

LOSING AN EMPIRE, LOSING A ROLE?:
THE COMMONWEALTH VISION, BRITISH IDENTITY, AND AFRICAN
DECOLONIZATION, 1959-1963

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ABSTRACT

Many observers of British national identity assume that decolonization presaged a crisis in the meaning of Britishness. The rise of the new imperial history, which contends Empire was central to Britishness, has only strengthened faith in this assumption, yet few historians have explored the actual connections between end of empire and British national identity. This project examines just this assumption by studying the final moments of decolonization in Africa between 1959 and 1963. Debates in the popular political culture and media demonstrate the extent to which British identity and meanings of Britishness on the world stage intertwined with the process of decolonization. A discursive tradition characterized as the “Whiggish vision,” in the words of historian Wm. Roger Louis, emerged most pronounced in this era. This vision, developed over the centuries of Britain imagining its Empire, posited that the British Empire was a benign, liberalizing force in the world and forecasted a teleology in which Empire would peacefully transform into a free, associative Commonwealth of Nations. This was the story the British reiterated to themselves in the era of decolonization, the political reality of which was anything but peaceful. Closely examining the debates surrounding British brutality in Kenya and Nyasaland, British responses to South African apartheid, and the rhetorical flourishes of Harold Macmillan’s “Wind of Change” speech and Dean Acheson’s assertion that “Britain has lost an Empire and not yet found a role,” this project demonstrates how the Whiggish vision served to stabilize and represent Britishness in the world. It provided an outlet through which British observers could claim that end of empire put British principles into practice. Even today, the potency of the Whiggish vision continues to color historical understandings of Britain’s Empire and its dissolution, characterizing end of empire as a benign program while downplaying its inherently violent and contingent nature.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Britishness and Empire in a Historiographical Context

“The peaceful divestment of the Empire was the most successful political achievement of Our Age. ... Britain withdrew from her dependencies in good order and left little resentment behind ... [while sticking] to the adage of Gladstonian liberalism - self-government is more important than good government.”

-- Noel Annan, *Our Age*, 1990

“Britain’s Empire ... was a liberal empire. Its functionaries claimed that a commitment to freedom was fundamental to their civilizing mission. ... [I]n the twentieth century, facing circumstances everywhere, the British grudgingly put their principles into practice. They fulfilled their duties as trustees, giving their brown and black colonies ... independence. The British Empire thus realised its long-cherished ideal of becoming... a self-liquidating concern.”

-- Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire*, 2008

“It is a vulgar but false jibe that the British people by a series of gestures unique in history abandoned their Empire in a fit of frivolity or impatience. They had not lost the will or even the power to rule. But they did not conceive of themselves as having the right to govern in perpetuity. It was rather their duty to spread to other nations those advantages which through the long course of the centuries they had won for themselves.”

-- Harold Macmillan, *Pointing the Way*, 1972¹

One of the most decisive geopolitical developments of the twentieth century is that of decolonization, a period of transition in which colonial European powers withdrew direct political and economic control over their colonies. The ramifications of European colonialism and decolonization still reverberate throughout the former colonies and within postcolonial historiography. Recently, scholars of European history are arguing as well that colonialism and decolonization should share an equally important place in modern European historiography. In France, scholars of the end of empire in Asia and northern Africa are exploring the ramifications of loss of empire on French national identity, within French political culture and everyday life,

¹ Quotes from Noel Annan, *Our Age: The Generation That Made Postwar Britain* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), 218; Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire, 1781-1997* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), xix; Harold Macmillan, *Pointing the Way, 1959-1961* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 117.

and within national commemoration and memory.² In Britain, “new imperial” historians are attempting to align empire into modern British historiography, which they claim has traditionally relegated imperial history to the periphery of understanding the development of modern Britain. In order to do this, some historians argue that British identity is fundamentally an imperial identity and trace its development throughout the centuries of Britain’s world empire. Given this assumption, what happened to Britishness during the decolonization of the mid-twentieth century?

Despite the emergence of a new imperial history in which scholars examine how the creation and existence of the British Empire shaped the identity and worldview of those living in the metropolitan center, few studies exist that trace this identity past the Second World War and into the era of decolonization. New imperial historians such as Catherine Hall, Kathleen Wilson, and Antoinette Burton have created a considerable body of work over the last twenty years that explores the impact of empire on conceptions of British national identity, focusing mainly on the periods of imperial formation in the eighteenth century and the height of the British Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³ Decolonization as an era rarely figures in the cultural history of the British Empire from a metropolitan perspective. Additionally, older scholars of decolonization from the British metropolitan perspective have more or less confined themselves to the political aspects of the era.

² Cf. Robert Aldrick, *Vestiges of the Colonial Empire in France: Monuments, Museums, and Colonial Memories* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); David Drake, *Intellectuals and Politics in Post-War France* (London: Palgrave, 2002); James Le Sueur, *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics During the Decolonization of Algeria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (London: MIT Press, 1995); Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Paul Clay Sorum, *Intellectuals and Decolonization in France* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1977).

³ Some notable works include: Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Catherine Hall, *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002); Hall, ed. *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Linda Colley, *Captives* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002); Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender* (London: Routledge, 2003); Andrew Thompson, *Empire Strikes Back?: Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005); Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminism, Indian Women and Imperial Culture* (London: Chapel Hill, 1994).

As historian Wendy Webster notes in the introduction to her work on decolonization and English identity, “the conventional historiography of decolonization ha[s] presented a ‘stunning lack of curiosity’ about its impact on the metropolis.”⁴ Traditional historiography on the subject documents the policy makers who implemented imperial withdrawal, focusing on what many label the “official mind” (the concerns and views of a select cadre of government leaders and officials as identified by historians Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher) of British decolonization, ignoring or downplaying what effect end of empire may have had on either British culture or the population at large. Other scholarship on end of empire, particularly cultural and sociological in nature, analyzes it from a socio-demographic perspective, exploring questions on post-decolonization Commonwealth immigration and the emergence of multicultural Britain. Historical consensus too seems to have closed off these questions of imperial dissolution and British identity, suggesting, as Stuart Ward describes it, that “the mass of people, as they had all along, cared very little [about empire]” and that “it was given away in a fit of collective indifference.”⁵

Yet, thirty years after the fact, British philosopher and memoirist Noel Annan felt confident enough to declare that decolonization was “the most successful” achievement of the postwar era, suggesting imperial dissolution was more than just the product of a “fit of collective indifference.” Less than ten years after the fact Harold Macmillan, one of the key instigators of imperial withdrawal in Africa, said much the same thing. Even today, as Piers Brendon’s quote at the beginning of this chapter illustrates, the idea that British decolonization was a product of the uniquely liberal attributes of British government retains potency. These assessments of end of empire encapsulate a key aspect pertaining to questions of British identity and imperial dissolution, illuminating some of the connections between British imperial identity and the

⁴ Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1. Webster quotes historian Bill Schwarz here.

⁵ Stuart Ward, *British Culture and the End of Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 4. Ward quotes historian Bernard Porter here. Porter in turn paraphrases J.R. Seeley’s famous assertion from 1883 that the British Empire was founded “in a fit of absence of mind.”

process of decolonization. Invoking traditions of British liberalism, Annan's declaration implies that end of empire was in itself a product of a uniquely British political mindset imbued with traditional definitions of liberty and self-government. As is clear, Annan was and is not alone in viewing British decolonization in this manner. Indeed, the goal of this work will be to show how, as decolonization itself progressed, British imperial identity maintained a deliberate continuity through a political discourse that invoked traditions of the empire of liberty and a vision of the British civilizing mission culminating in eventual colonial self-government. Historians of decolonization have coined several different phrases that refer to this discourse on end of empire; Wm. Roger Louis has labeled it the "Whiggish view" of decolonization, while John Darwin called it an "anesthetizing rhetoric" that masked the political realities of end of empire and subsequently the loss of Britain's great power status.⁶ Both agree that this discourse barely reflected the true nature of decolonization, a series of contingent political maneuvers that in no way bore the imprint of a planned program. Yet the existence of such a discourse, flowering in the era of imperial retreat in the 1950s and 1960s, illuminates how British national identity and end of empire connected.

As a category for historical analysis, British national identity has emerged in recent decades at the forefront of research because of a perceived crisis in its meaning and significance. Many historians seem to take for granted that decolonization caused a crisis in British national identity, yet many as well proceed on the assumption posited by Bernard Porter, that empire ended in a "fit of collective indifference." This suggests a multitude of perplexing and perhaps paradoxical questions: how exactly did end of empire factor into this perceived crisis of what Britishness means? How can decolonization cause a crisis if historical consensus suggests end of empire did not matter for Britain? And was there really a crisis of British national identity, an

⁶ Wm. Roger Louis, "The Dissolution of the British Empire," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, eds. Wm. Roger Louis and Judith Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 329. And John Darwin, "British Decolonization since 1945: A Pattern or a Puzzle?," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 12 (1984): 187-209.

identity with stark imperial overtones, as decolonization progressed?

It is the goal of this work to explore these questions in greater depth, examining how popular debate over imperial retreat in British political culture reflected visions of Britishness. Specifically, this project will focus on the debates in the popular political press and other sources of public record as Britain embarked on its final stage of decolonization in Africa circa 1959 to 1963. Tracing how commentators created a discourse that reconciled visions of the British imperial identity to the political realities of imperial retreat will show how the British viewed their empire as it ended and themselves as they ended it. Specifically, this project argues that the development and potency of the Whiggish vision of end of empire emerged most pronounced in this period of imperial retreat. To begin, it will be necessary to review definitions of Britishness as a category of historical analysis.

British Identity as a Category of Historical Analysis

Few historians and contemporary commentators would deny that the last thirty years have given rise to an industry devoted to analyzing “the British problem,” that is, this perceived crisis in what being British means. The factors leading to this problem are well rehearsed: the moves towards devolution in the political make-up of the United Kingdom, raising the specter of a break-up of the British polity; the pull of European integration, first in the guise of the EEC then later the EU; the dramatic increase of non-European immigration to the British Isles, prompting many to ask whether being British means being white; and an overall sense of declinism in Britain’s economic productivity and world power status over the last fifty years. With these contemporary concerns in mind, historians of British identity have explored the nature of Britishness through a variety of historical settings and with various methodological approaches.

In 1977, Scottish commentator Tom Nairn published his account on the devolving nature

of the British polity, *The Break-Up of Britain*, which posited that outmoded political institutions of the United Kingdom will eventually dissolve and devolve into national and regional polities. Nairn's break-up thesis was to have profound repercussions in the study of Britishness and on contemporary political anxieties in the United Kingdom. In 1992, partly in response to these political anxieties about a break-up of Britain, historian Linda Colley published her seminal work on the emergence of a British identity in the eighteenth century. In this work, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, and in her 1999 contribution to the Millennium Lectures, *Britishness in the 21st Century*, she attempted to assuage anxieties over political devolution by stressing the impermanent and evolving nature of British identity. Many other commentators within the last decade, such as Nairn, Andrew Marr and Peter Hitchens, have unequivocally declared Britishness a dead commodity.⁷ Conversely, other historians, while emphasizing the changing nature of Britishness, argue as Paul Ward does in his 2004 monograph, *Britishness since 1870*, that through its sheer flexibility, Britishness has a marked continuity and, significantly, a future. For historians of Britain, the future of Britishness is a question that many feel needs reflection.

While devolution debates have fueled much academic interest in what Britishness is as a historical phenomenon, so too have debates over European integration (witness the potency of "Euro-scepticism") and European and non-European immigration to the British Isles. This last factor has inspired a considerable number of studies on British culture and the future of a multicultural British polity. In 2002, former Conservative Party Chairman Lord Tebbit stated on the BBC that "nobody used to talk about Britishness in the 1940s and 1950s; it is a phenomenon of large numbers of non-British people coming into the country."⁸ The rise of British cultural studies in the 1960s and 1970s and the histories on race in Britain written by figures such as Paul Gilroy are testament to the importance of race in understanding Britishness. Yet it is key to note

⁷ Tom Nairn, *After Britain: New Labour and the Return of Scotland* (London: Granta Books, 2000); Andrew Marr, *The Day Britain Died* (London: Profile Books, 2000); and Peter Hitchens, *The Abolition of Britain: From Winston Churchill to Princess Diana* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 1999).

⁸ Quoted in Christina Julios, *Contemporary British Identity: English Language, Migrants and Public Discourse*. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008), 16.

that immigration as factor in the British problem is not exclusively an issue of black versus white: the Polish plumber is as popular an image of diversity in contemporary Britain as the West Indian immigrant or curry takeaway.

The issue of race and what is labeled Commonwealth immigration, that is in a sense the Empire coming home, have been at the forefront of contemporary political debates in the UK and on those over the nature of Britishness since the 1960s. From the fallout over politician Enoch Powell's 1968 "Rivers of Blood" speech to the continued existence of fringe political groups explicitly hostile to non-white immigration such as the BNP, race, racism and Britishness have intertwined in popular discourse and scholarly work. This phenomenon has also given rise to debates over a specifically English as opposed to British national identity and the emergence of what many label English nationalism. Some, like historian Bill Schwartz, argue that Englishness has emerged as a newly racialized concept, devoted to ethnic exclusivity now that Britishness is no longer as unifying an identity as it had been before the 1960s. Others, like Krishan Kumar, argue that Englishness was subsumed into British "missionary nationalism," akin to formations of imperial identities in the Habsburg and Russian empires. Xenophobic English nationalism, Kumar contends, has only come to the fore recently. The issue of English identity, as opposed to British, is connected as well to concerns over the devolution of the British polity and has witnessed an increase in scholarly interest in the last twenty years.

The final factor which has prompted soul-searching among those interested in what Britishness is has been Britain's loss of its former great power status. The theme of declinism in debates over the political direction of Britain was particularly pronounced in the 1960s and 1970s and continues to color historical inquiry into issues such as the rise of the Thatcher government, Britain's postwar economic productivity, and the future direction of the British polity. Historian Martin Wiener's 1981 monograph *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit: 1850-1980* probably best illustrates this phenomenon but the literature on

British declinism is abundant and has had, as Wiener's work did, an impact in the political sphere. Declinism too is usually connected to issues attendant to the end of empire, the most visible manifestation of Britain's loss of great power status. The 1982 Falklands campaign, which some consider British imperialism's last gasp, greatly affected cultural commentators and historians' inquiries, particularly leftist ones, into the nature of British national identity. The best illustration of this is Raphael Samuel's three volume collection of essays entitled *Patriotism: The Making and the Unmaking of British National Identity*, published in 1989. Yet surprisingly, as Stuart Ward points out, little has actually been explained in terms of end of empire and the 'crisis' of Britishness. As he states, "typically, the formative context of imperial decline appears more as an article of faith than of reason" in recent works on the end of Britishness such as Richard Weight's 2002 *Patriots* and Norman Davies 1999 *The Isles*.⁹ This is an interesting historical paradox - empire mattered enough that its loss heralded the end of Britishness yet empire was given away in a "fit of collective indifference" - and one on which hopefully this project will shed some light.

In addition to contemporary concerns that have focused interest on questions of Britishness, developments over the last forty years within academia and the discipline of history itself have fostered scholarly inquiries into the nature of nationalism and national identity. As part of the general turn to cultural history in the 1970s and 1980s, national identity has emerged as a foremost category of historical interest, alongside class, race, and gender in the pantheon of cultural history foci. Notably the works of Benedict Anderson (*Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 1983) and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (editors, *The Invention of Tradition*, 1983) have sparked a great deal of interest, some supportive, some skeptical, into national identity and nationalism as constructed and modern phenomena. For historians of British identities, these trends coincided with another shift in

⁹ Stuart Ward, "The End of Empire and the Fate of Britishness" in *History, Nationhood, and the Question of Britain*, ed. Helen Brocklehurst et al. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 244.

disciplinary focus with the advent of “New British History.” As J.G.A. Pocock pleaded in 1973, this approach reconfigures the history of the British Isles into a history of different cultures, rather than one monolithic English culture, and incorporates into British history Atlantic, European, and even world history perspectives.¹⁰

The impact of the New British History approach has significantly shaped historical inquiry throughout the discipline of British history, in effect giving rise to the very questions with which historians of identity contend: what is Britishness and when did it emerge as a historical phenomenon? The latter question has been particularly contentious; devotees of Hobsbawm and Anderson argue that national identity, and thus British national identity, is modern; others argue telling evidence of a specifically British consciousness can be found as far back as the early medieval period. Linda Colley argues in *Britons* that the eighteenth century witnessed the rise of a consciously acknowledged British identity; Keith Robbins contends the nineteenth century.¹¹ Other historians debate the early modern period, while still some others maintain that there was no such thing as a ‘British’ identity at all given the multitude of cultures and diversity throughout the history of the British Isles.¹²

In regards to the question of what Britishness is and how it formed historically, the arguments forwarded by historians revolve around issues of whether Britishness was a national or multinational identity and issues of English identity versus a stand alone British one. Some argue that Britishness resulted from a blending of identities in the Isles, that English, Scottish, Welsh and to a lesser extent Irish identities forged together to make an independent British identity. Others argue that Britishness is Englishness writ large, formed from English colonial

¹⁰ J.G.A. Pocock, “British History: A Plea for a New Subject,” *The Journal of Modern History* (1975): 601-621.

¹¹ Keith Robbins, *Nineteenth Century Britain: Integration and Diversity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), *passim* and Keith Robbins, “An Imperial and Multinational Polity: The ‘Scene from the Centre,’ 1832-1922” in *Uniting the Kingdom?: The Making of British History*, ed. Alexander Grant and Keith J. Stringer (New York: Routledge, 1995), 244-254.

¹² Pocock raised such questions in his “Plea for a New Subject” while Bernard Crick stated in 1991 that Britishness is a political term “not a cultural term, nor does it correspond to any real sense of a nation.” Bernard Crick, “The English and the British” in *National Identities: The Constitution of the United Kingdom*, ed. Bernard Crick (London: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 90-104.

conquest of and domination over the Celtic peoples of the British Isles. Most historians work between these two poles. Linda Colley argues that Britishness was a new identity forged as inhabitants of the British Isles realized they had more interests in common, specifically Protestantism, commercialism, and empire, than what divided them. Colley's thesis posits that Britishness existed alongside older loyalties and identities; British identity was "superimposed over an array of internal differences in response to ... conflict with the Other," that is Britain's arch eighteenth century rival, Catholic France.¹³ Colley's thesis has had a profound impact within the scholarship on British national identity and historians continue to work with, revise or reject her arguments.

Despite the contention over when and how British national identity formed, some historical consensus has developed in regards to the nature of British identity itself. Historians interested in this topic seem to agree that whatever Britishness was or is, as a historical phenomenon it was contingent, unfixed, flexible and historically specific. Many agree too that a large component of what shaped British identity was in some regards imperial; empire whether medieval, early modern or modern, was a force that shaped Britishness as a phenomenon in and of itself. Given this assumption and other developments within academia outlined above, it would seem only natural that a new kind of cultural history of empire would emerge out of these debates over Britishness.

New Imperial History: Identity and Empire in Britain

Conveniently, practitioners of this new cultural history of empire have given this development a name: "new imperial history." Of course new implies the existence of an old imperial history and the traditions against which the new imperial historians align themselves rest in some of the historiographical assumptions existent since the nineteenth century. These assumptions placed the growth of empire outside the historical framework of the development of

¹³ Linda Colley. *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 6.

modern Britain. Beginning in the 1980s, these assumptions have been challenged through the work of figures like John MacKenzie and his “Manchester school” of culture and imperialism and through the rise of postcolonialism as a theoretical preoccupation. Postcolonialism strongly informs much of the new cultural history of the British Empire, particularly with its Foucauldian emphasis on discourse analysis. The new imperial historians see themselves as bringing the empire home through analysis of discursive practices, though tensions remain between historians who avidly apply literary studies-based postcolonial theory and those wary of it. (This tension also exerts itself over issues of empiricism versus post-structuralist and post-modernist theory, with old imperial history overly reliant on the former, as some new imperial historians might contend.)

The central issue then for those concerned with new imperial history is: how much did empire matter for Britain and specifically for British identity? Obviously historical opinion runs the gamut between those who argue empire was central and constitutive to British national identity, a “vital aspect” in the words of John MacKenzie, and those who counter that empire mattered little and that a homogenizing imperial identity competed with and was lost among other identities, particularly those of class. Catherine Hall and Kathleen Wilson, two of the pioneers of this new imperial history, contend the former, while Bernard Porter contends the latter. As Stephen Howe, a skeptic of some of the more egregious claims of an “Imperial Britain,” recognizes, “[s]erious attention to empire’s impact on Britain itself has to start with recognition that imperialism and empire meant many different things in British political discourse to different people at different times.”¹⁴ It is key to remember that these debates between historians too span different time periods and differing methodologies. All agree empire had an impact within some aspects of British society and culture; the question of whether empire was central or peripheral to Britain is the contested one.

¹⁴ Stephen Howe, “Empire and Ideology,” in *The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives* ed. Sarah Stockwell, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 162.

So what did empire do to Britain according to the newer cultural history of the British Empire? Many point to the tangible effects that a world empire had on the metropolitan center: economic connections such as colonial products entering Britain, personal experiences such as migration, missionary activity, and military service within the various parts of the empire, and other cultural formations such as the advertising of imperial products, museum exhibits of colonial peoples and places, and news coverage of colonial wars and other events. Catherine Hall argues that these tangible effects rendered empire “nothing special, just ordinary, part of the world in which they [imperial Britons] lived” and continues to argue that specific knowledge or experience of empire was background to the ideas of empire that permeated the entirety of British society at large.¹⁵ It is these ideas of empire that attract the attention of historians investigating the ways in which discursive practices of empire influenced the development of modern Britain. New imperial history posits that the way empire was talked about (or as Hall might argue, as it was lived every day) shaped the way Britons thought of themselves and others as men or women, as white or black, and as just being “British.” Categories of difference are central to the investigations of these new imperial historians, with the categories of race, gender and modernity coming to the fore. Taking their cue from Edward Said and other postcolonialists, most view empire as installing hierarchies of difference into British society that created social injustice and inequality lasting into the present time.

Clearly, new imperial history has an eye on contemporary politics, particularly in regards to modern race relations and issues of globalization. As Simon Potter points out, debate among historians of empire has grown increasingly politicized with the newer cultural history of empire having emerged as a “new orthodoxy” (in the words of Stephen Howe), coming under attack from and retaliating against critics such as Bernard Porter.¹⁶ Issues attendant to empire and its end

¹⁵ Catherine Hall, “Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain,” in *The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives* ed. Sarah Stockwell (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 200.

