an explicit pledge of protection.²¹ Sands would throughout the crisis deny this.²² Protected by the official secrets act, 1963 was already buried history.

This historical question of Britain's pledge at Kenya's independence was a point of focus, a point of entry, into the larger question of who was responsible for these Asian communities in Kenya. Historian Randall Hansen eight years ago in large part resolved the mystery surrounding the Macleod-Sands debate.²³ As he has shown, archival evidence makes it clear that, in 1963, the British cabinet, and above all Duncan Sands, understood the rights that would be granted to Asians in post-independence Kenya. Sands did, on several occasions, affirm those rights. However, Hansen also notes that the historical contingencies that led to Kenyan Asian immigration—particularly the absence of inclusive local citizenship in Kenya—were not foreseen by those negotiating Kenyan

¹⁹ Hansen, p. 810

²⁰ *The parliamentary debates (Hansard), House of Commons*, (vol. xxmxiii, London, 8 March 1971), p. 80.

²¹ Iain Macleod, 'An Open Letter to Duncan Sandys' in *Spectator* (23 February 1968), p. 225

²² 'Mr Sandys denies pledge,' *The Times*, Feb. 28 1968.

²³ Randall Hansen, 'The Kenyan Asians, British Politics, and the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, 1968' in *The Historical Journal* lxii, no. 3 (1999), pp. 809-834.

independence in Britain. Though this point is perhaps settled by Hansen, it is still clear that the historical uncertainty of Britain's 1963 pledge was a point of entry into a larger historical negotiation in the late 1960s and 1970s, amidst protests over Vietnam, arms sales to South Africa, and the rise of Third Worldism, regarding the political responsibilities of Britain's imperial past. Powell worked to emphasize this by theoretically linking Britain's withdrawal East of Suez and support of Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence to the rejection of Britain's responsibility to the Kenyan Asian.

III.

In Kenya, the question of the Kenyan Asian was essentially linked to the birth of the nation – to a new national history. Kenyan leaders, against Sands, would make clear their view that Britain had assured the Kenyan Asians protection under their UK passports at Kenya's independence. Their willingness to deny Kenyan Asians access to membership into the Kenyan political community was, however, on a deeper level, in no small part linked to the independence struggle. Kenyan Asians were throughout the colonial period deemed the willing practitioners of colonial government, a hindrance rather than a help to the nationalist cause. Kenyan Asians had worked the lower grades of the civil service and predominated in small urban business. Efforts to exclude them from Kenya's economy were deemed, throughout the Kenyan media, fundamentally the Asians' own fault: the harvest of seeds sown by them. They were called both derisively and sympathetically (quote) "the Jews of Africa."²⁴ They were said to be exclusive, traditional, inward looking. They had been the middlemen of empire. Kenyatta's radio broadcasts followed this line of thinking, stating that: (quote) "There are some who, probably out of conceit, could not live as citizens of an African nation. To those people I say that, if they felt themselves to be too big, they should not now come in tears for Kenya Citizenship."²⁵ (UNQUOTE) The Asians had had their chance to make amends, Kenyatta argued, and had failed. While this Kenyanisation was compared to British Powellism,²⁶ Kenyan leaders—such as James Gichuru Kenya's Minister of Finance—would continue to deny

²⁴ Hansen, p. 814

²⁵ 'Non-citizens told: pack up and go,' BBC Jan 27 1969 (National Archive, FCO 31/379)

²⁶ 'Discrimination in Africa,' *Daily Telegraph*, 23 Jan. 1969.

the racism of the new business laws.²⁷ Kenya was, as one government spokesman put it in 1969, “non-racial.”²⁸

Though forty thousand Europeans—including a large number of redundant civil servants and military personnel—did leave Kenya between 1960 and 1966, there was no mass exodus of white settlers at independence.²⁹ By 1968, the white population was only 25 percent smaller than it had been in 1961.³⁰ And it was a staggered process. One historian has asked, “What then hindered the settlers and administrators from fleeing en masse to Britain...after independence? What stopped the Kikuyu, the Kenyan African National Union...and Jomo Kenyatta...from seeking revenge on their British taskmasters for the crimes committed, as had indeed occurred in Algeria?”³¹ His answer is land reform. The British Government’s Million Acre buyout scheme provided tens of thousands of African families with land in the former White Highlands.³² The land that made up the Million Acre scheme was, in large part, consolidated small farms that had grown mixed produce for local consumption. The big farms did not go. Poor Afrikaners did. The Kenyan government would then buy the consolidated land from the Land Board through British and World Bank loans and sell it to wealthy Kenyans, including some white Kenyans.³³ Economic inequity was actually strengthened in this process. On a smaller scale, throughout this period, Britain’s Compassionate Land Purchase scheme also bought a limited number of small farms from poor, elderly, or crippled white farmers. There were about 500 cases of compassionate compensation between 1962 and 1968.³⁴ These schemes both tended to remove poor and middle class whites from Kenya.