¹⁶ Simon Potter “Empire, Cultures, and Identities in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Britain,” *History Compass* 5:1 (2007): 51-71. And Howe, “Empire and Ideology,” 161.

continue to arouse considerable passion both within academia and and occasionally within the contemporary public at large: witness the reception of Niall Ferguson's 2002 work *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power*. As Potter explains, "[h]is argument that the effects of British empire-building were in fact broadly beneficial for the rest of the world has proved predictably controversial."¹⁷ Indeed, it seems empire might still matter to some in Britain as its legacy continues to garner attention and debate. Antoinette Burton, a leading figure and "evangelist" of the new imperial history contends that "the stakes [for new imperial historians] are incredibly high, for the practice of history no less than for contemporary politics."¹⁸

Why should this be so? From the point of view of the new imperial historians, the legacies of racism best illustrated by historical figures such as Enoch Powell and the debates over non-European immigration (one of the preconditions of this crisis of Britishness outlined above) are a product of Britain's imperial legacy. Countering those who suggest that empire never mattered for Britain, John MacKenzie forwards that "the notion that the British were indifferent to their Empire ... constitutes an interesting piece of right-wing propaganda."¹⁹ Porter has come under attack in a similar vein by Antoinette Burton who describes his critical and empirical take on the assumptions of the new imperial history, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, as propaganda for the "rampant Anglo-American imperialism" of this past decade.²⁰ That contemporary racism and imperialism are so connected in the new cultural history of empire explains a great deal of the passion aroused today over the topic of an imperial culture and its persistence. Some defenders of the new imperial history suggest that those who do question the absolute centrality of empire within British identity are motivated by "anxiety or disavowal towards Britain's descent from

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 52.

¹⁸ Quoted in Stephen Howe, "When If Ever Did Empire End? Recent Studies of Imperialism and Decolonization," *Journal of Contemporary History* 40:3 (2005): 587. Howe also christens Burton as "perhaps the most insistent evangelist for the idea of a new imperial history."

¹⁹ John MacKenzie, "The Persistence of Empire," in *British Culture and the End of Empire*, ed. Stuart Ward (New York: Manchester University Press), 23.

²⁰ Quoted in Potter, "Empire, Cultures, and Identities," 53.

world power, by colonialist nostalgia or even, simply, by racism.”²¹ John Darwin retorts that “the fashionable notion that the least attractive aspects of modern British culture can be traced directly to its unsavory imperial past should appeal to those who like their history kept simple.”²² Linda Colley too warns that this emphasis on contemporary racism and imperialism can have a rather myopic effect itself within imperial historiography:

[T]he impression is sometimes conveyed and/or received that if you can only demonstrate Britain’s, or France’s, or Spain’s capacity to accumulate real or bogus information about other peoples, and demonstrate too these powers’ racism (which is usually not hard), then you have somehow accounted satisfactorily for the existence and persistence of their respective empires. You have not.²³

Howe too specifically modifies new imperial historians’ assertions about the lasting persistence of imperial racism, concluding that “empire was understood and enthused about primarily in terms of a ‘Greater Britain’ and a globalized Britishness ... rather than a destiny to rule over non-European peoples.”²⁴ Clearly, the debate over the connections between empire, race and British identity is in no danger of winding down anytime soon and the body of work replicating the critical assumptions of the new imperial history continues to expand.

British Identity and Decolonization

Historians like Burton and Hall argue that empire was an everyday, lived experience for the majority of Britons connected through the national imperial culture. Their critics, like Bernard Porter and others, counter-argue that empire affected only specific segments of the British populace (in Porter’s estimation, specifically the upper classes most associated with the imperial apparatus of the military and bureaucracy) and that to speak of a national culture in

²¹ Howe, “Empire and Ideology,” 161.

²² John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 15.

²³ Linda Colley, “What is Imperial History Now?” in *What is History Now?*, ed. David Cannadine (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 144.

²⁴ Howe, “Empire and Ideology,” 163.

Britain, rather than cultures, is perverse. While these debates consume the attentions of imperial historians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, historians of decolonization have had relatively less to say about end of empire's cultural impact on Britain and Britishness, but this too is beginning to change. Figures like Paul Gilroy and Bill Schwartz posit that end of empire had a delayed effect of sorts on British culture. Gilroy argues Britain has never collectively faced end of empire; rather this history was "diminished, denied, and then, if possible, actively forgotten."²⁵ Schwartz examines this delayed impact in terms of a discourse on Britishness and race, arguing that contemporary discussions of race (particularly Powellism) represent the anxieties of empire and whiteness coming home to Britain and a "re-racialisation" of English identity.²⁶ Stuart Ward examines the issue of Britishness and end of empire from the point of view of a disruption within the British kith and kin motif in the white colonies, suggesting that the unraveling of Greater Britain through citizenship policies of the 1960s led to a rise in "ethno-national appeals" within the British Isles themselves (i.e. devolution).²⁷

Howe picks up this theme of a delayed effect as well in his 2006 essay "When (If Ever) Did Empire End? 'Internal Decolonisation' in British Culture since the 1950s," asking the question of what exactly needs explaining in regards to determining the domestic consequences of end of empire for Britain: was there a "radical transformation of Britain through decolonisation, its post-colonialisation, or the non-occurrence of such a process?"²⁸ Offering a brief survey of British culture in the 1950s, Howe concludes that this period was in no way witness to what some might label a decolonization of Britain, what would be defined as an increase in multiculturalism and non-European influences within British cultural production. These influences, he says, came later in the 1970s and 1980s. Howe sums up: "It is in the last years of

²⁵ Quoted in Howe, "When If Ever Did Empire End?," 220.

²⁶ See for example: Bill Schwartz, ed, *The Expansion of England: Race, Ethnicity, and Cultural History* (New York: Routledge, 1996) and Schwartz, "Reveries of Race: The Closing of the Imperial Moment," in *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain, 1945-1964*, ed. Becky Conekin, et al. (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1999), 189-207.

²⁷ Ward, "End of Empire," 257.

²⁸ Howe, "When If Ever Did Empire End?," 217.

the twentieth century, if not beyond, rather than at any earlier time, that one finds with real force and prominence both the pattern and puzzle of internal decolonisation, the deeply scored marks of both imperial retreat and revival. Britain in the 1950s was ‘post’ many things, perhaps above all post-war and post-austerity. It was certainly very far still from being post-imperial.”²⁹ John Darwin, one of the leading historians of British decolonization, too argues that the decade of the 1970s is the first moment Britain began to decolonize internally.

The first historical monograph exclusively devoted to this question of what end of empire meant for identities in the British Isles is Wendy Webster’s 2005 work *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965*. Influenced by the theoretical preoccupation of the new imperial history and by the conclusions of Bill Schwarz regarding post-imperial racial discourse, Webster argues that decolonization did cause a crisis in gendered conceptions of national identity as witnessed in cultural forms such as popular films and media coverage from the 1950s. Countering the notion that end of empire created a delayed response in British culture, Webster points to the immediate effects that events such as the colonial wars in Kenya and Malaya had on British cultural production and news reportage. She concludes that gendered notions of the frontier (masculine) and the domestic (feminine) were problematized by retreat from empire and that the anxieties of loss of empire came home to Britain in the form of a racialized siege mentality best exemplified by Powellism.

Hall describes Webster’s work (and Bill Schwartz’s as well) as effectively disrupting “any claim that the end of empire was unremarked in metropolitan culture and politics.”³⁰ But were the contestations in British imperial identity in this period really a comment upon the *end* of empire as a singular process? Is it possible that the disruptions in British identity Webster elaborates were par for the course for the continually contested nature of British imperial identity and not specifically a product of its end? Viewing this period and the contestations within

²⁹ *ibid.*, 234.

³⁰ Catherine Hall, “Introduction: Being at Home with the Empire,” in *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, ed. Catherine Hall et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 15.

British imperial identity as a consciously realized end to empire seems overly dependent on the benefits of hindsight. How can the end of empire cause cultural disruptions if empire was not over yet, if Britain, as Howe describes, was not post-imperial yet? Decolonization (as it is understood as a historicized process in the early twenty-first century) did not look like the end to anything from the vantage point of the 1950s and early 1960s. While contemporaries acknowledged the vast changes in the constitutional structure of the British Commonwealth of Nations (“empire” as a term had already fallen out of favor during the Second World War) and the transformation of empire into commonwealth, few would look at these changes as the singular end to a singular British imperial project, much less as the end of Britain’s standing on the world stage.³¹ The word “decolonization,” coined by the French, was not even that common then, showing up only a few times in the political press.³² Additionally, and as elaborated earlier, the debates within academia and the public at large surrounding the legacy of empire are now more contested than ever, suggesting that perhaps decolonization did have a postponed impact of sorts on British culture. So how did contemporaries talk about the events that historians now label end of empire? What can be understood in terms of a changing or perhaps continuous imperial Britishness by examining this talk? Exploring these questions is the goal of this project.

Tracing the Meaning of Imperial Retreat in British Political Discourse

It is crucial to keep in mind that responses to the events of imperial dissolution were not uniform throughout British politics and culture (just as responses to and visions of empire were not uniform through its history and just as the historical concept of imperial dissolution was not a uniform process). Given this, there are a considerable number of facets through which a historian can attempt to answer the questions outlined above. Generally, the historical consensus

³¹ Cf. John Strachey, *The End of Empire* (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1959).

³² According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*: in *The Economist* from 19 October, 1957: “Nor did the postwar return of the colonial powers reverse or halt the process of ‘decolonisation.’” And in *The Guardian*, three years later, from 6 October, 1960: “Britain, as a liberal state, engaged in working out the logic of decolonisation.” From “Decolonization,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed March 5, 2012, www.oed.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/view/Entry/48333?redirectedFrom=decolonization#eid.

that end of empire did not matter for Britain rests in the tenuous nature of assessing public consciousness of empire. The infamous (for historians of decolonization anyway) Colonial Office survey of 1948 is frequently cited to demonstrate how little the British public knew or cared about empire. The most cited statistic is the finding that only about half the respondents could name a British colony. However, Andrew Thompson has convincingly reexamined this survey and others to determine that the British populace was hardly imperially illiterate; in the question cited above, respondents were specifically asked to name a colony not, as about a third did, a Dominion territory, a terminology distinction that was not always precise even in the official mind.³³ While pinning down public opinion is difficult, tracking public debate in British political culture presents fewer challenges. For the purposes of this study and its arguments, the debates in the popular political press and other sources of public record will undergo examination.

As Peter Mandler states in his study on the English national character, the press is the place where the British “tell themselves in public who they are,” using the language of national identity that tells “what the people who use it think about themselves and others.”³⁴ Mass media’s role in shaping national identity is something widely acknowledged. Simon Potter and others suggest that newspapers courted their readership by “playing consciously on ideas about community,” identification and national belonging.³⁵ Many historians too of the high imperial era circa 1900 have done much in terms of drawing out how ideas of empire and identities were constructed through media representations.³⁶ This project proceeds on a similar assumption that

³³ Andrew Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005), 208. Thompson’s reexamination of the 1948 CO survey and other Mass Observation polls over empire from the 1940s and 1950s is a fascinating and invaluable work for an empirical understanding of empire’s place in British public opinion.

³⁴ Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 1-2.

³⁵ Simon Potter, “Webs, Networks, and Systems: Globalization and the Mass Media in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Empire,” *The Journal of British Studies* 46 (2007): 622.

³⁶ Chandrika Kaul, ed. *Media and the British Empire* (London: Basingstoke, 2006); Alan Lester, *Imperial Network: Creating Identities in Nineteenth -Century South Africa and Britain* (London: Routledge, 2001); Simon Potter, ed. *Newspapers and Empire in Ireland and Britain: Reporting the British Empire, c. 1857-1921* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, Ltd., 2004).

clues of how identities were constructed and digested for the public can be traced through analysis of debates and discourse in the popular press. Issues of public reception of and responses to these constructions are of course more tenuous and this project only offers tentative conclusions regarding how the larger public might have received and reacted to these debates.

The debates in the political press over British withdrawal from its African territories were quite pronounced. While some tend to view African decolonization as secondary to the loss of Britain's crown jewel India in 1947, the events of African decolonization were no less remarked upon in British political culture. As historian Anthony Low identifies, a healthy debate existed in the political press over the fate of Britain's African colonies in the 1950s and 1960s. Low posits leaders in the media "ensured that London's quality press kept a close watch on the developing scene and insisted that there should be sensitive hands on its tiller."³⁷ The year 1960 alone witnessed a steep increase in the number of books published over the future of Britain's African colonies.

Other historians argue as well that events in Africa in the 1950s and 1960s had a considerable impact within British political culture, judging that this impact was even greater than the imperial retreat of 1947-1948. John Darwin argues as much by suggesting that "it is doubtful [that] the late 1940s should be seen as a period in which the long-standing assumptions about Britain's position as a world and colonial power were decisively repudiated" as compared to the agonizing over Britain's world role in the 1960s as the scramble out of Africa wrapped up.³⁸ Other historians point to an emerging break throughout the decade of the 1950s within consensus that had existed over imperial questions between the political parties and within the 'official mind' regarding colonial policies; Wm. Roger Louis calls the period between 1959 and 1961, which witnessed a rapid push for constitutional independence for the remaining colonies in

³⁷ Anthony Low, "The End of the British Empire in Africa," in *Decolonization and African Independence: The Transfers of Power*, ed. Prosser Gifford and Wm. Roger Louis (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 44.

³⁸ John Darwin, "British Decolonization since 1945: A Pattern or a Puzzle?," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 12:2 (1984): 198.

Africa, a “revolution” in terms of Britain’s changing approach to colonial issues and constitutional settlements within the Commonwealth.³⁹ And tellingly, John MacKenzie, the father of the cultural history of empire in Britain, posits that the “implosion” of empire between the years 1959 and 1964 “is actually more important in cultural terms than the ... one of the 1940s.”⁴⁰ Most historians contend, as MacKenzie does, that very few in Britain had little indication or had come to the conclusion that “the imperial game was up until at least 1959.”⁴¹ Thus decolonization in Africa after 1959 is a period of tremendous transition, both in terms of the political settlements that ended empire and the growing anxiety over Britain’s world role now that empire was fading away.

The Historical Setting: British Postwar Decolonization

The specific debates examined in this project concern those over events as Britain proceeded to liquidate imperial control over its remaining African colonies between the years 1959 and 1963. This period was the final stage of British decolonization and because of the rapid nature of imperial withdrawal some tend to look back on this period as the culmination of an inevitable “wind of change” within the British Empire. Again this might be misleading, a result of hindsight that glosses over the contentious nature of events in Africa and Britain and the impact of an imperial revival of the 1950s, heralded by the Labour Government’s attempt to harness the economic and import potential of these territories as means to improve Britain’s economic standing and to strengthen the sterling area between 1945 and 1951. Increasing centralization, the result of efforts to utilize colonial resources during World War II, of the Colonial Office and other government bodies dedicated to Britain’s empire made it easier for the Labour Government to focus on African colonial development. This refocusing of interest has led many historians to

³⁹ Wm. Roger Louis, “The Dissolution of the British Empire,” in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, eds. Wm. Roger Louis and Judith Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 329.

⁴⁰ John MacKenzie, “The Persistence of Empire,” in *British Culture and the End of Empire*, ed. Stuart Ward (NY: Manchester UP), 28

⁴¹ *ibid.*, 27.

refer to the period of 1945 to 1956 as a kind of imperial retrenchment or revival despite the loss of the south Asian colonies like India in 1947-8, particularly as the Labour Government and its later Conservative inheritor continued to restructure the political settlements of African territories. Significantly (for this project), these policies included devising the political organization of the Central African Federation, which incorporated Nyasaland, Northern and Southern Rhodesia (present day Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, respectively). This “dominion-in-the-making,” in the words of John Darwin, was set up in 1953 in order to rationalize the economic potential of these regions and political leadership of the Federation was tightly in the hands of the white settler minority.⁴² By 1959, the Central African Federation was hotly contested, despised by African nationalists, doubted by Labour leaders (and secretly by then Prime Minister Harold Macmillan himself), and lauded by white settlers in the colonies. Because of this, Macmillan organized an investigative committee to explore the future viability of the Central African Federation in 1959-60. Termed the Monckton Commission after its chair Lord Monckton, this committee aroused passion among the Federation leadership and their Conservative allies in the British Parliament, who were fearful it would conclude that federal dissolution was the best course, and among Labour leaders, who hoped for just that. Essentially, Macmillan and his Government were caught between these two positions, wary of the Federation’s viable future yet needing to placate white settlers’ fears (and the fears of those in their own Party) of dissolution. The contestation over and fate of this political federation is a central theme of this project.

The new Dominion-in-the-making that was the Central African Federation served another purpose as well for the British official mind of empire. It was hoped that the Federation could emerge as a bulwark for British interests in south-central Africa in order to counterbalance the growing influence of Afrikaner-dominated South Africa, a Dominion territory the British felt they had lost to Afrikaner nationalism and racialism after the Nationalists came to power in 1948.

⁴² Darwin, *The Empire Project*, 619.

Contestations over the fate of South Africa, which left the Commonwealth in 1961 because of disagreements over its policy of apartheid, also figure prominently in this project, specifically those contestations orchestrated by the activist Anti-Apartheid Movement which emerged in 1959. Debates over South African apartheid and its place in the British Commonwealth illuminate how the British saw themselves as European powers in Africa defined against the racialist policies of the Afrikaners. Policies of decolonization of the territories in the Central African Federation too were colored by the concern over the spread of apartheid, a possibility that greatly worried British leadership.

Devising equitable political settlements between the white settler populations, African majorities, and Asian immigrants was a central preoccupation for British leadership as they transitioned much of their southern and central African colonies into Commonwealth nations. Nowhere was this more pronounced than in the colony of Kenya, once a “white man’s country” that had become destabilized by the early 1950s. White settler policies beginning in the 1920s had pushed indigenous tribes, particularly the Kikuyu, off their land, leading to severe economic dislocation. By the early 1950s, this disruption of the Kikuyu population had given rise to a new tribal movement known as Mau Mau, secret organizations dedicated to reclaiming Kikuyu land. The Mau Mau movement captured the imaginations of the white settlers in Kenya and the British public in the most negative way imaginable: sensationalized accounts of black-on-white violence, of perverted oath-taking ceremonies among Mau Mau members, and a general sense of moral panic enveloped the colony and dominated British press reports of the uprisings. It was not surprising that by 1952, a state of emergency was declared in the colony and a counter-insurgency, led by British troops, launched against Mau Mau belligerents. Kenya was in a sense the “British Algeria” - white settlers and their political allies in the British Parliament were determined to pacify the Kikuyu populations and British tactics in executing the counter-insurgency were particularly brutal. As historian Wm. Roger Louis describes, events in Kenya as

British authorities pursued their policies of “rehabilitating” Mau Mau insurgents led to the “moral end” of the British Empire: by 1959 revelations of British tactics in Kenya, including torture and forced labor, outraged many in British political culture and led Prime Minister Macmillan to reconsider British strategies in Africa. In many ways, Britain’s Algeria prompted the rapid transition of imperial dissolution in the period 1959 to 1963.

This project explores the ramifications of this period of transition on ideas and visions of Britishness as elaborated in British political culture. The figures of Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and his Colonial Secretary of 1959 to 1961 Iain Macleod are central to this transition, since, in many ways, they were the architects of Britain’s decolonization in Africa. Macmillan tellingly came to the Premiership after the fiasco of the Suez Crisis in 1956-7, in which Britain’s and France’s political ambitions in Egypt were stymied by the lack of American backing. While the events of Suez indicated that Britain’s ability to function as an independent imperial power had diminished considerably, many historians suggest as well that this did not immediately translate into a sense of imperial loss for Britain. Though Suez did influence Macmillan into embracing the idea of rapid imperial disentanglement in Africa, events of 1959, notably the revelations of British brutality in Kenya and Nyasaland (where a state of emergency, akin to that in response to Mau Mau, was declared to pacify Malawi nationalists), seemed a more immediate factor prompting Macmillan’s decision to “get out of Africa” as rapidly as possible. To this end, his appointment of Macleod to the Colonial Office indicated his willingness to proceed on his decision, while his 1957 audit of empire, essentially a balance sheet tallying the costs and benefits of empire for Britain, foreshadowed this later decision. Thus after 1959, Macmillan’s Government embarked on a rapid constitutional restructuring of the empire, in essence, its dissolution.

Macmillan and Macleod faced considerable challenges as they proceeded, not least of which involved political interests, both in Africa and Britain, determined to maintain the

constitutional settlements adopted by the imperial revival of the early 1950s. Macmillan and Macleod were caught between the demands of settlers in south and central Africa (and their lobbyists and friends in the British Parliament), who saw themselves as British and feared abandonment by the mother country, and the emerging African nationalism inspired by the newly independent Ghana (formerly Britain's Gold Coast colony) in western Africa. In addition, they faced international pressures in the form of other colonial powers' policies, specifically those of France and Belgium, in their respective African territories. Other pressures included facing criticism, via the forum of the United Nations, over British handling of African nationalist interests from newly independent Commonwealth nations (mainly India), from the Soviet Union and from the United States. The setting of the Cold War itself is remarkably significant to understanding how British decolonization proceeded in the manner and time frame it did. Anti-communist attitudes at times both sped up the process of granting independence, so as not to inflame or antagonize indigenous nationalists into radical, potentially communist movements, and slowing it down, so as to maintain western influence in certain regions. Imperial dissolution in Africa was particularly colored by Cold War concerns, as the potentially new African nations became a perceived battleground for hearts and minds between western capitalism and Soviet communism.⁴³

Historical consensus over why decolonization proceeded as it did rests in the notion that the British were determined to "save face" internationally as they liquidated their African colonies. The changing international world order created by the Cold War, which drove British interests closer to America and which viewed colonialism as outmoded, mandated that British officials negotiated imperial retreat strategically, in a manner policy makers considered honorable

⁴³ Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonisation, 1918-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 301: "The post-war world was at once profoundly anti-imperial and in the West anti-communist. Fortunately for Britain, the Americans came to believe that communism was a more serious threat than 'colonialism...'" This point is reiterated and more fully developed in Ronald Robinson and Wm. Roger Louis, "The Imperialism of Decolonization," in *Ends of British Imperialism: The Scramble for Empire, Suez, and Decolonization*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 451-502, which argues that American money underpinned the late British Empire.

rather than as a scuttling of imperial commitments. Additionally, the official mind viewed the orderly transfer of colonial independence as the mode by which to confer to Britain a significant standing in world politics through a restructured British Commonwealth of Nations. However, withdrawal strategy was contingent in many ways upon the conditions on the ground. The potency of indigenous nationalist movements in the colonies shaped how the British implemented their policies. End of empire was more or less an improvised process, best illustrated by Lord Mountbatten's decisions in India in 1947 or the withdrawal from Palestine that same year. End of empire in Africa was no different in this respect, yet British leaders were determined to create the appearance of an orderly transfer of power because of the international pressures they faced. They also felt that the end of colonialism was not the end of Britain's world role, that they could maintain economic and political ties with their former colonies via the Commonwealth and retain Britain's place at the center of a multinational political organization on the world stage. As Darwin notes in his 1988 study this desired outcome failed to materialize, partly because of growing American economic influence throughout the world relative to Britain's economic decline after the 1950s and partly because of Britain's general shift towards Europe in this period.⁴⁴

British decolonization policy, however strategic from the point of view of government officials, was a product more of contingency and not reflective of a singular strategy, thus leading many historians to conclude end of empire was a scuttle rather than a program.⁴⁵ Yet for the official mind, the transformation into Commonwealth was the means to organize an orderly transfer of power from colonial governments to indigenous ones. In part because of the Commonwealth ideal, some historians contend that policy makers at the time were successful in

⁴⁴ John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat from Empire in the Postwar World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 330.

⁴⁵ Martin Shipway summarizes this point: "... the one cast-iron principle in the endgames of the African colonial empires in this period was that, however rapidly and radically imperial policy makers shifted to the mode of rapid colonial disengagement, and however detailed the tactics and negotiations, even the most robust imperial stance was pushed further and faster than originally envisaged." *Decolonization and Its Impact: A Comparative Approach to the End of Colonial Empires* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 205.

negotiating for what they deemed the most beneficial path for British national interests: an opening to be viewed as a liberalizing Great Power with the granting of colonial independence. One historian concludes: “the new world order [of the Cold War] not only pushed Britain to dismantle its formal empire -- it also allowed it to do so without losing face.”⁴⁶ Given that the British were not alone among European powers to undergo imperial dissolution, this assessment is critical in understanding the mindset of those conferring independence to former colonies. In the case of the withdrawal from Africa, Britain witnessed French and Belgian attempts to pacify indigenous nationalists, in the French instance militarily as with Algeria, and in the Belgian example, through rapid and immediate withdrawal from the Congo in 1960.⁴⁷ From the perspective of the British, both examples served as warnings of how not to proceed: something like another Algeria (or another Kenya or Malaysia, where the British launched a military counter-insurgency between 1948 and 1952), costing lives and resources, was to be avoided, and by the end of 1960, the violently destabilized Congo was viewed as an irresponsible and overly rapid scuttling of imperial commitments. Thus the official mind on decolonization was determined to maintain goodwill on the part of the former colonized and a reputation as a liberalizing and democratizing power. This desire also plays into the potency of a Whiggish discourse that maintained a vision of the British as a liberalizing and civilizing world power, the focus of this project.

Outline of Chapters

What this project specifically offers is the argument that a type of British imperial identity (that of the British as a benevolent power bestowing the blessings of liberty and civilization on its subject peoples) remained remarkably continuous as decolonization progressed; this identity remained because of the insistence, however contrary to the political realities of the

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 297.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 204.

improvised nature (and sometimes brutal outcomes) of decolonization policies, that the British imperial mission had reached its happy conclusion as empire transformed into a democratic, liberal Commonwealth. This Whiggish discourse marked a continuity in how visions of Britishness and empire intertwined as empire wrapped up. In British political culture of the period between 1959 and 1963, there was little to no disruption in the meanings of Britishness because of decolonization; rather, the policies and progress of decolonization were in turn used to justify, in the mainstream political discourse of the era, the moral superiority of the British model and of a British identity on the world stage. This project offers a series of case studies that demonstrate how this continuity maintained itself in British political culture despite the contestations over end of empire in Africa among competing interests in British and African politics.

Chapter two begins this project by defining this Whiggish discourse more fully, exploring its origins and manifestations as a civilizing mission in nineteenth and early twentieth century conceptions of empire as well as outlining the centuries old debate over the nature of Britain's "liberal" empire. Central to visions of the British Empire as a civilizing force in the world, the idea of the "liberal" empire has been articulated since the eighteenth century. This chapter will examine its modern incarnations in the form of historiography and political discourse on the nature of the British Empire circa 1940 to 1959. Figuring prominently are the visions of empire morphing into a democratic Commonwealth as articulated by political leaders such as Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee, Conservative Colonial Secretary Alan Lennox-Boyd, and of course, Conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan himself. The propaganda value of such a vision of the British Empire is best understood in the international context of British decolonization, and political leaders were particularly keen to utilize this vision in order to justify to themselves, to their domestic audiences, and to those abroad their policies of imperial retreat. Again it is important to stress that this vision was just that, a vision, and in many ways it was

unreflective of the improvised and contingent political realities of British decolonization policies. It was however a form of Britishness writ large on the world stage, and thus, as with any identity, wholly flexible and contingent. The Whiggish discourse continues to influence how some of those looking back at the end of the British Empire perceive it today, bringing to the fore contemporary issues of empire's legacy.

While chapter two offers a historical definition of the Whiggish view of end of empire, this “anesthetizing rhetoric” of John Darwin’s description, chapter three offers a case study that introduces the historical setting via an examination of Prime Minister Macmillan’s 1960 tour of Africa, culminating with his famous “Wind of Change” speech to the South African Parliament on Wednesday, February 3, 1960. This chapter examines the speech itself (which is frequently used as shorthand for decolonization by scholars of end of empire) as contemporaries saw it - not so much as heralding the end of empire but as rebutting Afrikaner policies of apartheid. This examination presents an opening into which British visions of themselves emerged, casting the British in South Africa as tolerant and enlightened compared to the racist Nationalist leaders. This was a key component of how the Whiggish vision worked in British political discourse: the British frequently compared themselves to other powers in Africa, much to Britain’s own benefit. The Whiggish vision of Britain’s imperial dissolution emphasized British traditions of tolerance and good government, and comparisons to other powers in Africa emphasized the lack of these traits idealized as uniquely British.

The fallout over the “moral end,” in the words of Wm. Roger Louis, of the British Empire constitutes the fourth chapter. This end revolved around the revelations of British brutality in Kenya and Nyasaland in 1959. On March 3 of that year, 11 detainees in a prison camp in Kenya were beaten to death by British police, while in Nyasaland colonial authorities executed a plan to arrest nationalist leaders and instate military control over the territory. These events, though unrelated, eventually both came to light by the summer of 1959, prompting many in British

political culture to criticize British actions in Africa. The fallout over these developments was the moment in which the liberal ideal of empire was most sorely tested. With visible and controversial proof, in the form of official Hola Camp inquiries and the Devlin Report (the product of a special commission to investigate the situation surrounding the Nyasaland Emergency), British leaders and members of Parliament were faced with the brutal realities of Britain's attempts to retain control over its colonies. How British leaders responded to this crisis, both moral and political in nature, demonstrates the potency of the Whiggish view of empire. Their responses, specifically those of Labour shadow Colonial Secretary James Callaghan, Labour MP Barbara Castle, Conservative MP Enoch Powell, and various voices in the political press indicate that this ideal still guided how they thought empire and its transformation into Commonwealth should proceed and in reaction to the revelations of British brutality they reiterated the Whiggish vision even more stridently.

Chapter five continues to develop the theme of British versus Afrikaner ideals at work in Africa with an examination into the departure of South Africa from the British Commonwealth in 1961. In some ways both a challenge to and an affirmation of the Whiggish vision of end of empire, South Africa's withdrawal instigated a debate on the meanings of tolerance and equality within the evolving Commonwealth. This chapter will also explore divergent manifestations of the Whiggish vision as represented by the leftist Anti-Apartheid Movement in Britain and the actions of Lord Salisbury, the central figure of conservative reaction to Macmillan's African policies. The Anti-Apartheid Movement emerged in 1959 as a coordinated effort to end Afrikaner policies in South Africa, corresponding with leaders of the African National Congress and lobbying British political leaders and the public to exert economic and political pressure on South Africa. In many regards the discourse surrounding this agitation reiterated the Whiggish vision of British imperial exceptionalism and that the British had a responsibility to ensure tolerance and good government in their Commonwealth partners. On the right, the conservative

opposition to decolonization policies in Africa as personified by Lord Salisbury's criticisms were guided by the same Whiggish vision and civilizing impetus as those articulated on the left. One key difference though was that many conservative critics of Macmillan's policies felt his Government was moving too fast in setting up new nations, that African territories needed more time to develop British (thus the best) systems of government. Whether on the right or left, confidence in the British 'genius' to bestow good government to imperial subject peoples was more or less constant as decolonization proceeded in this period, thus suggesting a continuity in thought on a British imperial identity.

The final chapter offers a case study over responses in British political discourse to former American Secretary of State Dean Acheson's (infamous) statement from December 1962 that "Britain has lost an empire and not yet found a role." Acheson's quote provides a moment in time when the British could not avoid conscious examination of their role as an imperial power as that power was subsiding. Responses to Acheson ranged from anger - Macmillan wrote in his diary that the former Secretary was "always a conceited ass" - to grudging acceptance - one letter to the *Times* cited the accuracy of Acheson's statement given the woeful and underfunded state of school sports in the British educational system.⁴⁸ Fundamentally, Acheson's observation cut to the heart of British ambitions as they decolonized their empire. The official mind felt that their world role was to secure new nations out of their empire and the notion that the British were adrift and aimless on the world stage was galling to those who subscribed to the Whiggish vision of end of empire. Responses to Acheson demonstrate how the Whiggish view of British decolonization was a point around which the British could rally as they were under fire from foreign critics of their imperial policies, maintaining the potency of this vision and thus aspects of British imperial identity in imaginings of their world role.

These case studies examine how articulations of aspects of British national identity, that

⁴⁸ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London: Abacus, 2005), 219. And Letter to the Editor, 'Spending on Sport,' *Times*, 31 December 1962, 11.

is, the British imperial identity, played off of the realities of imperial dissolution in the postwar period. Rather than viewing end of empire as an end to British world power, and thus throwing Britishness into crisis, articulations of Britishness in this period of imperial dissolution relied on an updated vision of Britain's imperial civilizing mission. This suggests a continuity in thought, rather than a crisis, in notions of Britishness during the empire's end and emphasizes the flexible nature of the Whiggish vision as a projection of Britishness in the world. Tied in with historiographical questions of what empire meant for Britishness, this project makes clear that the immediacy of decolonization was met with reiterated notions of British exceptionalism, that end of empire to contemporaries did not necessarily mean an end to the British imperial identity based on notions of the British genius for government. As Stephen Howe and others argue, end of empire did have a delayed impact on visions of Britishness, partly because of this response to decolonization as it proceeded in the years between 1959 and 1963. This explains the potency of contemporary debates in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries over the nature and future of Britishness. Decolonization had a delayed impact on notions of Britishness because those talking about end of empire as it happened did not view it as an end to Britishness on the world stage.

Noel Annan wrote in 1990 that end of empire was the most successful political achievement of his age. Harold Macmillan articulated a similar notion in his memoirs from 1972, while even in the twenty-first century authors like Piers Brendon argue that the British imperial mission met its desired culmination in imperial dissolution of the 1960s. This view of British decolonization as a planned, peaceful and self-fulfilling process, one of the key aspects of the Whiggish view from the 1960s, of course flies in the face of the historical realities of the contingent nature of imperial dissolution. The fact that this view still exists is a testament to the continuity in thought over Britishness that is best exemplified by the popular political discourse surrounding empire as it ended, what this project examines. The concerns and agenda of

historiographical developments like the new imperial history are in themselves products of this continuity, a continuity that the new imperial historians would like to disrupt and one which eludes facing the impact of Britain's empire on Britain itself.

Empire perhaps is not ended for Britain in the twenty-first century; new imperial historians would certainly argue as much as Britain continues to grapple with its imperial legacy and issues of race in British society. As a 2009 editorial in *The Economist* surmised, "in important ways Britain is still - even, perhaps, increasingly - trapped by its imperial past" citing British involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, reactions to the recent world financial crisis, and issues over racism as symptomatic of how Britain's recent history "can be seen as a kind of post-imperial malaise."⁴⁹ Arguing that British foreign policy is marked by a mix of "militarism and messianism" characteristic of empire and describing contemporary British racism as "sometimes overt, more often and insidiously [colored by] the supercilious tolerance that the empire cultivated," the editorial highlights contemporary traits that are remarkably similar to articulations of the Whiggish vision of empire from the 1960s. This project examines one piece of the puzzle of why twenty-first century Britishness is informed so greatly by mid-twentieth century geopolitical developments. The widespread articulation of British imperial exceptionalism, the Whiggish view of end of empire, throughout the popular political discourse over empire as it ended masked the political realities of decolonization for Britain. The case studies offered in this project show the development of this Whiggish vision in a Britain losing its empire and attempting to justify to itself and to outside observers its place in the world, justifications that still have contemporary currency for notions of Britishness.

⁴⁹ "The Tiger under the Table: The Many Ways in which Britain is Living in the Shadow of its Empire," *The Economist*, 3 December 2009, 34.

Chapter 2

Persistent Vision: Emergence of the Whiggish Vision of End of Empire

“Gentlemen, where are the representatives of these former British territories? Here they are, sitting in this Hall. ... Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa - here are the representatives of India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Ghana, Malaya. Here, here in this Hall. In a few days’ time, Nigeria will join us... Who dares say that this is anything but a story of steady and liberal progress?”

-- Prime Minister Harold Macmillan,
addressing the U.N. General Assembly,
September 23, 1960⁵⁰

Such are the words Prime Minister Harold Macmillan employed to defend himself against charges of imperialism and exploitation, charges lobbed by Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev on the floor of the United Nations. Pointing out U.N. representatives of Britain’s former colonies as proof of the “steady and liberal progress” resultant from Britain’s imperial policies, Macmillan invoked a tradition of thought that viewed the British imperial mission as one of liberalization and modernization throughout the world, with the end goal of bestowing the British gift of liberal government and economic development to colonial peoples. This in essence was the ‘Whiggish vision’ of empire, potent in some form or another since the late 18th century and one which tied visions of Britishness to the formation and development of empire. The era of decolonization witnessed the repeated articulation of this Whiggish vision, whose adherents claimed that the Empire was a force for progress, economic development, and political liberalization, that imperial retreat was a planned liberal program in action, and that decolonization represented a modern and uniquely British ideal realized. This chapter will elaborate these articulations of the Whiggish vision of decolonization. It will trace the idea of a ‘liberal’ empire, one devoted to eventual colonial self-government, as it developed since the 18th century and explore ways in which it was adapted for the age of decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s.

The interpretation of end of empire that posits colonial self-government and independence were the inevitable and deliberate culmination of enlightened British imperial

⁵⁰ Quoted in Alistair Horne, *Harold Macmillan, Volume II: 1957-1986* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1989), 278.

trusteeship (aptly described by John Darwin as “Whig history large as life and twice as shameless”) was once the main theme of postwar colonial historiography and continues to inform popular understanding of imperial retreat.⁵¹ John Hargreaves labels it a paradigm of “gracious decolonization” within the historiography and public perception of end of empire.⁵² Stephen Howe describes the historiography similarly as “Whiggish, teleological, Anglocentric, ... fixated on Whitehall, [and] imbued with the mystique of a stillborn dream of Commonwealth.”⁵³ Significantly, the understanding of end of empire as a teleological development is truly part of the British national story as well. John Darwin calls it an anesthetizing rhetoric that masked the realities of post-imperial decline. Howe argues “the perception of the granting of self-rule to British colonies as a peaceful and voluntary process, the successful outcome of a coherent plan for disengagement, has attained the status of a major theme for national self-congratulation in the post-war years.”⁵⁴ Nicholas Owen recognizes a similar phenomenon, contending that “the ‘success’ of Britain’s decolonisation is held up for approval as a *national* achievement: a vindication of her constitutional arrangements and the good sense of those who worked them.”⁵⁵

Works of recent scholarship continue to reiterate themes of the Whiggish vision of the liberalizing empire and its end as “a trust honorably discharged and then deliberately and systematically wound up.”⁵⁶ Niall Ferguson’s 2002 work, while excoriating British postwar leadership for its ‘scuttle’ from empire, nonetheless reaches the conclusion that indeed the British imperial project promoted economic development and liberalization throughout the world. Piers Brendon’s more recent history (2008) rests on the central assumption that colonial self-government was the *raison d’etre* of the British Empire and that end of empire was a remarkably

⁵¹ John Darwin, “British Decolonization since 1945: A Pattern or a Puzzle?,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 12 (1984): 189.

⁵² John Hargreaves, “Approaches to Decolonization” in *The British Intellectual Engagement with Africa in the twentieth Century* eds. Douglas Rimmer and Anthony Kirk-Greene (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 107.

⁵³ Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire, 1918-1964* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). 7.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁵ Nicholas Owen, “Decolonisation and Postwar Consensus” in *The Myth of Consensus: New Views on British History, 1945-1964* eds. Harriet Jones and Michael Kandiah (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 158.

⁵⁶ Darwin, “British Decolonization,” 189.

peaceful process, putting British ideals of democratic self-government into practice: “nothing better became the British Empire than its dissolution ... thanks to pragmatic policies formulated in London, the Empire experienced what Ronald Hyam recently called ‘a quiet and easy death.’”⁵⁷

Many other historians though deny the historical validity of such an interpretation of British decolonization, arguing instead that the process of imperial retreat was messy, contested, and uncertain. Particularly, Louis and Darwin argue that end of empire was not so much a peaceful, planned transition as a scuttle with significant casualties and an exercise in policy-making under pressure as British leadership lurched from one crisis to the next. As Darwin so evocatively elaborates:

British leaders liked to see their demission of empire as the actions of an enlightened father, wisely conferring responsibility on his boisterous, but essentially good-natured, offspring. In fact, a better image might be that of an impoverished grandee whose hereditary mansion becomes slowly uninhabitable room by room as, in apparently random sequence, the floors give way, the plumbing fails, the ceilings fall in.⁵⁸

The teleological vision, essentially the justification of imperial retreat offered unanimously by British leadership and others at the time, has become rather frayed and politicized today, dividing those who subscribe to a version of Macmillan’s story of “steady and liberal progress” and those who emphasize the messy and at times quite violent nature of British retreat from empire. Revisions of the Whiggish view of decolonization have led in part to debates over empire’s legacy in contemporary Britain, a legacy tangled in the popular imagination between nostalgic pride and apologetic shame, and are themselves a product of access to the recently unsealed government records from the era of decolonization. While British leaders who implemented end of empire offered “*ex post facto* pious assertions” that their accomplishments were the culmination of the benevolent British imperial project, the historical evidence coming to

⁵⁷ Piers Brendon, “A Moral Audit of the British Empire,” *History Today* 57:10 (Oct. 2007): 44-47.

⁵⁸ Darwin, “British Decolonization,” 206.

light sixty years later hardly seems to bear this out.⁵⁹ In the word of John Hargreaves, “the records quickly showed that the cherished paradigm of gracious decolonization needed serious qualification.”⁶⁰ As a result, recent historical scholarship on end of empire significantly downplays, if not outright contradicts, the national story of decolonization. New scholarship has shed light on the contingent, contentious, and at times conflicting government policies and on government sanctioned violence during imperial retreat, particularly British brutality implementing counterinsurgencies in Kenya and Malaya. Significantly the work of Caroline Elkins and David Anderson on British prison camps in 1950s Kenya lay to rest any idea that the end of empire was a ‘quiet and easy death.’ Still the potency of this ‘cherished paradigm’ remains in public perception and scholarly inquiry. Fundamentally, the continued significance of the Whiggish vision relies on the fact that policy makers did (as some historians do) draw from a long tradition of thought that presented the British Empire as a benevolent and progressive entity, tying the process of decolonization to a centuries-long imperial project of paternalistic trusteeship designed to ready the colonies for self-government.

The idea of British trusteeship of colonial peoples, a trusteeship viewed by its practitioners as benevolent, humanitarian, paternalistic and didactic, was closely bound with notions of the British maintaining a ‘liberal’ empire dedicated to free commerce, rule of law, and representative government. According to this interpretation, the best and only possible outcome of British guidance, or ‘tutelage’ in the language of trusteeship, of its colonies was eventual self-government. Articulations of this logic of ‘liberal’ empire, in some form or another, have been voiced throughout the course of the British Empire’s history, gathering ever more frequent reiterations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and constituting an entire vocabulary of common reference among those engaged in imperial administration. Significantly, doctrines of trusteeship were accepted almost universally throughout British political culture.

⁵⁹ Alex May, “Empire Loyalists and ‘Commonwealth Men’: The Round Table and the End of Empire,” in *British Culture and the End of Empire*, ed. Stuart Ward (New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), 46.

⁶⁰ Rimmer and Kirk-Greene, *British Intellectual Engagement*, 107.

A.P. Thornton refers to these notions as a “common set of assumptions” that incorporated “a certain tradition and practice of governance, that of successful paternalism, as deeply entrenched on the Left as on the Right at home and at the heart of English government overseas,” while Ronald Robinson claims “the collected avowals of trusteeship from Burke to Attlee would fill a faculty library.”⁶¹ A.G. Hopkins calls this tradition a “legitimizing ideology” that “reinforced the character of the imperial power.”⁶² Alex May acknowledges how the “existing ideological framework” resultant from this logic of ‘liberal’ empire made it possible for decolonizers to claim their work as the culmination of an imperial project.⁶³ Darwin notes too that Britain’s policies of imperial retreat were “unquestionably influenced by the long tradition of trusteeship in colonial administration and respect for certain political maxims.”⁶⁴

Sarah Stockwell rightly warns that while this vocabulary of ‘liberal’ empire and eventual colonial self-government illuminates how British policy makers and observers approached decolonization, viewing end of empire as the British putting principle into practice “risks casting British management [of colonial disengagement] in an overly benevolent light.” Additionally, the nature of this vocabulary or ‘legitimizing ideology,’ like the nature of British national identity, was wholly flexible, shifting, and able to incorporate a multitude of political perspectives from left to right, as Thornton and others point out. Robinson elaborates on the nature of this ideological framework of imperial trusteeship:

It was this unsophisticated analogy which equipped English imperialists with an irrefragible Gladstone bag of morals that could pack almost any doctrine without bulging. The contents were changed from age to age to correspond with changing fashions in state intervention and social thought; and were refurbished in response to changing political pressures in colonial

⁶¹ A.P. Thornton, *The Imperial Idea and Its Enemies: A Study in British Power*, 2nd edition (London: Macmillan, 1985), 4 and viii. The bulk of this quote comes from the introduction to the second edition by Nicholas Mansergh. And Ronald Robinson, “The Moral Disarmament of the African Empire,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 8:1 (1979): 86.

⁶² A.G. Hopkins, “Back to the Future: From National to Imperial History,” *Past and Present* 164 (August 1999): 205.