²⁷ ‘Asians: On the Carpet, James Gichuru talks to Vivienne Barton,’ *Sunday Nation*, Jan. 26 1969.

²⁸ ‘Kenya Government denies racialism charge,’ *Financial Times*, Jan. 17 1969.

²⁹ Gavin Nardocchio-Jones, ‘From Mau Mau to Middlesex? The Fate of Europeans in Independent Kenya’ in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* xxvi, no.3 (2006), pp. 491-505

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 504

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 493

³² *Ibid*, p. 503

³³ *Ibid*.

³⁴ *Ibid*

Importantly, by the late 1960s resentment of economic inequity in Kenya was in large part focused on the Asian instead of European communities. The Kenyan state at this time, in an effort to remain a business-friendly economy and retain European investment, had turned away from its recent history of bloodshed – it had distanced itself from Kenya’s revolutionary struggle of Mau Mau. As one anonymous article put it at the time, the Kenyan masses were (QUOTE) “urged to ‘forget the past’ and to labour in ‘the spirit of harambee’” because it was thought that Kenya would be (QUOTE) “toppled into an economic abyss [unless a] business alliance formed” between white and black Kenyans.³⁵ When political independence came, the writer went on, those who had fought for it were (QUOTE) “easily deceived by neo-colonialism” and, consequently, adopted “the colonial way of life.”³⁶ The violence of the British in Kenya in the 1950s, seen most brutally in Caroline Elkins recent book *Britain’s Gulag*,³⁷ was written out of the national story.³⁸ Asians became, in the context of this closure on past violence, the carriers of British colonial exploitation.

As Paul Gilroy has noted, non-white immigrants from the colonies and New Commonwealth were and still are the (QUOTE) “unwitting bearers of the imperial and colonial past” in Britain.³⁹ This was a past, argued Powell, that doomed Britain to a state of decline – or a present continually overshadowed by lost glory. Powell would argue that Britain needed to find a “new patriotism”⁴⁰; to put itself at the center of its own political world; to banish the delusion of international dominance and control. In Powell’s mind, it was up to politicians, to reveal (QUOTE) “the picture of [Britain’s] own nature, its past and future, its place among other nation’s in the world, which it carries in its

³⁵ Anon., “The Asian Exodus: Who’s Responsible?” *East African Journal*, vol. V, no. 4 (April 1968), p. 5.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Caroline Elkins, *Britain’s Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (Jonathan Cape, 2005)

³⁸ For a discussion of significance of governmental censorship of the memory of Mau Mau, see Wole Soyinka, ‘Twice Bitten: The Fate of Africa’s Culture Producers,’ *PMLA*, cv, no. 1, Special Topic: African and African American Literature (Jan., 1990), pp. 110-120.

³⁹ Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), p. 110.

⁴⁰ Speech delivered at the S.W. Norfolk Conservative Fete by Enoch Powell, 15 June 1963 (Churchill Archives Centre, POLL 4.1.1)

imagination.”⁴¹ (UNQUOTE) Powell made clear that (QUOTE) “The matter of this imagining is nearly all historical.”⁴² (UNQUOTE) Britain could no longer carry the responsibilities of lost power. He argued that Britain, *like Kenya*, needed to forget. Powell put this perhaps most clearly to a Manchester crowd in 1965 when he explained that:

People belong together, in the political structure called a nation, because they feel they belong together. This feeling cannot exist without the dimension of time...In short, it needs a story.⁴³

However, this story can fail. This story can be (QUOTE) “broken up under the blows of external reality.”⁴⁴ (UNQUOTE) When this happens, Powell explained, (QUOTE) “men and societies go mad. It is revolution.”⁴⁵ And so, Powell turned to history, insisting on the need for a new national history: (QUOTE)

I am not quite saying that the new history will be ‘Britain without Empire,’ but it will be very nearly ‘Britain with the imperial episode in parenthesis.’⁴⁶ We might do worse than start reading again the histories of Britain written in the two generations before 1880...But the perspective we need for 1980 has much more in common with that of before 1890 than with any view that could be taken in the years since then. (UNQUOTE)

This would be the basis of Powell’s ‘new patriotism.’ Only in this new history, in this forgetting, did Powell believe Britain could find economic success and therefore national pride.