⁶³ May, “Empire Loyalists,” 46.

⁶⁴ Darwin, “British Decolonization,” 205.

capitals and at Westminster.⁶⁵

The vocabulary of ‘liberal’ empire, which transformed into the Whiggish vision of end of empire, should not be dismissed as mere rhetoric either; its manifestations within several traditions in British political thought and its remarkable recurrence throughout the history of the British Empire make it significant to understanding how empire, visions of Britishness on the world stage, and imperial dissolution intertwined in the age of decolonization. Essentially, invocations of the doctrines of trusteeship, of the vocabulary of ‘liberal’ empire, and of an imperial mission fulfilled on the part of British decolonizers put decolonization into the congratulatory national story that Howe and Owen identify, despite the messy reality of imperial dissolution. Because of this, end of empire, in the words of Paul Ward, “was absorbed into the sense of national identity as a sign of strength,” belying any notion that decolonization caused an immediate crisis in British identity on the world stage.⁶⁶ How this absorption proceeded during decolonization is the focus of this project. First though, this chapter will unpack that ‘Gladstone bag of morals’ with a brief survey of the many iterations of the British ‘liberal’ empire in the century leading up to decolonization and how effectively its logic transformed into the Whiggish vision of end of empire in the 1950s and 1960s.

The issue at heart of the development of the Whiggish vision was the debate over the nature of a liberal empire, involving such questions as can a liberal empire actually exist and what its implications would be for its rulers. Since the 18th century, visions of the British Empire as the “beneficent creation of a liberty-loving and commercial people” held currency within thought on the nature of Britain’s imperial undertakings.⁶⁷ Many assumed that Empire was a means of extending Britain’s native liberties overseas.⁶⁸ This sensibility however came under scrutiny

⁶⁵ Ronald Robinson, “The Moral Disarmament of the African Empire,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 8:1 (1979): 87.

⁶⁶ Paul Ward, *Britishness since 1870* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 32.

⁶⁷ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 102.

⁶⁸ Bernard Porter, “Empire and British National Identity,” in *History, Nationhood and the Question of Britain*, eds. Helen Brocklehurst and Robert Phillips (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 259.

during the imperial crises in North America and the Indian subcontinent of the late 18th century. In India particularly, it seemed to some observers that the British were not extending native liberties but rather merely replacing one form of despotism with another of their own making. What resulted from this scrutiny was the basic question within the debate over the nature of the British Empire: is there such a thing as a ‘free empire’? British observers of the late 18th century Empire, best exemplified by thinkers such as Edmund Burke, held true a supposed incompatibility between empire and liberty: that freedom at home in the domestic sphere and tyranny abroad in the imperial one is unsustainable and hypocritical. Attempts to reconcile this *imperium et libertas* question, as can be evidenced in the impeachment trial of Warren Hastings, began with the development of a discourse of ‘standards of conduct’ in imperial administration and of a parallel discourse of imperial responsibilities. “All political power which is set over men,” Burke declared to Parliament during the debate over the 1783 Government of India bill, “ought to be some way or other exercised ultimately for their benefit. If this is true with regard to every species of political dominion ... then such rights, or privileges, or whatever else you call them, are all in the strictest sense a *trust*.”⁶⁹ In this sense, responsibilities to the Empire included the notion that the British government had a duty to promote British liberties, the antithesis of despotism, abroad while maintaining a standard of humanitarian conduct, the antithesis of exploitation (in Burke’s example, the excesses of the East India Company) in regards to the peoples of the Empire.

The *imperium et libertas* theme was to continue to develop throughout the nineteenth century. In liberal thought, the discourse of imperial responsibilities reached new heights and was eventually to recast imperial administration as a British duty to the world, in essence, Britain’s world role. As historians Jennifer Pitts and Uday Mehta argue, nineteenth century British liberalism as a historical development in and of itself was closely bound with the growth

⁶⁹ Edmund Burke, *On Empire, Liberty and Reform: Speeches and Letters*, ed. David Bromwich (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 291.

of the British Empire and the development of modern British national identity; like thought on the development of liberal government in British politics, liberal thought on the British Empire in this period viewed imperial development as progressive, gradualist, paternalistic, and, if done right, wholly benevolent. Liberal visions of empire stressed the humanitarian nature of the British imperial project, deriving great moral satisfaction and inspiration from the campaign against slavery in the first half of the century. The theme of British benevolence as the predominant characteristic of the Empire was quite pronounced, and would influence the emerging concept of the civilizing mission by the end of the 1800s.

This was a continuing product of the ongoing *imperium et libertas* debate and the mid-Victorians' solution to this supposed contradiction was to recast it as 'good government' versus 'self-government.' In some ways this allowed for a resolution to the contradictory nature of a 'free' empire: tying together the humanitarian impulse and sense of imperial responsibility to 'protect' the peoples of the Empire, British liberals justified Empire, in the words of J.S. Mill, as a benevolent despotism, i.e. good government over self-government. As Mill famously stated in the introduction to his 1869 essay, "On Liberty:" "despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end."⁷⁰ Self-government had its role to play in the liberal imagination of empire and many believed empire and benevolent despotism were only a temporary stage in the development of Britain's colonies. "[B]y good government we may educate our subjects into a capacity for better government; that, having become instructed in European knowledge, they may, in some future age, demand European institutions [i.e. self-government]," Thomas Macaulay argued before Parliament in 1833. "Whenever [that day] comes, it will be the proudest day in English history."⁷¹ Macaulay's speculation of course was frequently cited in conceptions

⁷⁰ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (London: Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1869), accessed March 5, 2012, <http://www.bartleby.com/130/>.

⁷¹ United Kingdom. *House of Commons Debates*, 10 July 1833 (Mr. Thomas Macaulay). <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1833/jul/10/east-india-companys-charter>.

of the Empire's mission and Britain's duty to its colonies.

This thesis was best tested by the development of the Dominion colonies throughout the course of the nineteenth century. Observers of the British Empire who subscribed to this belief of the liberal empire could point to the growing autonomy of the Dominion colonies as proof that eventual colonial self-government was indeed the aim of British imperial policies. The white-settler dominated Dominions (Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and to an extent South Africa) had, since the 1840s, been subject to repeated constitutional reform, which incrementally devolved power to colonial governments modeled on Westminster. But those observers too found that with the rapid expansion of British influence in Africa and Asia, a product of the 'new imperialism,' Dominion model colonies, based on white settler-led governments, were difficult to replicate elsewhere. The 'new imperialism' of the late nineteenth century, along with the mid-century uprisings in India and Jamaica, kept alight the *imperium et libertas* debate for late nineteenth century liberal and radical observers of empire. Significantly, as many historians note, the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and the Morant Bay uprising of 1865 in Jamaica led to an increasing distinction in the minds of observers of the British Empire between white-settler dominated territories and those colonies populated by non-Europeans. This distinction also reflected a new development in thought that divided the world between 'civilized' and 'backwards' peoples. Thus after the mid-century, British thought, and particularly liberal thought, on the obligations of empire were situated in this frame of mind, one that viewed civilization as the result of progress over stages. As Mill elaborated in his 1869 essay "On Liberty," "liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion. Until then, there is nothing for them but implicit obedience to an Akbar or a Charlemagne, if they are so fortunate as to find one."⁷² 'Backwards' people were less advanced on the scale of civilization and Britain's world role, indeed her moral obligation in Empire, was to advance the lesser peoples to the highest stage of civilization: a

⁷² *ibid.*

society, government, and economic system modeled on the British example.

In liberal and radical thought on empire in the late nineteenth century, the moral obligation to advance ‘lesser’ peoples tied neatly with the humanitarian impulses of the doctrine of benevolent despotism. Radical anti-imperialist thought however, galvanized by what was perceived as an increasing militancy in the expansion associated with the ‘new imperialism,’ continued to turn the question of empire into one of morality, emphasizing the ‘benevolence’ to counter the ‘despotism’ associated with colonial military conquests. The function of empire as a liberalizing entity was not criticized, either by liberals or late nineteenth century radicals; rather, the excessive militarism and potential (and real) exploitation of colonial and British peoples that accompanied imperial expansion was. Even those highly critical of increased imperial expansion held as fundamental the concept that the British had a responsibility to govern their empire well and that the British, above all other western imperial nations, were best suited to maintain and develop the welfare of their colonial peoples. While *imperium* based on conquest and martial virtues was the antithesis of British liberty in radical thought, there was a “positive case,” in the words of historian Miles Taylor, for radical conceptions of empire.⁷³ This positive case wholly relied on the assumption that British institutions can and should be spread throughout the British sphere of influence, that British traditions of liberal government, particularly representative government, should be transplanted to the colonies. Even in the post- Boer War era (a war that most galvanized anti-imperialist sentiment as exemplified by J.A. Hobson and his 1902 study *Imperialism*), the question over empire was not ‘should it exist’ but rather ‘how best to govern’ to meet British standards of morality and imperial responsibility.⁷⁴ Hobson argued “all interference on the part of civilized white nations with ‘lower races’ is not *prima facie* illegitimate. ... [C]ivilized Governments *may* undertake the political and economic control of the

⁷³ Miles Taylor, “Imperium et Libertas? Rethinking the Radical Critique of Imperialism during the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 19:1 (1991): *passim*.

⁷⁴ Bernard Porter, *Critics of Empire: British Radical Attitudes to Colonialism in Africa, 1895-1914* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 295.

lower races...[and] the control must be directed to the general good.”⁷⁵ Labour Party leader Ramsay MacDonald too subscribed to the moral component of the British imperial mission as a world force, declaring in 1900 that “so far as it is a claim that a righteous nation is by its nature restless to embark upon crusades of righteousness wherever the world appeals for help, the spirit of Imperialism cannot be condemned. Morality is universal...”⁷⁶ Late nineteenth and early twentieth century anti-imperialists were not dismantle-at-all-costs, get-out-of-empire types; they were antimilitarists and continued to inform conceptions of the British Empire as one “based not on power but on ideals.”⁷⁷

The turn of the century and the decades leading up to the Second World War were heady times for thought on the nature and mission of the British Empire. Empire, especially as it developed in the Dominion colonies, was posited by some as a kind of Greater Britain, an organic extension of British liberties and system of government overseas. In the words of John Seeley, a historian whose 1883 work *The Expansion of England* popularized the concept, Greater Britain was “the English state extended indefinitely without being altered...the ripe fruit dropping from the tree and giving rise to another tree.”⁷⁸ Privileged in this imagining were the white Dominion colonies, reinforcing a sense of racial difference between the white settler colonies and those predominantly populated by non-Europeans. After the Boer War and with the 1909 foundation of the Round Table, the preeminent ‘think tank’ of imperial affairs, some argued that a new kind of imperial federation was necessary in order to maintain this extension. Coupled with this was, as Ronald Robinson argues, the moral challenge posited by radicals and anti-imperialists to maintain a ‘free’ empire dedicated to nurturing British liberties throughout the world. This moral challenge was answered with the notion of closer imperial federation and the development of the

⁷⁵ J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism* (1902): Quoted in Rita Hinden, *Empire and After: A Study of British Imperial Attitudes* (London: Essential Books Limited, 1949), 91.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Bernard Porter, “Critics of Empire,” *History Today* 57:10 (Oct 2007): 48.

⁷⁷ Porter, *Critics of Empire*, 312.

⁷⁸ John Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (1883): Quoted in Hinden, *Empire and After*, 67.

Commonwealth ideal.⁷⁹

Most closely associated with historians working at Oxford, the Commonwealth ideal quickly grew to signify “to politicians and men of affairs ... a chance to display the qualities which justified them in the possession of an empire”: the cultivation and maintenance of British liberal traditions throughout the world.⁸⁰ Arguments of empire in the first four decades of the twentieth century quickly shifted to this idea of a transformation of empire into Commonwealth, an association of free peoples united by their shared tradition of liberty. This moved conceptions of Britishness away from a strictly ethnic identity, as in the Greater Britain mythos, to a cultural one, a universal identity to which members of any race could subscribe. This was the birth of the concept of a multiracial Commonwealth. Almost a century after Macaulay proclaimed Indian self-government as the “proudest day” for Britain, historian Keith Hancock, a preeminent scholar and advocate of Commonwealth, argued that “the British Commonwealth is nothing else than the ‘nature’ of the British empire defined in Aristotelian fashion by its end” in which the dialectic between *imperium et libertas* resolves in favor of “liberty, equality and fraternity of self-government and racial impartiality.”⁸¹

By the start of the Second World War, the argument of transformation from empire into Commonwealth held sway throughout the bulk of the political spectrum and clearly represented, as Hancock elaborated, twentieth century thinkers’ resolution to the age-old contradiction of liberty and empire. Few argued against such a transformation and thus debate on the nature of the British Empire turned to how best to implement it. In regards to the African colonies, which by the interwar period had attracted considerable scholarly inquiry and popular attention, the key philosophy was that of trusteeship and indirect rule. British Africanists like Lord Lugard and his protégé Margery Perham advocated indirect rule as means to facilitate colonial

⁷⁹ Ronald Robinson, “Oxford in Imperial Historiography” in *Oxford and the Ideal of Commonwealth: Essays Presented to Sir Edgar Williams*, eds. Frederick Madden and D.K. Fieldhouse (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 34.

⁸⁰ Kathryn Tidrick, *Empire and the English Character* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1990), 229.

⁸¹ Quoted in Robinson, “Oxford,” 39-40.

development gradually with benevolent and impartial imperial administrators situated to protect native interests from white settler exploitation and to develop the colonies politically and economically. Perham, looking back on the doctrine of indirect rule, described its motivation as “the challenging ideal of philanthropy [which] saw the interests of the ruled as equal, if not superior, to those of their rulers.”⁸² Essentially by the 1930s and onwards, colonial development was the term given to the ‘civilizing’ impulse of British imperial policies. Indirect rule as an imperial philosophy was clearly a response to the moral challenges of empire posited by radicals and anti-imperialists and was another means to justify empire as a force for progress.

In addition to the developing philosophy of indirect rule, one of the most telling experiments in imperial affairs in this period was the establishment of the League of Nation mandate colonies in the post-World War I era. The colonies were an internationalist method to end unilateralist imperial expansion as the international body of the League of Nations granted the mandates to standing imperial powers such as Britain and France. British mandate colonies were predominately former German and Ottoman Empire territories in Africa and significantly in the Middle East, specifically the territories of Palestine and Iraq. The mandate experiment and its attendant ideology of imperial stewardship emanated from the moral imperative behind empire. Hobson in his 1902 study *Imperialism* even envisioned such a thing: as a condition of maintaining an imperial trust over subject peoples, “there must exist some organization representative of international interests, which shall sanction the undertaking of a trust by the nation exercising such [colonial] control.”⁸³ Thus mandates were established over the subject peoples of the defeated German and Ottoman Empires. However, as historian Bernard Porter recognized, the mandate system was eventually a kind of failure, given the imperial powers’ predisposition to treat the territories, and especially the increasingly valuable natural resources of the Middle East,

⁸² Margery Perham, *The Colonial Reckoning: The End of Imperial Rule in Africa and the Light of British Experience* (1962): Quoted in Anthony Kirk-Greene, “Margery Perham and Colonial Administration: A Direct Influence on Indirect Rule,” in *Oxford and the Ideal of Commonwealth: Essays Presented to Sir Edgar Williams*, eds. Frederick Madden and D.K. Fieldhouse (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 128.

⁸³ Quoted in Hinden. *Empire and After*, 91.

like “colonial spoils.”⁸⁴ The experiment however was a testament to growing opinion throughout the western world that advanced nations were beholden to the moral imperative of stewarding ‘backwards’ peoples into modernity.

The 1930s and World War II also reinforced for defenders of the British Empire the moral imperative behind British colonial administration. With the rise of fascism and the imperial ambitions of powers such as Germany, Italy, and Japan, defenders of the British Empire had another means to justify the need to protect and develop colonial peoples: to keep them out of fascist hands. British benevolence in empire never looked so good as when compared against the fascists’ treatment of subject peoples. Observers of empire in the 1930s and 1940s were quick to make the distinction between British benevolence and good government and fascist violence and exploitation. Wartime propaganda, aimed mostly at American audiences, defended the British Empire in just this way, emphasizing its peaceful nature, its commitment to British liberties, and its ‘end goal’ of eventual colonial self-government in the form of the Commonwealth. To more skeptical observers, who might point to India as an example of British failure to put principle into practice, defenders of empire, like Hancock, claimed that just such a strain as the civil unrest in India was the product of an overall rapid growth of liberty within the Empire.⁸⁵ This defense of empire, claiming the inevitable growth of liberty throughout, was the Commonwealth ideal, deriving from a teleology that posited the British Empire could do nothing but transform into a free, associative Commonwealth. In Hancock’s and others’ estimation, growing pains like the Indian stalemate were natural in such an inevitable progression of liberty. Most closely associated with Oxford scholars like Hancock, Margery Perham and others, the Commonwealth ideal fundamentally, in the words of Robinson, “present[ed] the imperial record teleologically in terms of an ideal end,” that of colonial self-government in a free and British association of nations, and quickly dominated establishment and official thought on the nature of

⁸⁴ Porter, “Critics of Empire,” 49.

⁸⁵ Keith Hancock, *Argument of Empire* (London: Penguin Books, 1943), 41.

the British Empire during the Second World War and throughout the mid-twentieth century.⁸⁶

Key examples of the potency of the Commonwealth in official thought reside in British propaganda during World War II that not only defended empire to skeptical American allies but also attempted to solidify Commonwealth support for Britain's war efforts by emphasizing the inclusive and free nature of the British imperial project. As the work of historians Simon Potter and Siân Nicholas demonstrate, official thought in the British political establishment was keen to portray imperial development in such a teleological light as that emanating from the Commonwealth ideal. Potter's study on the role of imperial historians in developing wartime propaganda shows how their efforts to present Britain's empire as a benevolent world power reinforced the interpretation that the British had in fact created a benign empire dedicated to realizing colonial self-government.⁸⁷ Nicholas' study on the wartime BBC Home Services coverage of imperial affairs draws a similar conclusion: in the mind of BBC programmers, it was critical to emphasize British benevolence and to distance the British Empire from accusations of exploitation and subjection of native peoples.⁸⁸ These attempts only reinforced the sense of Britain's 'free' empire and of the teleological development from empire to Commonwealth both among historians and officials of the British Empire and in the popular imagination. As one 1942 BBC memorandum on how to approach assumptions about the Empire suggested, programmers should envisage the empire as an "incubator ... hatching the eggs of independent nationhood. How the eggs got in the incubator it doesn't matter now so much, the important thing is 'are they being given the quickest possible development and what are we going to do about providing a decent poultry run in which so many independent chickens can scratch in the future?'"⁸⁹

It is clear that by mid-century, the logic of liberal empire found its most fruitful iteration

⁸⁶ Robinson, "Moral Disarmament," 86.

⁸⁷ Simon Potter, "'What Did You Do in the War, Professor?': Imperial History and Propaganda, 1939-1945" in *The British Empire and Its Contested Pasts* eds., Robert J. Blyth and Keith Jeffrey (Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 24-42.

⁸⁸ Siân Nicholas, "'Brushing Up Your Empire': Dominion and Colonial Propaganda on the BBC's Home Services, 1939-1945" *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 31:2 (2003): 207-230.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Nicholas, "Brushing Up," 214.

in the Commonwealth ideal, accepted almost universally throughout the British political spectrum. The Commonwealth ideal was a product of centuries-old intellectual wrangling over the conundrum of *imperium et libertas*. The various forms of this conundrum's resolution, from the late 18th century discourse of imperial standards and the nineteenth century liberal program of benevolent despotism to twentieth century articulations of the Commonwealth ideal, gave rise to notions of a British identity on the world stage as well. This identity was bound with older and continually potent notions of liberty, representative government, and rule of law being quintessentially British characteristics. Empire, and by the twentieth century, Commonwealth, was fundamentally viewed by almost all observers, from left to right, as an extension of British liberties and British good government overseas. The ways in which the Commonwealth was envisioned reflected how the British saw themselves as a world power. Historian Alex May elaborates this vision:

the British Empire, uniquely, stood for and promoted values of democracy, good governance, mutual tolerance, and respect for the individual; ... 'Britishness' was not so much a matter of race or ethnicity as of cultural values, exported to the self-governing colonies through British settlers but also to the 'dependent' Empire through example and education [i.e. trusteeship]; but ... the dissemination of 'Britishness' was a long game, requiring decades and even centuries of imperial tutelage in order for alien cultures to be re-moulded in the image of Britain.⁹⁰

Thus stood the basic image, in the official mind and to a degree within the popular imagination, of the British Empire on the eve of decolonization. Central among this was the notion that transformation of empire into Commonwealth was an inevitable, albeit gradual process; that, in the words of John Hargreaves, "idealists [as early as the 1930s] assumed that with trusteeship that Greater Britain, the organic empire, would transform into Commonwealth."⁹¹ Repeatedly, observers of empire in the mid-twentieth century projected that the Commonwealth was the

⁹⁰ May, "Empire Loyalists," 41.

⁹¹ Hargreaves, "Approaches to Decolonization," 91.

logical outcome of the development of the British Empire. At this stage, the eve of decolonization, the Whiggish vision of end of empire emerged. With the teleology in place and its significance within assumptions of Britain's world role, it was only natural that those overseeing end of empire, regardless of the political realities of imperial retreat, were able to invoke the Whiggish vision of imperial duties fulfilled as they liquidated the Empire.

After Indian independence and throughout the 1950s, this vision was articulated widely in the mainstream political culture. Decolonization of India itself was cast in such a light. Former Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee, at the helm during British withdrawal from India, claimed in a 1960 lecture, aptly titled *Empire into Commonwealth*, that the British “never envisaged that British rule would endure for all time” and that modern India was a product of the “ideas of freedom and self-government that they [the Indians] found in Britain.”⁹² Conservative Alan Lennox-Boyd made much the same claim in his 1958 lecture, also aptly titled *Imperium et Libertas*. Lennox-Boyd, who was Colonial Secretary for half of the 1950s, was well suited to apply the Whiggish vision as a mode to interpret British imperial policies. An address to the Conservative Political Centre, Lennox-Boyd's speech was replete with claims that the British were in essence putting principle into practice, that of the gradual realization of colonial self-government based on the British government model. Throughout his address Lennox-Boyd restated the Whiggish case that the growing demands for colonial independence were only the natural outcome of British imperial policies, “the cherished ideal of independence which we preached in the past” coming to fruition.⁹³ John Strachey, the leftist journalist and MP whose 1959 work *The End of Empire* chronicled the history of, in his words, British ‘disimperialism,’ also cast the British withdrawal from and legacy within India in a benevolent light. His proof of the positive results of British rule of India and its end derived in part from a comparison between

British and Dutch administration of their Asian colonies over the centuries: “[t]o measure [the]

⁹² Clement Attlee, *Empire into Commonwealth: The Chichele Lectures Delivered at Oxford* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 29-30.

⁹³ *ibid.*, 10.

respective consequences we have only to compare the degree of successful self-government achieved in present-day India and Indonesia” with India, in Strachey’s estimation, clearly the more successful.⁹⁴ Strachey also claimed that Britons could take “pride in the mighty legacies which his countrymen have left” in India, a product of British modernizing policies and the determined intent since the nineteenth century to put India on the road to independence.⁹⁵

Throughout the 1950s, India served as a touchstone to bolster the Whiggish vision of end of empire and as a model of sorts of how to dissolve the remaining ‘dependent’ colonies in Africa.

While the actual dissolution of empire was a major impetus that transformed the logic of Britain’s liberal empire into the Whiggish vision, external pressures, particularly those of the bipolar nature of the Cold War world, also prompted British commentators to solidify their rhetoric on the benign and democratic nature of Britain’s postwar imperial policies. The Communist bloc and its sympathizers were quick to criticize western policies regarding colonialism as another front within the ideological Cold War, as was evident in Macmillan’s prompt to defend British policies at the United Nations. Like responses to the rise of fascism in the 1930s, these challenges presented an opportunity to emphasize the beneficent and liberalizing goals of the British imperial project. Refuting Communist assertions that the British Empire exploited colonial peoples and that the emerging Commonwealth was merely empire by another name, defenders of Britain’s imperial legacies and decolonization policies reasserted the old elements of the logic of liberal empire. These reassertions attempted to thwart Communist influence among colonial nationalists by reminding them and the world of the modernizing and democratic tendencies within the British Empire. Kenneth Younger, a contributor to 1959’s *The New Fabian Colonial Essays*, made the most representative defense of Britain’s imperial policies. He claimed that colonial nationalists, tempted to agree with Communist criticisms of the emerging Commonwealth, tend to forget the intentional and benign outcome of British rule: “the rule of

⁹⁴ John Strachey, *The End of Empire* (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1959), 31.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, 58-9.

law, sound administration, [and] advances in the art of government,” essentially Macmillan’s ‘steady and liberal progress.’⁹⁶ Anyway, he concluded, claims of imperial exploitation were hollow in the face of Communist nations’ treatment of their own minorities, policies worse than anything Britain ever implemented, he asserted. In the face of these external criticisms, defenders continued to transform the logic of liberal empire into the coherent discourse of the Whiggish vision of end of empire.

While the Cold War set a backdrop to the development and articulations of the Whiggish vision, the basic foundation of this vision rested in the historical traditions associated with the liberal empire, Darwin’s ‘certain political maxims’ within British political culture of the two previous centuries. Historian W.D. MacIntyre’s 1966 study *Colonies into Commonwealth* claimed that the modern Commonwealth was the inheritor of mid-Victorian liberal values, tying the emergence of the Commonwealth to the centuries-old project of the liberal empire.⁹⁷ He, Strachey, and many others also claimed that Commonwealth was the logical opposite of empire, and reiterating Hancock, proceeded on the assumption that this logical opposite was a unique product of the “rise and decline of the British Empire.”⁹⁸ Essentially the Whiggish vision of end of empire stressed the evolutionary nature of the British Empire with claims that colonial independence was the goal all along, a goal now being realized in the postwar world. Strachey claimed that the Commonwealth itself was proof of the enlightened imperial policies and end goal enacted by the British. MacIntyre posited that the parliamentary systems installed by the British in their colonies were the means in themselves to dismantling empire and transforming it into Commonwealth.⁹⁹ Former colonial administrator and diplomat Sir Hugh Foot wrote in his 1964 memoirs *A Start in Freedom* that the two decades after the war were “a period when earlier ground-work was rewarded, when a great transformation was being achieved - the transition from

⁹⁶ Kenneth Younger, “The Colonial Issue in World Politics” in *The New Fabian Colonial Essays*, ed. Arthur Creech Jones (London: The Hogarth Press, 1959), 52.

⁹⁷ W.D. MacIntyre, *Colonies into Commonwealth* (London: Blandford Press, 1966), 339.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 341.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 214.

colonies to new independent nations. It was a time of fulfillment. ... We did not doubt that colonial peoples should become free to govern themselves.”¹⁰⁰ Clearly those witnessing the end of the British Empire drew from the long tradition of thought that posited such an end was only the logical culmination of the unique British experiment in liberal empire.

Significantly as well this Whiggish vision of end of empire reflected notions of Britain’s world role, much as Empire had done before the Second World War. Lennox-Boyd in his 1958 address claimed that the British Commonwealth was the “only effective League of Nations that the world has seen.”¹⁰¹ His concluding remarks summarized a vision of Britain’s world role as the head of a multi-national Commonwealth: “provid[ing] the world with what it so desperately wants, a union of nations bound by a common ethic to protect its weaker members and prepared to sink self-interest for the common weal.”¹⁰² Observers in the period of decolonization also compared this vision of Britain’s and the Commonwealth’s world role with other European nations’ own struggles over the end of their respective empires. Strachey emphasized how the British were “lucky” particularly when compared to France, which was losing empire “the hard way,” while Britain peacefully transformed its Empire into a democratic world body.¹⁰³ He pointed out the remarkable flexibility of British institutions in this regard, claiming that this flexibility should be a point of national pride for the British. Indeed, comparisons of the British Empire and Commonwealth with other European powers served to highlight the liberal and benign nature of Britain’s world role and the uniquely British nature of the transformation of empire into Commonwealth, strengthening the Whiggish vision of end of empire. S.R. Mehrotra’s 1963 article “On the Use of the Term ‘Commonwealth’” emphasized how the end goal of colonial independence and the uniquely British and liberal approach to imperial

¹⁰⁰ Sir Hugh Foot, *A Start in Freedom* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964), 13 and 15.

¹⁰¹ Alan Lennox-Boyd, “Imperium et Libertas,” (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1958), 7-8.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, 22.

¹⁰³ Strachey, *End of Empire*, 217 and 213.

administration distinguished and privileged the British Empire above all other western empires.¹⁰⁴

This idea that the British Empire was different from other empires, and significantly that its end was different from other forms of imperial collapse, tied the Whiggish vision of end of empire to notions of Britishness on the world stage.

A good example of this is Attlee's 1960 address. He argued that the Commonwealth strengthened and spread British culture throughout the world, much as earlier observers argued for Empire. He posited that the British were better at ending their Empire than other European powers (claiming the British Empire was the only empire never to 'fall,' but rather voluntarily surrendered), and that their legacies of democracy throughout the world were stronger than the influence of the new American world superpower. (He also claimed that colonial peoples preferred the British model of democracy to the American one, much as one would prefer butter to margarine.)¹⁰⁵ Attlee continued to argue that the British mission of bestowing liberty and rule of law made it only natural that colonial peoples would want such British privileges for themselves, thus the inevitable, logical, and welcomed transformation from empire into Commonwealth. He concluded his speech with an eye towards the contemporary situation in Africa, warning that it was too soon to tell if the emerging independent nations of Africa will, like India had in the preceding decades, accept "the best that Britain gave to them," especially the "ideas of freedom and self-government ... found in Britain," reiterating the belief that the Commonwealth was a testament to and promoter of British values.¹⁰⁶

As Attlee and his contemporaries unhesitatingly pulled from the tradition of the liberal empire as they observed and justified British decolonization, they had an eye too on the implications of this transformation of empire into Commonwealth for Britain itself. Many contended that Empire, because of its end in freedom, should be a point of British pride: the

¹⁰⁴ S.R. Mehrotra, "On the Use of the Term 'Commonwealth'" *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies* 2(1963): 9.

¹⁰⁵ Attlee, "Empire into Commonwealth," 41.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, 29-30.

British need not feel ‘guilty’ towards their colonial legacy since it was predominately a benign one.¹⁰⁷ Strachey too argued this and that the peaceful dissolution of empire was good for Britain. In his words, the Commonwealth was a “great reward” for Britain’s unique good sense in imperial matters.¹⁰⁸ MacIntyre in his 1966 study forwarded the same concepts while lamenting that Britain’s great achievement of empire into Commonwealth may be forgotten since “history is not generous to achievements of peace.”¹⁰⁹ Strachey however also acknowledged that while Britain can take pride in the “good sense” of its leaders in dissolving Empire peacefully, there remained for the British people, an imperial people, deep psychic implications accompanying end of empire: “so tremendous an imperial tradition could not but have profound effects upon the national psychology.” He then continued to exalt the “extraordinary feats of statesmanship [of] both political parties” and more significantly the British tradition of anti-imperialism that allowed “this imperial people, in defiance of some their deepest instincts,” to relinquish peacefully their empire and avoid the the political strife “which has overtaken most nations which have lost their empires.”¹¹⁰

In Strachey’s estimation, what prevented Britain’s self-destruction over end of empire was the prominence of the anti-imperialism tradition, personified by the Labour Party and anti-colonial “wage earners:”

It was only because of at least the most politically conscious sections of the British wage-earners felt a sympathy and identification with the colonial peoples as, to some extent, joint victims of the exploitation of the imperialist system, that the national situation has been saved.¹¹¹

Strachey’s anti-imperialism tradition clearly derived from radical critiques of the British Empire, imbued, as has been seen, with the tradition of Britain’s liberal empire. The Whiggish vision of

¹⁰⁷ Younger, “Colonial Issue,” 54.

¹⁰⁸ Strachey, *End of Empire*, 204 and 254.

¹⁰⁹ MacIntyre, *Colonies into Commonwealth*, 358.

¹¹⁰ Strachey, *End of Empire*, 213-217.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, 217.

end of empire emerged out of the centuries-long debate over the nature of the British Empire, a tradition that statesmen and observers of decolonization willingly drew from as they justified the dissolution of Empire. The concept of the liberal empire destined to evolve into free and independent nations modeled on Britain dominated the discourse on empire and Commonwealth in the era of decolonization. Transformed into the Whiggish vision, a powerful maxim in the political culture of postwar Britain, it did “save” the national situation, preventing a break-up in British national identity during end of empire (unlike the situation in France) and paving the way for many to view decolonization as a national triumph rather than tragedy, as will be seen. While the historical validity of Britain’s “peaceful colonial evolution” is highly suspect if not blatantly contradicted by the evidence, the potency of this vision should not be underestimated in understanding how end of empire intertwined with British national identity. Macmillan’s declaration to the world at the U.N., challenging Khrushchev to “say that this is anything but a story of steady and liberal progress,” was the story the British told themselves as they got out of empire, allowing them to absorb end of empire as a national achievement. Khrushchev responded to Macmillan’s challenge by removing his shoe and banging it against his desk in the U.N. General Assembly. The British on the other hand only heard in Macmillan’s challenge what they had always believed about themselves and their Empire.

Given the potency of this tradition of thought, it remains to be seen how British commentators invoked it as they debated and discussed Britain’s march out of Empire. The next chapter will explore the historical background regarding Britain’s rapid decolonization of its African territories leading up to 1960. Included in this story are details regarding the personalities involved, specifically Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and his Colonial Secretary of the years 1959 to 1961, Iain Macleod. These architects of decolonization were also fervent believers in the British ‘mission’ of transforming the Empire into a free, associative Commonwealth of independent and equal nations. In the case of Prime Minister Macmillan, the

crowning glory of his application of this tradition came with his 1960 address famously known as “The Wind of Change” speech delivered during his tour of Africa. The following chapter will use this speech as a starting point to explore how the British saw themselves as enacting British tradition as they ended their Empire in Africa. After the exploration of this background history and Macmillan’s own iteration of the Whiggish vision as developed in his most famous speech, this project will investigate the events of the previous year, events which in many ways brought the “wind of change” to Macmillan’s attention.

Chapter 3

The Wind of Change: Harold Macmillan's African Tour, January to February 1960

On January 5, 1960, Conservative British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan embarked on a six-week journey to Africa to “learn something of the problems and to have personal talks with the political leaders representing all shades of opinions in a friendly and informal atmosphere.”¹¹² Closely reported on in the press, Macmillan's African tour came at a time when Britain's dependencies in Africa were on the cusp of independence. It culminated in Macmillan's famous “Wind of Change” speech in which he identified African nationalist aspirations as a political fact western nations must face, an assertion that many historians view as a turning point in British decolonization policies. This chapter will seek to place Macmillan's speech in the context of the larger history of British decolonization in Africa between 1959 and 1963 and also provide analysis on how debate in British political culture over his tour and speech reflected notions of British identity tied to a specific view of imperial retreat. As Macmillan himself argued, decolonization was viewed by some commentators as the culmination and intentional outcome of British imperial history, a kind of imperial destiny closely related to a British tradition of empire stretching back to the nineteenth century, the Whiggish vision. Looking at how the popular press, one of the key voices in British political culture, reiterated this notion in its coverage of Macmillan's “Wind of Change” speech leads to a deeper understanding of how empire and identity were intertwined as Britain oversaw the final liquidation of her imperial presence in Africa. Essentially, the British press in their coverage of Macmillan's tour reinforced a popular image of British identity tied to this view of decolonization as a British tradition of her liberal empire.

By 1960, as Macmillan himself noted in his memoirs and diary, Africa was in a state of flux: the rising and occasionally violent unrest between African nationalists and the European colonial authorities throughout the continent had undermined the foundations of British colonial

¹¹² Harold Macmillan, *Pointing the Way, 1959-1961* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 144-145.

rule since the end of the Second World War. From Macmillan's perspective, it did seem that change was inevitable for the political and constitutional settlements between Britain and her African possessions and independence was thought to be eventual and desirable for most territories. He viewed his African tour as an opportunity to study "some of the difficulties involved in the next stages of constitutional advance, [and also] perhaps by focusing public opinion at home on this problem lift it to a plane above that of narrow party politics."¹¹³ This latter part was something most desired by Macmillan, after suffering at the hands of an Opposition on the offensive after revelations emerged in 1959 surrounding colonial violence in Kenya and Nyasaland. Macmillan's African tour, itself contested and criticized by Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell and the Opposition in the last months of 1959, was then a moment to seize the initiative on colonial and African affairs away from the Government's critics.

As several of his biographers note, Macmillan never held a deep affinity for empire, a position in contrast to the attitudes somewhat common for the more traditionalist and right-wing components of his party, whom he once condescendingly referred to as "your retired colonels in the golf club and their ladies."¹¹⁴ Nor did Macmillan nurse any kind of passion for African affairs, having visited only the northern shores of the continent during his governmental duties during the Second World War. Macmillan's high profile tour of Africa then, in part modeled on his 1958 tour of the Commonwealth nations outside of Africa, was a component of a larger project regarding the changing nature of the British Commonwealth after 1956: disentangling Britain from her imperial commitments while securing African loyalties, both native and settler, to British international policies. As journalist and author Anthony Sampson, who followed Macmillan on his African tour, noted: "It became steadily clear that Macmillan's government had one preoccupation with Africa - to get out of it."¹¹⁵ By 1960, the question at hand for Macmillan and particularly for his Colonial Secretary Iain Macleod was then how to get out of Africa while

¹¹³ *ibid.*, 119.

¹¹⁴ Alistair Horne, *Harold Macmillan, Volume II, 1957-1986* (New York: Viking, 1989), 187.

¹¹⁵ Anthony Sampson, *Macmillan: A Study in Ambiguity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 181.

leaving the goodwill of both the African nationalists and the European settler communities intact towards Britain. The 1960 trip in part was designed to walk the line between assuaging African nationalists and placating white settlers, particularly in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, who feared that colonial disengagement would allow the British to impose constitutional terms forcing the end of white political domination.

Of central importance in this scheme, at least in Macmillan's estimation, was the role of African nationalism. Macmillan was to a degree sensitive to African nationalist sentiment and agitation. His official biographer Alistair Horne described his opinion of Africa "as secondary to Asia," yet continuing "he had never said much about his views on Africa, but if anything it was plain that his sympathies were on the side of the Africans."¹¹⁶ Macmillan himself described the issue of nationalism in Africa: "It's like a sleeping hippo in a pool ... suddenly it gets a prod from the white man and wakes up; and it won't go to sleep again."¹¹⁷ His African tour and specifically its culmination in the speech delivered before the South African Parliament in Cape Town, famously known as "The Wind of Change" speech, aimed to make unequivocal Macmillan's position on African nationalism. Macmillan felt that his obligations in the process of 'getting out' of Africa included accommodating the African nationalists and attempting to reconcile the issue of race relations between Africans and Europeans in the settler colonies. This of course tied neatly to conceptions of Britain's role as exemplified by the Whiggish vision.

Macmillan placed faith in this notion of an imperial destiny for Britain to impart peaceful political evolution to her colonies, a set program of eventual self-government guided by British tradition and pragmatism. In reality, as historian Wm. Roger Louis describes, "the British lurched from one crisis to the next" that caught policy makers between African and white settler demands.¹¹⁸ Macmillan, however sensitive to the plight of African nationalists, was bound by these conditions, lest he forgo the sympathies of one group for the other and undermine British

¹¹⁶ Horne, *Macmillan*, 187.

¹¹⁷ Sampson, *Macmillan*, 169.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, 329.

influence over her former colonies. Yet, from Macmillan's point of view, as established in his memoirs published nearly a decade after his tenure in office, British accommodation of African nationalism was "the culmination of a set purpose of nearly four generations" of a tradition that included Macaulay's programs for India in the nineteenth century and Burke and Sheridan's speeches given in the impeachment trial of Warren Hastings in the late eighteenth century, a clear invocation of the Whiggish tradition of end of empire.¹¹⁹

While historians may not agree with Macmillan's own justification and explanation of British colonial disengagement in Africa, it is important to note the innate appeal subscribing to such a tradition held for Macmillan and others responsible for decolonization in Africa. Macmillan in his memoirs took to task the notion, aired by some of his white settler critics in the Central African Federation during the early 1960s, that the British had lost the will to govern and thus gave up their empire. Macmillan's language in defense of his 'program' of decolonization is telling.

There is a common illusion that this story, begun during and after the First World War and concluded within less than twenty years of the Second, is one of weakness and decay, resulting from the loss of will to govern inherent in a democratic system. This is an undeserved libel on a people who twice in my lifetime demonstrated their courage and tenacity, as well as against its leaders. ... It is a vulgar but false jibe that the British people by a series of gestures unique in history abandoned their Empire in a fit of frivolity or impatience. They had not lost the will or even the power to rule. But they did not conceive of themselves as having the right to govern in perpetuity. It was rather their duty to spread to other nations those advantages which through the long course of the centuries they had won for themselves.¹²⁰

Several themes arise in Macmillan's justification of decolonization, not least of which invokes the Second World War as a watershed moment for the British people, a common refrain in postwar Britain. Macmillan used Britain's real and symbolic victories of the Second World War to deny

¹¹⁹ Macmillan, *Pointing the Way*, 117.

¹²⁰ Macmillan, *Pointing the Way*, 116-117.

the argument that postwar Britain was too weak to maintain her world Empire and had no choice but to decolonize. This common explanation for decolonization, both from contemporaries of the decolonization era and among later historians, suggests that world empires were too costly to maintain for increasingly second rate European powers after the Second World War. The emergence of the American-Soviet Cold War as the determining geopolitical factor for world politics after 1948, the growing emphasis on nuclear weaponry and the air power to deliver it, and the decreasing importance of large navies combined to make the large ocean-based empires built in the end of the nineteenth century obsolete as a determinant of great power status in the postwar world order. In many ways these conditions did determine the pace and direction of the British withdrawal from Empire, something that was even noted at the time. Yet Macmillan in his memoirs rejected the argument that Britain was too weak geopolitically to maintain her Empire, postulating that any such supposition of weakness was a form of personal insult upon the British people, who emerged victoriously from the Second World War, and significantly, their leaders who guided decolonization policy.

Why then, according to Macmillan's own account of end of empire, did Britain decolonize? He contended in his memoirs that decolonization was part of the nature of the British Empire, the Whiggish vision. Decolonization was the British imperial destiny reaching its teleological culmination. Macmillan iterated the notion that the British Empire was an ever changing and evolving political entity. He argued even as early as 1942 that the true resilient strength of the Empire lay in its evolutionary nature, that the empire was bolstered with "the great quality of adaptability;" he elaborated on what he saw as a kind of 'tutor-student' relationship between Britain and its colonies, one that he could foresee developing into a political entity based on equality between nations within the Commonwealth.¹²¹ Without question, Macmillan's views on the evolutionary nature of the British Empire were neither unique nor

¹²¹ Philip E. Hemming, "Macmillan and the End of the British Empire in Africa" in *Harold Macmillan and Britain's World Role*, eds. Richard Aldous and Sabine Lee (London: Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1996), 99.

particularly novel. They were the tried and true conceptions of the peaceful evolution of empire into Commonwealth fit into a guise of actual political policy.

Macmillan too as a political actor was conscious of projecting an image of British identity as Prime Minister that tied into his justifications of decolonization, or at least the administration of colonial independence, as a British tradition of empire. Macmillan's personal style reflected what both contemporaries and historians note as an element of exaggerated Englishness. Historian Dominic Sandbrook describes it : "It even seemed that, the further British power receded from its Edwardian heights, the more determined Macmillan became to conceal the decline by presenting himself as a breezy Edwardian grandee. *The Economist* quipped that Conservative Central Office were faced with the task of 'trying to project in 1958 a Prime Minister obstinately determined to reflect 1908.'¹²² Macmillan's cultivated and exaggerated Englishness, popular to the point that his penchant for shapeless cardigans was a minor fad in the early years of his premiership, derived in many ways from a shift within British identity exacerbated by international affairs, particularly encroaching Americanization in British culture, the Suez Crisis of 1956, and the ongoing process of imperial retreat. Macmillan's personal style of "languor, irony and careless elegance" though concealed his adeptness at being an effective politician.¹²³ Behind the placid English facade was a wily, flexible, unflappable, and at times, rather ruthless character. These traits would prove critical as Macmillan embarked British policy on a course of decolonization after 1960.

1960 itself was a pivotal year for both British decolonization in Africa and for Prime Minister Macmillan. It was the midpoint of his premiership, one which emerged from the aftermath of Suez in 1957 and which ended amid the scandal surrounding the Profumo Affair and Macmillan's own poor health in 1963. In the 1959 General Election called in October the Conservative Party had more or less achieved a mandate, something which Macmillan looked on

¹²² Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London: Abacus, 2005), 73.

¹²³ *ibid.*, 74.

as fortunate particularly in regards to his colonial policies since he felt “Africa ... seems to be the biggest problem looming for us here at home. We just succeeded at the General Election in ‘getting by’ on this.”¹²⁴ The reasons for this appreciation will be covered in chapter four. By the end of his tenure, Macmillan’s policies towards Africa represented the strongest break his Government made with its predecessors.