The history that Britain told, Powell knew, would work to define who belonged and who did not, whom the state owed a political debt and whom the state could reject. As is clear in the thousands of letters Powell received from working class voters after his Rivers of Blood speech, these letter-writers claimed their national belonging and the benefits of the welfare state through historic sacrifice, particularly through their experiences in the world wars. Some of the letters Powell received were blatantly racist; some wrongly blamed

⁴¹ Powell, *Freedom and Reality*, p. 246

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ ‘Power and Glory: The Nation in the Mirror,’ Speech by Enoch Powell to Manchester Convention Dinner, 6 Nov 1965 (Churchill Archives Centre, POLL 4.1.2)

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Enoch Powell, ‘Tradition in Culture and in Politics’ in *Confluence: An International Forum* ii, no. 3 (Sept. 1953), p. 18

⁴⁶ ‘Power and Glory,’ by Enoch Powell (Churchill Archives Centre, POLL 4.1.2)

immigration for the shortages in council housing and hospital beds; and some believed that immigration threatened the viability of a welfare state—which was a political gain, it is important to note, firmly linked to the sacrifices of the Second World War. The history of their suffering as a class—their victimization—stood, again and again, against the political claims of the ex-colonial. They alone had been the laborers of the British state. This was not America, which owed a debt to the ex-slave. I will quote just two typical letters here, to give you a sense of the use of memory in anti-immigrant sentiment:

1. One wrote: “How disgraceful that [my father] who has served in two world wars and worked damn’d hard all his life should be forced out of his neighbourhood by foreigners.”

“I’m sure that our boys who died from 1939-1945 to preserve our wonderful country... would turn in their graves if they could see the hordes of invaders we are now getting.”

2. Another wrote to Powell, “Let [those who support the entry of Kenyan Asians] read our History, of pregnant woman [sic] working the mines—of children being exploited and made to work long hours—or people being executed for stealing a loaf of bread...The natives of this country are getting restless, the natives who’s forbears sacrificed so much for the greatness of this Country.”⁴⁷

The working classes, they emphasized and Powell assured them, shared no history with the colonial laborer.

The notion of a divide between ‘the people’ and ‘the Establishment’ had a major influence on understandings of the post-imperial legacy. Many men and women of the working classes regarded the British Empire as not part of their (class) history; it was, in essence, a source of wealth and historical guilt that only the upper and middle classes shared.

Powell was not alone. The Conservative Lord Elton sounded much like Powell and his supporters in a letter entitled ‘Burdens of Past’ to the Editor of *The Times*. Elton spoke of public resentment and hostility against the Commonwealth in Britain. He argued that the notion that Britain had a “moral obligation to admit great numbers of Commonwealth citizens” was due to:

⁴⁷ Ibid.

[T]he strange guilt complex...has been fostered in respect of our imperial record. In the past we did more harm than good to our colonies and dependencies and consequently we owe them some compensation now. Such is the current ideology; it is most unlikely to stand up to the verdict of history.⁴⁸

He took the point further. Again echoing Powell's criticisms of the Whiggish histories of Commonwealth/Imperial political thought, Elton argued that it was the *imperial* arrogance of the liberal mind to argue in support the entry of African and Asian immigrants. As he put it, (quote) "the assumption that Britain must eventually prove able to anglicize hundreds of thousands of African and Asian immigrants is a survival of the analogous assumption of our empire-building forefathers that they would somehow be able to anglicize the Asian and African continents..."⁴⁹ This was out of touch with the man on the street, Powell's letter-writers. For the ordinary citizen, such (quote) "post-imperial obligations" were part of the "mad, make-believe world of Whitehall."⁵⁰ For the ordinary citizen, (quote) "the moral obligation of the British taxpayer to continue to provide £270m. a year in overseas aid is as unintelligible as the moral right of thousands of Asians from Kenya and Uganda to permanent residence in Britain."⁵¹ For the ordinary citizen, he emphasized, it is "Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Robinson" who are the fellow-citizens, not the unknown Kenyan Asian.⁵²