Between 1960 and 1964, Britain almost completely divested herself of her major remaining colonies in Africa, something which throughout the 1950s seemed unimaginable to the bureaucrats in the Foreign and Colonial Offices. Even as late as 1958, they had projected timetables of colonial independence for African nations in terms of decades rather than years or even months. However after 1956, with the entry of Macmillan into the premiership and particularly with the debacle surrounding the failed attempt to return the Suez Canal to European control, British colonial policy underwent a significant shift. Some of this can be attributed to Macmillan himself; one of his first actions as Prime Minister was to order a balance sheet drawn up to assess the costs and benefits of Empire for Britain, suggesting that Macmillan, perhaps more than others in his Party, was willing to consider getting out of Empire. Yet most of the shift within colonial policies was a product of the Colonial Secretary appointed by Macmillan in the end of 1959, Iain Macleod, who, throughout 1960 and 1961, rapidly accelerated the pace of independence for most African territories.

Macleod was part of the younger generation of Conservatives who came of age politically after the Second World War and who, along with his colleagues Reginald Maudling and Enoch Powell, represented the intellectual, reformist wing of the Tory Party in the 1950s.¹²⁵ With the appointment of Macleod to the Colonial Office, Macmillan deliberately intended to alter and accelerate colonial independence policies in Africa. Macmillan’s previous Colonial Secretary,

¹²⁴ Letter from Macmillan to Secretary of the Cabinet Norman Brook, November 1, 1959 quoted in Horne, *Macmillan*, 183. The Conservative victory of 1959 also persuaded Macmillan to embark on his African tour of early 1960.

¹²⁵ Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, 51.

Alan Lennox-Boyd (who came to the position under the Churchill Government of 1951-1955), was a charismatic figure in the Cabinet yet perhaps not as eager as Macmillan would have wished to oversee the divestment of British imperial interests from Africa. He resigned from the post for personal reasons shortly after the Conservative victory in the October 1959 election, despite having resisted calls for his resignation from the Opposition during the investigation of the Hola Camp murders in Kenya and the Nyasaland Emergency that summer. Personally well-liked by Macmillan regardless of his “bad luck over Kenya and Nyasaland,” Lennox-Boyd stayed in his position as a favor to the Prime Minister to prevent a breakdown within the Government before the election.¹²⁶

After the October election, Macmillan sought a new face to replace Lennox-Boyd and chose Macleod, an up and coming figure among the younger Conservatives who first drew the attention of high party leaders for his “parliamentary demolition” of Aneurin Bevan over NHS costs in 1952.¹²⁷ Macmillan felt a personal affinity towards Macleod because of their shared Scottish heritage but was not to find him easy to work with during his two years as Colonial Secretary.¹²⁸ Macmillan’s emotional and personal detachment to the questions of Empire in Africa were balanced out by, as Macmillan described it, Macleod’s “very high-minded, very excitable, often depressed” attributes he brought to the Cabinet.¹²⁹ In effect, Macmillan thought Macleod grew too emotional over the issues of the day.¹³⁰ Macleod threatened to resign three times during his two year stint as Secretary. Yet in 1959, Macmillan felt that Macleod possessed the necessary “genius” to oversee the steady development of colonial independence in Africa, a task Macmillan described, without much hyperbole, as “the worst job of all.”¹³¹ Indeed, Macleod was well suited in terms of talent and inclination to “get a move on Africa,” as he was instructed

¹²⁶ Macmillan, *Pointing the Way*, 18.

¹²⁷ Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, 285.

¹²⁸ Horne, *Macmillan*, 184.

¹²⁹ Sampson, *Macmillan*, 169 and Horne, *Macmillan*, 184.

¹³⁰ Nigel Fisher, *Harold Macmillan* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982), 246.

¹³¹ Macmillan, *Pointing the Way*, 19 and Horne, *Macmillan*, 183.

upon entering the Colonial Office. One biographer described his ambitions upon entering office as seeking to be the last Colonial Secretary Britain ever had.¹³² He oversaw the rapid compression of the colonial timetable for independence from decades to years and months, constituting, in the words of one decolonization scholar, “no less than a revolution in colonial affairs” and a true change in the nature of British colonial policies.¹³³ Macleod himself, reflecting on his impact within the Colonial Office, said to the *Spectator* in 1964: “It has been said that after I became Colonial Secretary there was a deliberate speeding up of the movement towards independence. I agree. There was. And in my view any other policy would have led to terrible bloodshed in Africa.”¹³⁴ Macleod and Macmillan were thus the central figures guiding Britain’s withdrawal from her African colonies.

When Macleod entered the Colonial Office as Secretary in the end of 1959, he faced a series of crises and developments with no easy solutions. In West Africa, nationalists had already gained independence for the Gold Coast (which became Ghana in 1957) and Nigerian independence had been set for 1960. Kwame Nkrumah, the nationalist leader of Ghana who had agitated for independence throughout the 1950s, was by 1960 an emblem for African nationalists throughout the continent and Ghana itself viewed as the ‘great experiment’ in black African independence by British policy makers.¹³⁵ Ghana’s independence seemed to be the accomplishment British leaders sought in regards to containing African nationalism: it achieved an end to open conflict and “wide recognition of Britain’s genuine commitment to colonial independence,” while retaining Ghanaian allegiance to the Commonwealth of Nations.¹³⁶ But Ghana was not a victory of containment; rather, Ghanaian independence, coupled with Nkrumah’s own pan-African nationalist rhetoric, increased nationalist agitation throughout the rest of

¹³² Robert Shepherd, *Iain Macleod* (London: Pimlico, 1994), 153.

¹³³ Horne, *Macmillan*, 183 and Wm. Roger Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism: The Scramble for Empire, Suez, and Decolonization* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 351.

¹³⁴ ‘Trouble in Africa,’ *Spectator*, January 31, 1964.

¹³⁵ Anthony Sampson, *Common Sense about Africa* (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd.), 83 and Anthony Low, “The End of the British Empire in Africa,” in *Decolonization and African Independence: The Transfers of Power*, eds. Prosser Gifford and Wm. Roger Louis (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 39-40.

¹³⁶ Low, “End of the British Empire,” 40.

Britain's African dependencies. This was particularly acute in the white-dominated settler colonies; while the Gold Coast had been one of the more profitable African colonies for Britain after the Second World War, it had never been a colony of settlement like south and central Africa. Thus in essence, 'getting out' of Ghana was easy for the British who had no ties of settlement there. Nkrumah's popularity and pan-Africanism, a symptom of the rising tide of African nationalism to which Macmillan and Macleod were sympathetic, created significant problems for British policy makers when negotiating with the white-dominated settler colonies like Kenya and the Central African Federation (composed of Nyasaland, and Northern and Southern Rhodesia), and to an extent South Africa, a Dominion power.

The most vexing issue for Macleod and Macmillan was developing a reconciliation between African nationalists and the white settler communities who dominated most of Britain's African colonies. This had been a recurring issue for British policy makers since the end of the Second World War, who had attempted to solve the problem of reconciliation with a policy of 'partnership.' That is, economic and political 'partnership' between the races would entail the creation of 'multiracial' societies to prevent the development of South African-style apartheid in Britain's other African colonies. Equal representation in government was sought and thus British policy makers developed increasingly convoluted formulae to determine representation ratios in African colonial governments. These policies however failed to satisfy African nationalists, who viewed 'partnership' as a continuation of white rule. They were perhaps justified in this view considering that white settlers accepted the policies of 'partnership' as analogous to, in the words of one white settler leader, "the partnership of European rider and African horse."¹³⁷

Along with 'partnership,' the Colonial Office in the postwar era developed the policy of federation, a ploy that would unite former colonies in a political alignment more conducive to British influence before granting independence. Political federation of geographically linked colonies was attempted in Malaysia, Nigeria, the West Indies, southern Arabia and central Africa

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, 37.

throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s. But, as was made clear in the Malayan Emergency of 1948-52 and particularly with violence in Nyasaland in central Africa in the late 1950s, this process of political realignment did not satisfy nationalist aims nor did it necessarily bestow political stability to the territories in question. By 1960, it was in the case of the Central African Federation another factor complicating Britain's attempt to disengage from her African colonies, as settler-dominated federal governments, strongly connected to their interpretation of 'partnership,' were less willing to concede federal power to the nationalists. Generally, federation failed throughout the Commonwealth to impart lasting political stability. In fact, by 1964, the Colonial Office, in a balance sheet of federation drawn up that year, had deemed federation for central Africa and the West Indies as failures, southern Arabia and Malaysia as "future uncertain," and Nigeria as "perhaps the best hope of the lot ... but still decidedly shaky."¹³⁸ 1960 and with it Macmillan and Macleod's efforts to redraw Britain's stance toward her African colonies was a central turning point then in this rejection of previous Colonial Office policies, as Britain's leadership came to realize that maintenance of federation was untenable for their aims in 'getting out' of Africa.

The specific political circumstances in Africa into which Macmillan flew those early days of 1960 centered on the future of the Central African Federation (CAF) and the issue of race relations within the CAF, Kenya, and South Africa. The CAF, established in 1953, was due for a constitutional review that year. Macmillan had, prior to his African tour, set up a special commission dedicated to solving the sticky problems of political representation and constitutional settlement for the CAF's African and white settler communities. This commission, referred to by the name of its chair Lord Monckton, was a source of considerable debate both within the House of Commons and among the leadership of the Federation.

Federation leadership feared that the Monckton Commission might deem federal dissolution as a possible political alternative leading up to independence, while the Labour Opposition at home in

¹³⁸ A.M. Palliser, 'Policy towards East Africa,' as cited in Louis, *Ends of Imperialism*, 350.

Parliament hoped for just that: Labour leaders and other observers feared that the Federation might inch steadily closer to a South African-style apartheid system if the British failed to keep such developments in check. This scenario was particularly evident after the Federation's Prime Minister, Roy Welensky, sent Rhodesian troops into Nyasaland to quell the nationalist uprisings in 1958-59, while British forces policed and arrested African nationalist leaders. The most high profile leader detained in Federation custody was Dr. Hastings Banda of Nyasaland. His arrest and detention garnered much sympathy for African interests both in the press and in the Opposition throughout the end of 1959 and the beginning of 1960, and determining the conditions of his release was a primary concern for Macleod once in office. The 1959 Devlin Report, a product of a special commission to investigate the violence in Nyasaland (and over which the previous Colonial Secretary Lennox-Boyd took a beating in Parliament that summer), concluded that the situation of British control within the territory amounted to a 'police state.' This report inflamed public and governmental opinion against the Federation and in favor of another kind of constitutional settlement for the central African territories before independence, as will be seen in chapter four. The Federation too was itself unpopular among African communities, many of whom had boycotted previous federal elections. Again Macmillan was caught between placating the fears of the Federation's leaders, assuaging the African nationalists, and assuring the Opposition and observers at home that he would prevent the spread of nationalist violence and of South African influence into the CAF.

The question of South Africa too was central in Macmillan's motivations for his African tour. South Africa's unique position in British Africa as a Dominion power gave the country a considerable amount of autonomy in her domestic policies, as the rise of apartheid, a form of legalized segregation that classified nonwhite populations as second-class citizens, attested. After 1948, the Afrikaner Nationalist-dominated government of South Africa institutionalized apartheid within South African law and society. These developments were much detested by

British and world opinion and South Africa found herself increasingly isolated on the world stage because of this. By the end of the decade, it seemed South Africa's only international ally was Britain, yet that alliance was itself a product only of the political and economic ties of Commonwealth membership rather than shared sympathies. British opinion was strongly opposed to supporting South African racial policies and a popular movement, particularly on the left, gained momentum in late 1959 to institute a boycott in Britain of South African imports. Yet Macmillan felt bound to respect South Africa's domestic autonomy, however unpopular, to the point that Britain found itself voting against a U.N. resolution condemning apartheid in November 1959. Along with South Africa, only four other countries voted against the resolution: Britain, Australia and New Zealand (both of whom had been cajoled into the vote by British representatives) and Portugal, notoriously known for its own racist colonial practices. It was not lost by observers at home that Britain had conceded the moral high ground by opposing the resolution and now found herself isolated at the U.N., while at the same time exposing herself to criticism from the Communist bloc, a particularly vocal group eager to paint the West as zealous practitioners of the color bar.¹³⁹ Macmillan argued the resolution violated U.N. terms respecting national autonomy for member nations, but it was clear that Britain's stance was devised to placate South African Nationalist opinion and to bolster the ties of Commonwealth membership as South Africa toyed with the idea of a public referendum to become a republic in 1960. From the British perspective, this referendum would open the way for South Africa to leave the Commonwealth, a development Macmillan felt he needed to avoid, even at the cost of international criticism, in order both to maintain the integrity of the Commonwealth and to retain some influence, however informal through Commonwealth channels, on South African policies.

By the beginning of 1960 then, Macmillan was in a difficult position in regards to Africa.

Bombarded by criticism at home for Britain's seeming support of apartheid at the U.N., worried

¹³⁹ Wm. Roger Louis, "Public Enemy Number One: The British Empire in the Dock at the United Nations, 1957-1971," in *The British Empire in the 1950s: Retreat or Revival?*, ed. Martin Lynn (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 186-213.

that South Africa might vote herself into a republic and out of the Commonwealth if not ‘treated’ properly by other members (most vocally, Nkrumah in Ghana) who openly condemned apartheid, and fearful that if left unchecked by British policies South African-style apartheid could travel north to the Central African Federation, Macmillan left for Africa in early January. He was accompanied by his wife Dorothy and a small retinue of political handlers including the Cabinet Secretary Norman Brook. The tour was to culminate in South Africa as she celebrated her Golden Jubilee as a Dominion power. Macmillan’s trip, covering several thousands of miles by air, land, and sea, began in Ghana in early January, where the Prime Minister met with Dr. Nkrumah and toured newly constructed schools and government buildings. In Accra on January 9, he addressed members of the Ghanaian Assembly, where he first issued the phrase “wind of change” in regards to the rise and potency of African nationalism as political force. Macmillan wryly and grandly noted in his memoirs that “I used a phrase to which the Press paid no particular attention ... When I repeated it at a later stage it was to echo through the world.”¹⁴⁰ Macmillan continued his tour in western Africa by visiting Nigeria, which was to gain independence as a federated state in October of 1960. He again met with political leaders and toured regional power centers. On January 18, Macmillan and his retinue flew to Salisbury, the capital of the Central African Federation, a transition Macmillan described in his memoirs as “a different world [from the ebullience of the west Africans]... It still had a colonial atmosphere.”¹⁴¹ Macmillan in the Central African Federation reiterated a message of multiracial partnership as a viable solution to the problems of the CAF, but was essentially reluctant to say much on British policy regarding the constitutional conference so as not to undermine the upcoming findings of the Monckton Commission.

While in Nyasaland, Macmillan encountered the first controversy that emerged during the tour itself in the form of the Blantyre riots, when on January 26 British police were perhaps too

¹⁴⁰ Macmillan, *Pointing the Way*, 124.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, 130.

enthusiastic at holding back protesting crowds outside a hotel hosting a luncheon for the Prime Minister. As Macmillan noted in his autobiography, “[n]aturally much was made of this in the Press at home in an exaggerated form.”¹⁴² And indeed, the British press, the major daily newspapers of which had their own correspondents following Macmillan in Africa, played up this issue of police violence during Macmillan’s visit, partly because the incident itself occurred in front of the press corps outside the hotel. With the Devlin Report still fresh in the minds of both the press and Macmillan’s Government, particular scrutiny was directed at the incident in Blantyre. Macmillan’s Government at home, headed by R.A. Butler, was quick to investigate while the Opposition on the floor of the Commons drew overt, however hyperbolic, parallels to the Hola Camp murders in Kenya of the previous year.¹⁴³ The inquiry’s findings proved the incident not as serious as had been reported in some of the more sensationalistic coverage of Macmillan’s tour, but that the British police were responsible for the escalation of violence. *The Daily Mail*, a popular right-wing daily, published particularly vivid accounts from its eyewitness reporter, drawing the left-leaning *New Statesman* to note that “the *Mail* did not mince its words. ... Every other newspaper with a special correspondent covering the tour reported in similar terms and with equally shocking detail - except *The Times*.”¹⁴⁴ The editorial continued to criticize *The Times* for what it deemed ‘partial reporting’ on Macmillan’s African tour. This sentiment was reiterated as well in the right-leaning magazine *Spectator*, which noted that reporting on the African tour in the London press was “detailed and fair.” *The Spectator* editorial cited the Blantyre incident coverage as exemplary, except for two papers: “the *Guardian*, which for some reason decided that the tour was not sufficiently newsworthy to merit sending a correspondent; and *The Times*, whose correspondent appears to have been too busy finding what the Prime Minister was having for lunch (‘grilled Nyasa Chambo and pheasant flown in from Scotland’) to

¹⁴² *ibid.*, 149.

¹⁴³ United Kingdom. *House of Commons Debates*, 04 February 1960 (Mrs. Barbara Castle, Lab). <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1960/feb/04/monckton-commission>

¹⁴⁴ “Fleet Street: Bad Times,” *New Statesman*, 6 February 1960.

have seen what the other correspondents saw.”¹⁴⁵

Clearly, as the above examples of the press’ interest in its own coverage demonstrate, reportage of Macmillan’s tour was particularly heavy, mostly since Macmillan envisioned his tour as a large-scale public relations junket, open to the press and replete with multitudinous press conferences. Macmillan was eager to bring the problems of Africa to national attention in Britain, and felt the tour could achieve that while also indulging his penchant for dramatic statesmanship.¹⁴⁶ *The Spectator*, in the same editorial criticizing *The Times*, declared that the tour “has been of great value: enlightening public opinion at home.”¹⁴⁷ While the major dailies covered the tour closely, press coverage only intensified through the course of Macmillan’s tour, which culminated with his visit to the Union of South Africa.

On January 27, Macmillan reached Johannesburg for his final leg and what he described as “the most difficult part of my journey.”¹⁴⁸ There he was greeted by Sir John Maud, British High Commissioner in South Africa, who also acted as an editorial consultant for Macmillan’s Cape Town speech which he was to deliver at the end of his visit in South Africa. Macmillan was in Johannesburg briefly, accompanied throughout his South African tour by the Union’s Foreign Minister Eric Louw; he then traveled to Cape Town and stayed as a guest of the Prime Minister H.F. Verwoerd at his residence in Groote Shuur. While Macmillan in his memoirs dismissed this hospitality as diplomatic cordiality, the political message sent by Macmillan’s stay at the Prime Minister’s residence was, for critics of South African policy, alarming. Verwoerd was one of the key architects of apartheid policy and observers in Britain were worried that this stay might suggest an air of coziness between the two leaders unreflective of British disapproval of apartheid. *The Daily Mail* nicknamed Verwoerd “Dr. Apartheid” in its coverage of Macmillan’s meetings and other papers criticized how the public ceremonies in honor of Macmillan were

¹⁴⁵ “African Tour,” *The Spectator*, 12 February 1960.

¹⁴⁶ Philip E. Hemming, “Macmillan and the End of the British Empire in Africa,” in *Harold Macmillan and Britain’s World Role*, ed. Richard Aldous, et al. (London: Macmillan, 1996), 104.

¹⁴⁷ “African Tour,” *The Spectator*, 12 February 1960.

¹⁴⁸ Macmillan, *Pointing the Way*, 150.

themselves segregated affairs, “the whitest of white welcomes” according to *The Telegraph* and *The Daily Mirror*.¹⁴⁹

Macmillan’s decision itself to visit South Africa had been intensely criticized both in the press and among the Opposition in Parliament over the issue of apartheid. Many, including Labour Opposition leaders Hugh Gaitskell and James Callaghan, various voices in the press, and South African anti-apartheid leaders, argued that for the Prime Minister to visit South Africa as a guest of the Nationalist Government was to condone unequivocally the policies of apartheid. One Labour MP in the Commons demanded that the Prime Minister avoid even the appearance of endorsement for “the evil policies of apartheid which are abominations to the decent people in these islands.”¹⁵⁰ Margery Perham, architect of trusteeship and vocal supporter of policy reform in Africa, wrote to *The Times* after Macmillan announced his tour to warn the Prime Minister that his visit was not a “private enterprise” and that seemingly to condone South African policies would make issues in other parts of Africa more difficult to resolve.¹⁵¹ Callaghan, the shadow Colonial Secretary, tabled a motion in Parliament specifically to address the issue of the British Government’s position towards “racial intolerance and discrimination” before Macmillan departed for Africa and in debate cited Perham’s letter and the U.N. resolution vote to criticize Macmillan’s silence on the issue of apartheid.¹⁵² From the South African liberal perspective, *The Observer* reported that one left-wing Cape Town paper called Macmillan’s visit “part of a grand ‘Let’s Be Nice to the [Afrikaner] Nationalists’ campaign,” a dangerous message to send to African nationalists throughout the continent who closely observed the Prime Minister’s every word.¹⁵³

While Macmillan’s proposed visit initially attracted the most criticism, after it was

¹⁴⁹ “Cheers for Macmillan,” *The Daily Mirror*, 2 February 1960 and “Premier’s Insistence on Meeting African Group,” *The Telegraph*, 2 February 1960.

¹⁵⁰ United Kingdom. *House of Commons Debates*, 01 December 1959 (Mr. John Stonehouse, Lab). <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1959/dec/01/union-of-south-africa-prime-ministers>.

¹⁵¹ Letters, “A Visit to Africa; Hazards for Mr. Macmillan,” *The Times*, 5 December 1959.

¹⁵² United Kingdom. *House of Commons Debates*, 07 December 1959 (Mr. James Callaghan, Lab). <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1959/dec/07/racial-intolerance-and-discrimination>.

¹⁵³ “Africans Urge Macmillan to Cancel Visit,” *The Observer*, 13 December 1959.

underway, criticism shifted onto his program while in South Africa, a program of speeches and meetings vetted by the Nationalist Government which excluded any meetings with black African nationalists or anti-apartheid groups. Howls of indignation resonated from the Opposition and throughout the press, from left to right, on this point, with some arguing that failure to meet with African nationalists undermined the fact-finding component of Macmillan's tour, a point made by Perham in her letter to *The Times* and reiterated in *The New Statesman* and *The Economist*. Others contended that Macmillan's failure to meet with African nationalists and most prominently the African National Congress sent the wrong message throughout the continent. In the words of *The Daily Mail*, "the damage which has been done [from this] to Britain's reputation in the eyes of the Africans may be serious."¹⁵⁴ The editorial continued to deride the South African Government's refusal to allow "Big Chief" Macmillan the freedom to decide his own program, blaming Sir John Maud for the limited arrangements that allowed only token (and white) representatives of black South Africans an interview with Macmillan. *The Daily Mirror* wondered whether Macmillan might dramatically break away from his official program to meet with African leaders since to not do so reflected poorly on Britain's attitudes towards South African policies.¹⁵⁵ *The Mail* editorial concluded with a call for Macmillan to give a stirring speech before the South African Parliament in Cape Town, which he was scheduled to give the day before he ended his tour.

Thus, as the end of his tour neared, Macmillan faced a clear imperative to state the British case over South Africa's apartheid policies. Britain's vote against the U.N. resolution condemning apartheid, coupled with the high profile visit to South Africa by Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery in 1959, during which he tacitly endorsed the Nationalist Government's racial policies, only stoked criticism of Macmillan's Government in regards to its attitudes towards British Africa. Labour, previous to his trip, had already attempted to humiliate

¹⁵⁴ "Why Didn't Macmillan See Alan Paton?" *The Daily Mail*, 2 February 1960.

¹⁵⁵ "Macmillan Has Talk with Dr. V," *The Daily Mirror*, 3 February 1960.

Macmillan on his Government's silence over apartheid. Press opinion too was unanimous in identifying the need for Macmillan to take this opportunity to denounce South Africa's apartheid system. *The Economist* warned that "he will have to avoid doing a 'Montgomery' on apartheid. There is great good in South Africa, as the field marshal discovered, but there is also great evil, and Mr. Macmillan will doubtless want to see and hear about this evil without speaking any himself."¹⁵⁶ Early in Macmillan's trip, *The Economist*, conscious of the seriousness of Macmillan's opportunity to denounce apartheid during his visit, offered a piece to help him "choose the right clichés for his new journeyings ... only partly put forward as a joke." The piece snarkily suggested that Macmillan begin by recounting Britain's shared history with South Africa, "perhaps the greatest historical monument of the British Liberal Party, but we Conservatives now take about as much pride as our opponents in its achievements [a jibe at apartheid]" and continue by invoking the common sacrifice of the Second World War, during which "with only a little local hesitation we defended our shared ideals against the pernicious ambitions of an arrogantly self-styled Herrenvolk [a jibe at Afrikaner nationalism]."¹⁵⁷

While *The Economist* infrequently but effectively made light of the seriousness of Macmillan's visit for both South Africa and Britain in world public opinion, it recognized, as well as many others voices in the press, that this was a moment to amend the ills of the U.N. vote and Britain's official silence on South African policies. *The New Statesmen* printed an editorial that called for an end to such silence:

Mr. Macmillan must use his opportunity to make clear beyond doubt his total opposition to *apartheid*. If he fails to do so, he betrays not only the Queen's African subjects, but also the people of this country whose spokesman he is; ... During the next month Mr. Macmillan's progress will be puffed up in the white man's press both here and in Africa. The affable smile, the courtly phrase, all the Edwardian *panache* will be

¹⁵⁶ "Mac's South Africa Tightrope," *The Economist*, 16 January 1960.

¹⁵⁷ "What To Say in Africa," *The Economist*, 9 January 1960.

flaunted from every television screen. And none of it will be worth a row of beans, unless Mr. Macmillan faces the real test and passes it.¹⁵⁸

Macmillan himself described in his autobiography the pressure he felt to say something significant over the policies which he, like most in Britain, found abhorrent: “if I said nothing but platitudes I would be thought by public opinion, both at home and in Africa, to have failed in my duty.”¹⁵⁹ As the date approached for his address before the South African Parliament, Macmillan, “with much trepidation” and careful planning, prepared his highly anticipated speech that would be watched closely in Britain, in South Africa and throughout the entirety of the African continent.

Perhaps demonstrating again Macmillan’s penchant for drama, he had throughout his tour instructed his private secretary Tim Bligh to hint to the press corps that “something was cooking which would astonish and satisfy us all” about his address in South Africa.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, Macmillan and his Cabinet Secretary Norman Brook, with the assistance of Sir John Maud who had flown to London specifically to brief Macmillan on his upcoming trip, had drafted what was to be famously known as “The Wind of Change” speech as early as November of 1959.¹⁶¹ The speech went through several drafts over the next two months, with editorial assistance from David Hunt, the Assistant Undersecretary in the Commonwealth Relations Office, Julian Amery, minister of state in the Colonial Office, John Johnston, Maud’s deputy, and James Robertson, son of the Nigerian Governor-General and an employee of the Colonial Office. Scholar Colin Baker in his history on the evolution of the speech credits Robertson for use of the “wind of change” phrase in the final draft.¹⁶² On February 3, 1960, a Wednesday, Macmillan, who was nervous enough over the speech to be physically sick that morning, stepped before the joint session of the South African Parliament, convened in the dining room since protocol dictated only members could

¹⁵⁸ “Mr. Macmillan’s Acid Test,” *The New Statesman*, 9 January 1960.

¹⁵⁹ Macmillan, *Pointing the Way*, 120.

¹⁶⁰ Cited in Horne, *Macmillan*, 195.

¹⁶¹ Colin Baker, “Macmillan’s ‘Wind of Change’ Tour.” *South Africa Historical Journal* 38 (May 1998): 171-182.

¹⁶² *ibid.*, 180.

speak on the floor of the legislature, to deliver his address.¹⁶³

He began his fifty minute address, delivered in slow, measured tones punctuated by occasional, emphatic fist bumps on his podium, by complimenting the South Africans on their achievements in building their nation and continued to draw out the shared history between South Africa and Britain. Overall his tone was conciliatory, moderate, and sympathetic. Shifting to the situation on the African continent, Macmillan noted that the major fact throughout history had been the emergence of nations and of nationalism, declaring

[i]n different places it takes different forms, but it is happening everywhere. The wind of change is blowing through this continent, and, whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact. We must accept it as fact, and our national policies must take account of it. Of course, you understand this better than anyone. ... Indeed, in the history of our times yours will be recorded as the first of the African nationalisms...

Macmillan then identified the specter of communism as a threat for the newly emerging nations, imploring his South African audience to recognize that the west, of which they were a part, must offer as alternative to communism a community based on freedom, order and justice. South African isolationism, particularly after the U.N. resolution condemning apartheid was passed in November 1959, was an issue for Macmillan, and he addressed it by arguing that

we must recognise in this shrinking world in which we live today the internal policies of one nation may have effects outside of it. We may sometimes be tempted to say to each other, 'Mind your own business,' but in these days I would myself expand the old saying so that it runs: 'Mind your own business, but mind how it affects my business too.'

Macmillan continued to argue that nations in their policies must do what they deem right and responsible, and reiterated the notion that in Africa British policies must devise a scheme by which different races in a society work together in harmony and unity, the principle of

¹⁶³ Horne, *Macmillan*, 195.

partnership, “that must in our view include the opportunity to have an increasing share in the political power and responsibility, a society in which individual merit and individual merit alone is the criterion for a man’s advancement, whether political or economic.” Macmillan then transitioned to what he called “the policy for which we in Britain stand,” quoting from foreign secretary Selwyn Lloyd’s speech at the U.N. in September 1959:

We reject the idea of any inherent superiority of one race over another. Our policy is therefore non-racial. It offers a future in which Africans, Europeans, Asians, the peoples of the Pacific and others with whom we are concerned, will all play their full part as citizens in the countries where they live, and in which feelings of race will be submerged in loyalty to new nations.

Speaking sympathetically towards his South African audience, and acknowledging the validity of different perspectives on the problems of Africa, Macmillan delivered what observers later identified as the most crucial aspect of his speech:

As a fellow member of the Commonwealth it is our earnest desire to give South Africa our support and encouragement, but I hope you won’t mind my saying frankly that there are some aspects of your policies which make it impossible for us to do this without being false to our own deep convictions about the political destinies of free men to which in our territories we are trying to give effect. I think we ought, as friends, to face together, without seeking to apportion credit or blame, the fact that in the world of today this difference of outlook lies between us.

Macmillan continued in his speech to draw out the shared history of Britain and South Africa to inculcate a sense of commonality despite the “difference of outlook,” invoking again the need to remain unified before the communist threat and dismissing outright the attempt of some in Britain to implement an economic boycott of South Africa. Warning South Africa to reject isolationism, he quoted John Donne and continued to emphasize the common aims of the two nations over the differences, concluding

I hope -- indeed, I am confident -- that in another fifty years we shall look back on the differences that exist between us now as matters of historical interest, for as time passes and one generation yields to another, human problems change and fade. Let us remember these truths. Let us resolve to build, not to destroy, and let us remember always that weakness comes from division, strength from unity.

Despite the speech's reference to and rejection of South African racial policies, the joint assembly responded warmly to Macmillan's speech, applauding as he sat down while Prime Minister Verwoerd arose to motion a vote of thanks to Macmillan. In his motion though, Verwoerd took the opportunity for an "impromptu defence of his policies" calling for "justice for the white man" as well the black, something that did not go unnoticed by the press in Britain.¹⁶⁴ Observer and journalist Anthony Sampson described the speech as "probably the finest of Macmillan's career. ... [one] of masterly construction and phrasing, beautifully spoken, combining a sweep of history with unambiguous political points."¹⁶⁵ Bernard Levin said of Macmillan's skill in delivering the speech: "[h]e had managed to spread the speech, unambiguous as it was, with so much butter that he fairly hypnotized the joint assembly."¹⁶⁶ Macmillan's biographers, Alistair Horne and Nigel Fisher, along with Sampson and Macmillan himself, noted that the South African response, both among the Parliamentarians and the political press, was initially one of warm acceptance.¹⁶⁷ Macmillan in his memoirs claimed that only after the British press "had singled out certain phrases like 'wind of change'" did South African "criticism combined with a good deal of self-pity and resentment [begin] to develop."¹⁶⁸

Reception of Macmillan's speech in Britain was quite pronounced. For many in the press it was the declaration against apartheid for which they had clamored, despite the fact that Macmillan never specifically used the terms apartheid or color bar, and the dailies were not shy

¹⁶⁴ Macmillan, *Pointing the Way*, 159.

¹⁶⁵ Sampson, *Macmillan*, 176.

¹⁶⁶ Quoted in Fisher, *Macmillan*, 236.

¹⁶⁷ Horne, *Macmillan*, 197; Fisher, *Macmillan*, 236; Sampson, *Macmillan*, 177; Macmillan, *Pointing the Way*, 159.

¹⁶⁸ Macmillan, *Pointing the Way*, 159.

to paint the address as a dramatic confrontation between ‘Dr. Apartheid’ and ‘Good Old Mac.’¹⁶⁹ ‘Devastating,’ ‘explosive,’ ‘pulled no punches,’ ‘dramatic,’ ‘plain-speaking,’ ‘historic,’ ‘triumphant,’ ‘frank,’ ‘astonishing’ constituted the initial descriptions by the press the day after Macmillan addressed the South African Parliament. Only left-leaning papers, while quick to admit the courage and courtesy Macmillan demonstrated in delivering his speech, held back from absolute adulation of his ‘triumph.’ *The New Statesman* wrote “[s]ome of us have been saying just these things week by week and year by year. As if by a miracle, the leader of the Tory Party has decided that we were right,” while *The Guardian* unhesitatingly criticized it as an “inadequate indictment... if a British Prime Minister had spoken the beliefs of the people of Britain about South Africa, it would not have been possible for his listeners to applaud at the end.”¹⁷⁰ The Opposition, notably Gaitskell and Callaghan, released statements applauding Macmillan’s accomplishment and calling it a much-needed clarification of Britain’s stance on apartheid. Several papers pointed out that Macmillan had managed to avoid ‘doing a Monty’ in regards to South African policies, and every paper highlighted Macmillan’s depiction of apartheid as contrary to British convictions. Fewer emphasized as strongly the ‘wind of change’ component, subordinating it to Macmillan’s rhetoric of the rights of man, of merit, and of British convictions opposing apartheid. Essentially, most reportage and editorial coverage of the speech exclaimed it as an unequivocal denunciation of apartheid. Over the next few months though, the phrase “wind of change” would come to dominate thinking not only of Macmillan’s speech but also the entirety of his African policy.

Most voices throughout the press heartily endorsed the key points of Macmillan’s speech, particularly the denunciation of apartheid and the argument that Britain had a lingering obligation to her African subjects, black and white, to help them establish new nations based on British notions of justice, freedom and partnership. *The Telegraph* emphasized the notion of

¹⁶⁹ “Challenge on Africa; Macmillan Issues It Fearlessly,” *Daily Express*, 4 February 1960.

¹⁷⁰ “London Diary,” *The New Statesman*, 4 February 1960; “Inadequate,” *The Guardian*, 4 February 1960.

duty and responsibility Britain owed her multiracial colonies, a point Macmillan made several times in his address.¹⁷¹ *The Times* in a leader from February 4 reiterated partnership as the model Britain must develop in Africa, in opposition to policies of apartheid, and warned that failure to secure this racial harmony for Africa opened the continent to communism. Anthony Sampson in his editorial commentary for *The Observer* praised Macmillan for pointing out to his South African audience how “white communities in Africa must see themselves in perspective, as awkward liabilities among British friendships in Africa.”¹⁷² Yet the preponderance of commentary on Macmillan’s speech revolved around the key theme of unequivocal denunciation of apartheid, interpreting that the ‘wind of change’ meant Britain was ready to give African nationalists in the settler colonies the same primacy as they received in Ghana and Nigeria.

This was the reception that Macmillan complained of in his memoirs. Indeed, only after the British press pronounced the speech an unmitigated criticism of South African policies, with most referring to it as the anti-apartheid speech, did officials and the press in South Africa respond with harsher terms for his address. This too was covered in the daily press in Britain in a somewhat sensationalized fashion. “At First They Did Not Get the Message; Now - the Shock Sets In” reported *The Daily Express*. “Macmillan’s Speech Hardens Their Hearts” read *The Daily Herald* while *The Telegraph* reported “South African Bitterness at Premier.” Papers like *The Daily Mail* sensationalized Verwoerd and his Government’s response: “Now Verwoerd Taunts ‘Young Macmillan’” covered the South African Prime Minister’s statement during a press conference in which he said Macmillan’s speech was a product of naiveté and misunderstanding of the Afrikaner position. *The Times* reported the South African reaction as one tinged with a sense of betrayal since Afrikaner nationalists quickly came to view the speech as indicative of unconditional support for the African nationalist cause at the expense of the South African Government.

¹⁷¹ “Britain ‘Cannot Flinch from Doing Her Duty,’” *The Telegraph*, 4 February 1960.

¹⁷² “This is a Milestone,” *The Observer*, 7 February 1960.

Particularly the response of the Afrikaner Foreign Minister Louw, delivered in a interview with a leading Nationalist paper February 8, after Macmillan had left the country, came under heavy fire in British political reporting. Louw claimed Macmillan's speech was merely an attempt to save face at the U.N. and dismissed criticisms over his refusal to allow Macmillan to meet with African leaders. In his dismissal, he compared Macmillan's desire to meet with the African National Congress, which was refused, to a South African politician visiting Britain and requesting an interview with Oswald Mosley, the British fascist leader. "What would be the reaction in Britain if, for instance, our Prime Minister while visiting the country as a special guest of the United Kingdom Government, were to ask for a private interview with Sir Oswald Mosley, who is leader of an alleged and growing Fascist organisation?"¹⁷³ Press reactions, particularly on the left, to this statement by the Foreign Minister, whom the British press had already demonized for his role in limiting Macmillan's program, was swift and unanimous: "It would be entirely in keeping with the philosophies of Dr. Verwoerd ... It would be entirely in keeping with the policies of his notorious predecessors ... to want to see Sir Oswald Mosley" read one editorial commentary on the South African reaction to Macmillan's speech.¹⁷⁴

Press reactions to Louw's statement and to the general tenor of anger and bitterness over the speech emanating from the South African Nationalist press suggest several assumptions over Britain's role in South Africa held by commentators in British political culture. Despite the historical tradition and contemporary rhetoric of South Africa as a key white Dominion member of the British Commonwealth, Afrikaners in the Union were still seen as somewhat foreign compared to the British populations. Tensions among the white populations of Afrikaner and English-speaking were a recurring facet in South African political life. Afrikaner nationalism was in many ways deliberately anti-British, a recurrent issue since the end of the Boer War and the creation of the Union in 1906. Afrikaner apartheid was also viewed as a direct rejection of the

¹⁷³ "Bitter Reply to Premier; Ready to See South Africa Black," *The Guardian*, 9 February 1960.

¹⁷⁴ "Harold Mac and Mr. Louw," *Daily Mirror*, 10 February 1960.

‘British values’ of liberalism and tolerance. In the press reportage of Macmillan’s visit to South Africa and the critical fallout surrounding his Cape Town speech, differences between British and Afrikaner were emphasized in a variety of ways, not least of which, particularly after Macmillan’s speech, was this idea of apartheid as wholly un-British.

The popular dailies especially emphasized these differences, and in doing so, promulgated a popular image of British identity, both in Britain and within the Commonwealth, as one defined against the ‘racialist’ South African nationalists. The Whiggish vision found its challenge in Afrikaner apartheid. *The Daily Mail* in particular emphasized in its coverage of Macmillan’s visit the fact that Cape Town itself was originally a British settlement, highlighting the relations between the British ‘kith and kin’ left in Cape Town and the Afrikaner majority, and posited that Macmillan’s token visit with a white representative of black South Africans, Margaret Ballinger, allowed Macmillan to “hear the voice of Africa ... from a Scotswoman.”¹⁷⁵ In the same article and others, *The Mail* as well emphasized how the strongest anti-apartheid voices, independent of the African National Congress, were those emanating for the South African Anglican church leadership. The emphasized differences between the British ‘kith and kin’ in South Africa as opposed to the Afrikaners was most pronounced in the coverage of Macmillan’s departure from South Africa on February 5. Macmillan boarded his cruise liner *The Cape Town Castle* to choruses of “God Save the Queen” and shouts of “Good Old Mac,” “We Want Mac,” and “Come Back Mac.” From *The Times* to *The Daily Mail* this detail was not left out in the reporting of his farewell, with *The Mail* adding how Foreign Minister Louw stood impassively and silently by during the English-speaking crowd’s ebullient demonstrations.¹⁷⁶ Macmillan described the impromptu singing and chanting as “a moving and impressive scene.”¹⁷⁷ *The Daily Express* ran the headline “Mac Triumphs: Woman Mayor Speaks of Empire Loyalty” and went on to describe how the Mayor’s farewell speech to Macmillan was interrupted by applause

¹⁷⁵ *The Daily Mail*, 2 February 1960.

¹⁷⁶ “‘Come Back Mac’ Cries End Tour,” *The Daily Mail*, 6 February 1960.

¹⁷⁷ Macmillan, *Pointing the Way*, 161.

when she claimed “Cape Town had been a multiracial society for 300 years.”¹⁷⁸ The reportage in the popular press made clear the imperial attachments of British ‘kith and kin’ in South Africa and how they were defined against the Nationalist policies of the color bar.

One telling moment in Macmillan’s farewell ceremonies that February afternoon also juxtaposed British and Afrikaner identity. Before boarding his liner, Macmillan accepted as a gift from the South African Government a Burgher hat, a traditional Boer garment worn during the end of the nineteenth century, replete with an ostrich feather. This too was a detail that few papers failed to address, as Macmillan put on the hat as he waved farewell to the crowds gathered at the dock. *The Daily Mirror* referenced the gift in its headline coverage of Macmillan’s departure: “Macmillan (Feather in Cap) Sails Home.”¹⁷⁹ Most dailies, from *The Telegraph* to *The Daily Mail*, clearly delighted in reporting on the hat and many included pictures of Macmillan wearing his new souvenir. There was a sense of frivolity and humorous juxtaposition in the reportage of Macmillan in a Boer hat, derived from the fact that Macmillan cultivated a very English image and the press was receptive to Macmillan’s playful efforts to disrupt that image. This was not unprecedented, as references in the press to Macmillan’s Boer hat made clear; in his 1959 visit to Moscow, the Soviet authorities had gifted Macmillan a Russian fur hat, which equally amused commentators in the press when pictures of him wearing it emerged. The reasons for this amusement stem from a popular image of British identity, something which Macmillan was very conscious to cultivate, as juxtaposed against Afrikaner identity. While the incident with the hat was somewhat lighthearted, it was reported in the same coverage that made more overt juxtapositions between British ‘kith and kin’ and Afrikaner nationalism, creating a sense that apartheid was an un-British thing and reaffirming the Whiggish vision that promoted British exceptionalism in its dedication to equality, tolerance, and liberal values.

While the Whiggish vision flourished in the press reportage on Macmillan’s trip, another

¹⁷⁸ *The Daily Express*, 6 February 1960.

¹⁷⁹ *The Daily Mirror*, 6 February 1960.

question arose as well regarding the historical significance of what most agreed was a very politically successful tour for Harold Macmillan. Most of the popular dailies heralded his speech as an unequivocal denunciation of apartheid, a significant shift in British policies towards South Africa and by extension her other African settler colonies. But some questioned whether this really was such a change. *The Economist* claimed the speech's "echoes will be long heard ... [yet] nowhere did he add anything substantial that was new; whenever possible he quoted what had already been propounded at Westminster and the United Nations."¹⁸⁰ *The Spectator* made much the same claim: "It is true ... that what he said has been said before by representatives of Her Majesty's Government -- sometimes much more explicitly."¹⁸¹ The editorial continued to point out that the true novelty of Macmillan's Cape Town speech was that he delivered it in South Africa, leaving "little doubt of British feelings on the subject. ... Where he did leave some doubt ... was on what he proposes to do next." British criticisms of his speech, both in the press and among the Opposition, made just this point. Macmillan returned to the House of Commons on February 17, 1960 to deliver his report on his tour. There, amidst cheers from his own Party, he encountered stringent criticism from Gaitskell on just that question of what happens next in Africa.

Historians of decolonization point to the "Wind of Change" speech as an emblem of the shift in colonial policy regarding Africa. Indeed, the phrase 'wind of change' is used by historians as a kind of shorthand to denote decolonization after 1960 and Britain's relatively rapid withdrawal from her African territories. But the speech itself is only emblematic of a policy shift that Macmillan had put in place by 1959, one constituted and enacted by Colonial Secretary Macleod that put a primacy on rapid independence for African colonies. This policy itself was not unequivocally adopted by all in Macmillan's own party and historians still debate the reasons behind Macmillan's obvious desire to get out of Africa. The most telling immediate

¹⁸⁰ "Apartheid in One Country," *The Economist*, 13 February 1960.