As other historians have noted, the political significance of the sacrifice of war stood at the center of the postwar order in Britain. The myth of the heroic sacrifice of 'the people'—a sacrifice that worked to resolve the contradictions of a classed society and legitimize the social peace of 1945—could mature into a myth of sacrifice that revealed the victimization of the people by the political Establishment. The commitment to liberal immigration policy was, as one letter put it, the (QUOTE) "Never-ending humbug of wealthy and privileged pundits." Due to Britain's immigration policy, wrote another of Powell's supporters, (quote) "Our British working classes [are being] sacrificed on the alter of a dead colonialism." The Establishment was failing to protect 'the people' from

⁴⁸ Lord Elton, 'Burdens of Past,' *The Times*, Jan. 8 1969.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

the ‘unarmed invasion’ of New Commonwealth immigrants. Powell associated the Establishment with the appeasers of the 1930s. Some of them, Powell insisted, were traitors to the state. The People’s War was, by 1968, retold not as a resolution of the class war of the interwar years, but as an assertion of self-reliance—‘the people’ against the liberal state. In Powell’s supporters, we see in sharp relief the way in which Britain’s preoccupation with the sacrifices of her (QUOTE) ‘good war’ worked to obscure a morally problematic imperial history.

The political currency of British sacrifice can be found at the international level also. Historian Niall Ferguson, in the work *Empire*, has attempted to correct the recent historical focus on the violence, racism, and material exploitation of Britain’s imperial adventure.⁵³ He insists that, more than anything, it must be remembered that the British Empire brought modernity to the world via infrastructure, trade, and education. This apologist of empire, like others before him, relies on a particular construction of Empire’s end. It is that, in the end, Britain *nobly* sacrificed the empire—or more explicitly, British rule in India—to save the world for democracy against German barbarism. Like most myths, there is some truth to this: the eventual abandonment of the Empire was a condition Winston Churchill traded for US military support in the Second World War (this is specifically mentioned in the Atlantic Charter). On the other hand, it obscures other truths, such as the power of anti-colonial revolt and pre-war failures in political reform in India.⁵⁴

Yet again, this noble sacrifice is a myth that has a political life of its own. It contributes to the vision of British decline as a heroic sacrifice to the world, which can turn, in the context of the New Commonwealth immigration especially, into a myth of victimhood. Still today, the British people, after saving the world for democracy, are drawn as victims to excessive and ongoing post-colonial reprisals.

⁵³ Niall Ferguson, *Empire: how Britain made the modern world* (London: Allen Lane, 2003).

⁵⁴ Arthur Herman, *Gandhi and Churchill: The Epic Rivalry that Destroyed an Empire and Forged Our Age* (New York, Random House, 2008).

I wish to turn now briefly back to the Kenyan Asian Crisis and the passing of the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill. While in the Lords, the main debate on the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill revolved around the shame and honour of the nation, Britain's failing to uphold an historical pledge, in the Commons the criticisms were quite different. The Liberal Party led the opposition to the Bill. Because both the Labour and Conservative parties had in large part reached an agreement on the need for further immigration restrictions, courting the same voters, the Liberal Party would set the parameters of debate against the bill. 1968 was the official U.N. year of Human Rights. Denying a citizen the right to enter her own country was a breach of the European Convention of Human Rights, to which Britain had signed.⁵⁵ Significantly, Liberals such as David Steel used the crisis to argue that Britain was in dire need of its very own Bill of Rights. The Kenyan Asian Crisis and the claims of the Kenyan Asians were therefore firmly set in that political movement.

East African Asians both in the UK and in Kenya began to organize opposition from 1967 onwards against the Commonwealth Immigrants bill. Leaders of the Kenyan Asian community in Kenya sent a telegram to the Queen, arguing that the bill, as well as being contrary to fundamental human rights, was "contrary to centuries-old British standards of justice and fair play."⁵⁶ Mr. M.S. Khimasia, a founding member of the Committee of the British Citizen Merchants demanded (unsuccessfully) that Britain take responsibility and grant compensation to Asian business owners, as she had done for some white Kenyans.⁵⁷ Others took to the streets in non-violent protest, carrying pictures of the Queen and Mahatma Gandhi.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, due to the leadership of the Liberal party, most opposition in the UK was wholly set in the language of human rights, focused on rights of citizenship rather than on any notion of service to the British Empire and British reparations. Organizers focused on Britain's legal, rather than moral, responsibilities.

⁵⁵ Sir Anthony Lester would eventually take the case to the European Commission of Human Rights as the *East African Asians' case* challenging the compatibility of the partial clause of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act with the Convention. In 1973, the Commission did rule that the clause was in breach of the Convention, though the British Government did not argue the ruling and was therefore not brought to court.

⁵⁶ Steel.

⁵⁷ 'Kenya Asians see British envoy on compensation,' *The Times*, Jan. 9 1969.

⁵⁸ 'Why Asian Families stayed British to suffer distress in Kenya,' *The Times*, Feb. 18 1970.

David Steel would, early on, work closely with the political organizer Praful Patel, who was an Asian businessman originally from Uganda. Patel founded the Committee of UK Citizenship that stood at the center of East Asian community's opposition to the act.⁵⁹ Rather than being preoccupied by reminding Britain of the Kenyan Asians' historic place in Britain's wider political community, organizers in the UK focused on their legal and economic rights – this was in part a consequence of both a wider failure of the politics of the Commonwealth and the rise of the politics of human rights. In the very passing of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, and also in Britain's failure to effectively oppose the racist Smith Regime in Rhodesia, the weight of Britain's moral leadership in the Commonwealth was already lost.

[IMAGE] I would like to conclude with one last moment in this history of the Kenyan Asian crisis, close to a year after the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill was legislated into effect. On January 12 1969, somewhere between 4 thousand and 8 thousand people participated in a march in London against the Smith regime in Rhodesia. The Commonwealth Prime Ministers' conference was going on close by that week at Marlborough House. That day, Prime Minister Wilson's policy of denying Rhodesian Independence without a promise of African Majority Rule was announced by newspapers to be (QUOTE) "dead."⁶⁰ There, too, Callaghan met with the East African leaders of Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania to attempt to discuss their policies towards Asian communities, and to negotiate a controlled and staggered emigration of Asians into Britain. Asians throughout 1968 had faced ever-harsher limitations on their businesses, especially in rural areas, in Kenya.

On the day of the march in London, Jagmohan Joshi, a leader of the Indian Workers' Association and organizer of the march, delivered a memorandum to the Wilson at 10 Downing Street, calling for the Government to stop capitulating to racism, demanding a repeal of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act.⁶¹ By this time, well after the Rivers of Blood speech, Enoch Powell had already become a rallying point for black Britons; he

⁵⁹ Steel, p. 170

⁶⁰ Roy Lewis, 'Africans seek new pledge,' *The Times* Jan. 13, 1969.

⁶¹ 'Battle of the Strand in South Africa and Rhodesia protest,' *Times* January 13, 1969.

had already become a clear symbol of British racism. And so, the Indian Workers Association carried an effigy of Enoch Powell in a coffin. And to indicate what they thought of the remaining power of the Commonwealth ideal, the coffin was painted black on one side, labelled “Common,” and white on the other and labelled “wealth.”⁶² Powellism and the Commonwealth, or the hope of an imperial past made good and profitable, were, in one act, put to death.

According to Powell, the resolution of the political problem of decolonization required a turn away from the colonial past.” His was an historical vision that rejected the notion of an imperial past made good in the Commonwealth and one that rejected Britain’s political obligations to postcolonial subjects. This was a strategic rejection of historical guilt, a rejection of enduring political responsibility without enduring power, which would, by 1968, become a clear personification of the *English* nation as the victim of a disconnected and disinterested political leadership. Powell’s vision of Britain’s post-imperial history does of course have resonances today. Still, the histories of empire, its coherence as myth or material exploitation, necessarily reflect on the question of who belongs in Britain, who the British state owes for its very existence.

The Kenyan Asian crisis was resolved by a rejection of responsibility, by a disowning of an imperial community. Such a rejection of the notion of imperial responsibility, as is clear today, could then have widely different political consequences, from the creation of stateless Kenyan Asians to a withdrawal East of Suez. While the United States continues to build a tragic past, both in the guise of disabled veterans and worn-torn cities in Iraq, it is perhaps worthwhile to note the ways in which history will continually come back to define the parameters of what is imagined to be politically possible in the future. Significantly, the political obligations to this tragic past may be contradictory, at the domestic and international level—in this I mean that there will be veterans of the violence of both sides of the political aisle.

⁶² Ibid.