¹⁸¹ "Against Apartheid," *The Spectator*, 5 February 1960.

backlash of Macmillan's policy shift within British political culture was the formation of the conservative Monday Club, which formed after his Cape Town speech to advocate for imperial renewal rather than withdrawal.¹⁸² Conservative opposition to Macleod's tactics and policies of imperial withdrawal also led to Macmillan removing him from the Colonial Office in 1961. As a case study into end of empire in Africa and British national identity, the "Wind of Change" speech as an emblem of this policy shift is a good starting place to break down how discourse on Britishness intertwined with imperial withdrawal. It illuminated how public debate maintained a specific imperial British identity, the Whiggish vision, imbued with visions of Britishness as innately tolerant and progressive (particularly when compared against an Afrikaner identity). This identity, derived from a tradition of viewing empire as benign, came to the fore as Macmillan drew attention to the British situation in Africa. The next chapter will seek to examine this debate as it centered on the issue of colonial violence perpetrated by the British against African subjects, specifically the revelations of the murders at Hola Camp in Kenya in 1959 and the publication of the Devlin Report over police actions in Nyasaland that same year. From many observers' perspectives, these incidents taxed notions of British imperial responsibilities and convictions more heavily than anything since the 1930s, subtly altering British conceptions of her responsibility to Empire and in turn giving rise to Macmillan's sensitivity to the wind of change.

¹⁸² Many historians of the "Wind of Change" speech claim the Monday Club derived its name from 'Black Monday,' the day when Macmillan supposedly delivered his speech, yet Macmillan addressed the South African Parliament on a Wednesday. Probably the first historian to make this mistake was Conservative MP Nigel Fisher in his 1982 biography on Macmillan, and it has been reiterated in several different places including Ritchie Owendale's study on the African tour and British decolonization policy, "Macmillan and the Wind of Change in Africa, 1957-1960" in the June 1995 volume of *The Historical Journal* and a 2008 compilation of great British speeches.

Chapter 4
The Vision in Crisis:
Furor over the Hola Camp Murders and the Nyasaland Emergency, July 1959

For two days in late July 1959, the British House of Commons, on the eve of recess before a general election, held one of the most intense debates on colonial affairs in the nation's history. To a packed gallery and stretching late into the night, the Commons debated no less a topic than the standards of British conduct in their African protectorates. Earlier that year on March 3, 11 men were beaten to death in the Hola detention camp in Kenya, a camp set up to rehabilitate anti-colonial insurgents known as Mau Mau. That same day in the British protectorate of Nyasaland, the colonial government instituted a state of emergency which resulted in the deaths of 51 Africans and the detention without trial of over a thousand more. By July, the details surrounding these tragedies had come to light, throwing into question British policies regarding a 'peaceful' transition from Empire to Commonwealth and the concept of British justice as it translated to the colonies. The furor over Hola and over the Devlin Report, the product of the commission set up to investigate the situation in Nyasaland, bring into relief historical questions regarding how realities of colonial control and the ideals of the Whiggish vision of end of empire fail to reconcile; how professed British ideals and colonial policies diverged; and how the brave new world of the transformation of Empire into Commonwealth butted against traditional forms of colonial repression. The Parliamentary debate over Hola and the Devlin Report represent a crisis within the Whiggish discourse over end of empire. The divergence between ideals and policy was more than obvious to the men and women of Parliament and the British Government and analyzing their responses, in the Commons and in the pages of the political press, will be the focus of this chapter. How did the image of Britain as a benign imperial power guiding her colonial charges to democracy and freedom survive such a crisis as this? Was this moment in the summer of 1959 really the "moral end," in the words of Wm. Roger Louis, of the entire British Empire?

From an early twenty-first century perspective, the answer would seem to be yes and within the last few years several historians have revisited the darker histories of the British in Kenya and elsewhere in Africa. Most notable among them is Caroline Elkins, whose Pulitzer Prize-winning 2005 book, *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (published in America as *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya*) raised a modicum of controversy for its sensationalist claims to uncover the hidden histories of British brutality in Kenya, brutality that flies in the face of the Whiggish history of British decolonization.

Historian David Anderson's work, *Histories of the Hanged*, published the same year as *Britain's Gulag*, also makes considerable use of the vast amount of documents regarding British anti-Mau Mau policies and trial proceedings. Indeed, Anderson himself says that what is most remarkable about the British anti-insurgency campaign in Kenya is how well documented it was in the courts of law: "British justice in 1950s Kenya was a blunt, brutal and unsophisticated instrument of oppression. Yet, those same courts documented their proceedings in meticulous, voluminous detail."¹⁸³ It seems a primary motivation in this newer scholarship is to quell the impression that British decolonization was somehow entirely peaceful, to discredit any remaining faith in a Whiggish vision of end of empire. Because of anti-insurgent activities like the Mau Mau War, Elkins concludes "in the final accounting, repressive laws and undemocratic institutions, not peace and progress, are the primary bequest of the British to their onetime empire."¹⁸⁴

It is a testament to the resilience of the Whiggish vision of end of empire that historians in the twenty-first century are compelled to discredit it still. Popular imaginings of Britain's end of empire downplays its violent history. This can be seen in the reaction during the summer of 2011 to the five former Mau Mau detainees who sought legal restitution in British courts. Voices in contemporary Britain have expressed incredulity that British rule in Kenya ended as violently as it did. While contemporary observers in Britain may be unfamiliar with the brutality launched

¹⁸³ David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire*. (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2005), 7.

¹⁸⁴ Caroline Elkins "The Wrong Lesson" *Atlantic Monthly* 296:1, 34, 36, 38 (Jul./Aug. 2005): 17.

against the colonial insurgency, history itself makes clear that indeed British violence in Kenya was well documented and hotly debated at the time. The contradictions between what was happening in Kenya, in the Rhodesias, and in Nyasaland and what the British were telling themselves about their unprecedented peaceful transition from Empire to Commonwealth were apparent even to observers in the 1950s. British tactics in the Mau Mau anti-insurgency campaign were widely known in the political culture of the era, the institution of rehabilitation methods debated in the press and in Parliament. Indeed, in many ways the story of the anti-colonial left in mid-twentieth century Britain was closely tied to the course of the Mau Mau War and its ensuing counter-insurgency and rehabilitation programs.

The most striking example of this was the extra-Parliamentary organization, Movement for Colonial Freedom, spearheaded by Labour MP Fenner Brockway in 1954. As Stephen Howe's thorough history makes clear, the Movement for Colonial Freedom (MCF) drew its anti-imperialist stance from the liberal-radical tradition in British political culture and presented itself as a moral crusade to help colonial peoples gain their independence. The MCF was galvanized by the perceived increase in violence against colonials in British policy in the 1950s and specifically by the situation in Kenya, which Kingsley Martin described as "so bad that most people here now try not to think about it."¹⁸⁵ Though never to grow as large or as popular as other left-wing political movements like the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament or the Anti-Apartheid Movement (a kind of 'spin-off' organization from the MCF), the MCF in the 1950s was the most important organization for those concerned about colonial issues and served as a resource for Labour MPs as well as a metropolitan point of contact for nationalists in the colonies.

The MCF also did much to publicize British actions in the colonies, particularly on the floor of the House of Commons through its affiliated MPs, and occasionally to the chagrin of

¹⁸⁵ Quoted in Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire, 1918-1964* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 234.

Labour Party leaders. Throughout the 1950s, the Commons witnessed a tremendous increase in debate over colonial affairs, motivated as much by a sense of moral outrage on the left as by the more quotidian political partisanship of the day. Kenya and the anti-Mau Mau campaign served as the central rod of controversy. Reports of British brutality were circulated widely, Parliamentary fact-finding missions were launched, speeches were given and monographs on the topic of Mau Mau and British reactions to it published. Labour MP Barbara Castle earned her Parliamentary reputation in these years, visiting Kenya and other places in Africa and continually hounding Conservative Colonial Secretary Alan Lennox-Boyd on the floor of the Commons. As Brockway explained in 1957, “three years ago, it used to be said that MPs were indifferent [to colonial affairs]. If the Colonial Secretary was asked thirty questions in a month, it was thought he was worked hard. Now he has to answer at least two hundred.”¹⁸⁶ Challenged by leftist critics at home in the press and Parliament, the Conservative Governments of the 1950s responded in kind. The anti-Mau Mau campaign was not only a military conflict, it was also a propaganda war, both within the African and white settler populations in Kenya and within the British populace at home. It was the closest thing the British had to an Algeria.¹⁸⁷

What then was Mau Mau? Recent historiography posits it was a peasants’ revolt that transformed into a civil war among the Kikuyu tribe of Kenya, with nearly 25,000 Kenyans killed in the years of actual combat between 1952 and 1955 and another 150,000 detained by colonial forces.¹⁸⁸ Displaced from their traditional lands by white British settlers in the 1920s and 1930s, many Kikuyu were impoverished, destitute, and left voiceless in the colonial political system. Throughout Kenya after the Second World War material conditions fomented mass disaffection within all segments of the Kenyan population and tribes, including agrarian workers, urban laborers, and the middle tiers of society. By the second half of the 1940s, this disaffection

¹⁸⁶ Quoted in Paul Kelemen “The British Labour Party and the Economics of Decolonization: The Debate over Kenya” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 8:3 (2008): 12.

¹⁸⁷ Macmillan even recognized this as such. John Turner, *Macmillan* (New York: Longman, 1994), 258.

¹⁸⁸ Daniel Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counterinsurgency, Civil War and Decolonization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5.

manifested itself in the emergence of trades and political unions, such as the Kenya African Union (KANU), headed by Jomo Kenyatta. While these unions made the traditional nationalist demands on the Kenya Government and sought a move away from tribalism to nationalism and even to pan-Africanism, by 1950 discontent gave rise to militant underground movements dedicated to resisting colonial agrarian policies and to reclaiming lost lands. These underground movements constituted the seeds of the Mau Mau peasant revolt. Not highly centralized, the peasant revolt initially took the form of agricultural sabotage and the destruction of white settler crops and livestock. What form of centralization there was in this nascent Mau Mau lay in oath-taking ceremonies administered by resistance organizers. By 1952, unrest in Kenya had worsened to the point that the newly instated Governor, Sir Evelyn Baring, declared a state of emergency on October 20.

It was the institution of emergency powers that led to Mau Mau's rise as a militant insurgency.¹⁸⁹ An overreaction of sorts on the part of the Kenya Government, the emergency only served to inflame anti-colonial sentiment in the African population.¹⁹⁰ Kenyatta, though he had denounced Mau Mau in a speech in August, was arrested along with most of the Mau Mau leadership and other nationalist and trade unionist agitators. Remaining Mau Mau adherents fled to the forests of the Kenyan Central Province to take up arms against colonial forces. By the end of 1952, Mau Mau was on the offensive and saw their numbers rise. However, the rise of the insurgency exacerbated divides within Kikuyu society, already riven from disputes over resources in the tumultuous 1940s. As Bethwell Ogot and Tiyambe Zeleza point out, the undercurrents of intra-African class struggles fundamentally colored Kenyan anti-colonialism of the 1950s, turning the anti-colonial Mau Mau conflict into a Kikuyu civil war.¹⁹¹ The insurgents'

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 7.

¹⁹⁰ Susan Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds: British Governments, the Media and Colonial Counter-Insurgency, 1944-1960* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), 134.

¹⁹¹ Bethwell Ogot and Tiyambe Zeleza "Kenya: The Road to Independence and After" in *Decolonization and African Independence: The Transfer of Power, 1960-1980*, eds. Prosser Gifford and Wm. Roger Louis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 404.

main targets of attack were those Kikuyu loyal to the colonial government, particularly the Kenyan Home Guard, of whom nearly 2,000 were killed during the insurgency. In March of 1953, Mau Mau forces massacred the Home Guard families living in the village of Lari, killing 97 men, women and children. This event and the murder of a white settler family earlier that year, along with the relative ineffectiveness of policing actions in the months after the emergency began, led the British government to mobilize a vast force to eradicate the Mau Mau insurgency. The British offensive, directed by General George Erskine, began in earnest in the summer of 1953. In less than two years, the Mau Mau insurgency, lacking organized leadership after the arrests of October 1952 and incapable of withstanding British military might for a protracted conflict, was completely defeated.

The declaration of emergency fomented the need for military intervention and was clearly a product of white settler anxieties regarding the destabilization of Kenya's African society and the threat Mau Mau represented to the 'progress' the settlers believed they had achieved in Kenya. In actuality, white settlers were little targeted by Mau Mau insurgents who mostly went after the Kikuyu loyalists. Only 32 European settlers were killed in the entirety of the conflict. However the fear and moral panic of a widespread African insurrection gripped the imagination of the white settlers and their allies back home in Britain. The Kikuyu population, whom the settlers saw as having rescued from savagery and turned into productive constituents, were now turning savagely against them. As Graham Greene noted in 1952, the settlers felt "as though Jeeves had taken to the jungle."¹⁹² Kenyatta was demonized, despite his lack of connections to or influence on Mau Mau, and his trial in 1953 laid bare the hysteria and blinding fury of the white settlers over Mau Mau. Sensationalist reports of Mau Mau brutality were sent to London and disseminated widely to garner support for the military action and sympathy for the white settler cause. This was however an uphill battle at times. Many in Britain disdainfully viewed the

¹⁹² Quoted in John Lonsdale, "Mau Maus of the Mind: Making Mau Mau and Remaking Kenya," *Journal of African History* 31:3 (1990): 407.

Kenyan white settlers as exploitative, overprivileged, and racist. General Erskine wrote home to his wife in 1953 complaining about the white settlers: “Kenya is a sunny place for shady people...I hate the guts of them all. They are all middle-class sluts.”¹⁹³ Indeed, even in the official mind, the British viewed their role in Kenya since the 1920s as one of corralling the excesses of the white population, as part of the British mission of trusteeship over the African peoples.

While the white settler cause may not have enjoyed the widest base of support back home in Britain, it did have allies among the Tories in Parliament and was boosted by the perceived barbarity of the Mau Mau fighters. The British media evinced a morbid fascination with the more “irrational” aspects of Mau Mau, its use of machetes, mutilation of animals, and particularly its oath-taking rituals. Sensationalized as a form of pagan terrorism, Mau Mau oath-taking ceremonies figured early and prominently in British imaginings of their enemy. Colonial Secretary Lyttleton mentioned them as a cause when the state of emergency was declared, claiming that “Mau Mau pursued its aims ‘by forcing secret oaths upon men, women and children by intimidating witnesses and law-abiding citizens.’”¹⁹⁴ The British government was not shy in propagating some of the more salacious and horrific accounts of what transpired during these oath-taking ceremonies, while also claiming to hold back the truly obscene material in the public’s interest. Suffice to say, accounts of Mau Mau oath-taking ceremonies, published in the press and for the government propaganda services, dwelt primarily on the taboo and the grotesque, emphasizing the bestial nature of the Mau Mau. If “Jeeves had taken to the jungle,” Graham Greene continued, he had also “been seen crawling through an arch to drink on his knees from a banana-trough of blood; Jeeves had transfixed a sheep’s eye with a seven kie-apple thorn; Jeeves had had sexual congress with a goat; Jeeves had sworn, however unwillingly, to kill Bertie Wooster ‘or this oath will kill me and all my seed will die.’”¹⁹⁵

Commentators and political leaders in Britain and Kenya did not hesitate to refer to Mau

¹⁹³ Quoted in Brian Lapping, *End of Empire* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), 427.

¹⁹⁴ Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, 158.

¹⁹⁵ Lonsdale, “Mau Mau of the Mind,” 407.

Mau and its practices as an atavistic evil, intent on willfully perverting Kikuyu customs in a revolt against the benign modernity offered by the Europeans. Lyttleton himself referred to it as the “heart of darkness” reasserting itself and indeed the narrative the British constructed for Mau Mau in the popular discourse unsurprisingly emphasized a dichotomy between the savage and the civilized.¹⁹⁶ The British projected onto Mau Mau “the characteristics - insanity and savagery - that were the mirror opposites of their self-image, as rational and progressive, an image which they were trying to hold up against the reactionary forces of old-style colonialism [i.e. the white settlers] as well as against the premature assertiveness of not-yet acculturated Africans.”¹⁹⁷ This had the effect of diminishing the validity of the real political and economic causes behind the uprising, even rendering it difficult for those on the left, generally more willing to paint Mau Mau as a sympathetic nationalist uprising, to do so. The fear Mau Mau induced in the hearts of the Europeans made any true understanding of its causes difficult.¹⁹⁸ Because of this, the British “reverted to a primitiveness almost as extreme as that they believed they faced” in the prosecution of the war against Mau Mau.¹⁹⁹ As David Anderson elaborates in his 2005 study, the instruments of the British counterinsurgency, both military and judicial, were blunt. Over 1,000 people were hanged on charges of conspiring with Mau Mau and tens of thousands more detained and questioned by British authorities. With these vast numbers, even Churchill complained that the counterinsurgency gave “a bad odor” to British policy in Kenya and warned of the damage too many mass hangings may cause to Britain’s image in the world.²⁰⁰

Along with the official channels of brutality, the frontline and the law courts, British savagery against the Mau Mau also took the form of what is now euphemistically referred to as ‘enhanced interrogation techniques,’ essentially the torture of Mau Mau suspects. Allegations of

¹⁹⁶ Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, 138.

¹⁹⁷ Frederick Cooper, “Mau Mau and the Discourses of Decolonization” *The Journal of African History* 29:2 (1988): 317.

¹⁹⁸ Denis Judd, *Empire: The British Imperial Experience, 1765-Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 347.

¹⁹⁹ Lapping, *End of Empire*, 398.

²⁰⁰ Richard Toye, *Churchill’s Empire: The World That Made Him and the World He Made* (London: Macmillan, 2010), 299.

this and other forms of unsanctioned brutality on the part of British and colonial forces began emerging as early as late 1952. Over the course of the counter-insurgency, the Colonial Office grew increasingly uneasy with the overuse of the euphemistic phrase “shot while attempting escape” in reports of detainees killed in British custody.²⁰¹ Taken up back home in Britain by Fenner Brockway, who had criticized the institution of the emergency in Parliament, reports of British abuses of Mau Mau suspects were another dominant theme in the discourse of the Mau Mau War, particularly on the left. Allegations of ‘trophy-taking,’ the cutting off of ears or hands of dead insurgents, of a “sporting attitude,” making games of how many insurgents were killed in an action, and of beatings of detainees trickled back to Britain throughout the course of the Mau Mau campaign. The MCF did much to publicize these atrocities in the press. Brockway received and published a letter from an anonymous British officer who reported the “Gestapo methods” used against insurgents that made the officer “ashamed to say I am British.”²⁰² Barbara Castle too took up the cause after she interviewed Colonel Arthur Young, Commissioner of the City of London Police, who was seconded to the Kenya Government during the war. His resignation in 1954 because of his disgust over the abuses of power proved controversial and his report on Kenya galvanized the left, though the Conservative Government refused to publish it.²⁰³

1954 was a turning point in regards to the volume of criticism over Britain’s Kenya policies. For the first time in history, an entire question period in Parliament was taken up with colonial affairs.²⁰⁴ Castle traveled to Kenya in 1955, reporting back in the British press, “in the heart of the British Empire, there is a police state where the rule of law has broken down.”²⁰⁵ Such charges as these were met by the British Government and by Colonial Secretary Lennox-Boyd (he replaced Lyttleton in 1954) with a reassertion of the bestial and subhuman nature of the Mau Mau and the outright denial of any wrong doing. Additionally, the Colonial Office was

²⁰¹ Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, 172.

²⁰² Quoted in Howe, *Anti-Colonialism*, 206.

²⁰³ Barbara Castle, *Fighting All the Way* (London: Macmillan, 1993), 263-4.

²⁰⁴ June 23, 1954. Stephen Howe points this out. Howe, *Anti-Colonialism*, 256-7.

²⁰⁵ Quoted in Wanjohi Kabukuru, “The Hola Massacre” *New African* (Dec. 2003): 37.

willing to make personal attacks against those critics most voluble on British misdeeds in Kenya, such as Eileen Fletcher, a former worker in the rehabilitation system set up to process Mau Mau detainees. Fletcher published accounts of abuse in the MCF mouthpiece *Peace News* only to see her reputation assailed by CO and Public Relations Office officials.²⁰⁶

While critics of British policy in Kenya were most vocal by 1955, the war itself had ended, though the state of emergency was to last until 1960. The reasons for the emergency's longevity rest in the issue of what the Kenyan Government should do with the tens of thousands of Mau Mau detainees in state custody. In the second half of the 1950s, nearly 80,000 detainees remained in the camps set up during the war. After a campaign in which Mau Mau symbolized the ultimate atavistic evil, simple release was not an option for the Government. Rehabilitation, the concept of transforming insurgents into 'progressive citizens,' was the answer the British devised and implemented. Viewed as a continuation of the liberal policies that made the British Empire so exceptional on the world stage, rehabilitation went hand-in-hand with government instituted development and welfare schemes, including land reform. In reality, rehabilitation in the camps was code for forced labor. The analogy the British drew for their system of rehabilitation camps was that of a pipeline: detainees would move through the various camps, with each camp representing each stage of rehabilitation, to eventual release. The first roadblock though for the British was the opposition of Kikuyu loyalists, who felt sidelined by attempts to make their erstwhile enemies into productive citizens. The second was the sheer numbers of camp detainees that made constructive rehabilitation an impossibility, though tens of thousands eventually were released. By the end of the 1950s however, the pipeline system had stalled. The relative numbers of 'hardcore' detainees, those deemed the toughest to rehabilitate, i.e. coerce into working in the camps, grew. In the face of this, British administrators and prison officials devised the doctrine of 'compelling force,' a legally specific way to use violence to make

²⁰⁶ Caroline Elkins, "The Struggle for Mau Mau Rehabilitation in Late Colonial Kenya" *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 33:1 (2000): 48.

detainees work. Named the Cowan Plan after one of the prison system administrators, it authorized warders to “manhandle the detainees to the place of work and force them to carry out their tasks” if necessary.²⁰⁷

On March 3, 1959, the Cowan Plan was first put into action at Hola Camp in a remote part of southeastern Kenya. 88 ‘hardcore’ detainees refused to work, claiming their status as political prisoners, so warders took to them with truncheons. After three hours, 11 men were dead, beaten to death, as historian John Lonsdale observes, “in the name of modernization.”²⁰⁸ The truth of what happened that day seeped out slowly. After a brief investigation, the Governor of Kenya announced the men had died from drinking contaminated water. A coroner’s report however claimed the men suffered fractured skulls, brain lacerations, fractured jaws and broken limbs. Though the events of March 3rd were briefly reported on in the British press, by the end of month, through the persistence of the Labour left, Lennox-Boyd was hauled before Parliament to explain. The previous month had already witnessed a full Commons debate regarding an inquiry into allegations of violence against Mau Mau detainees. After March 3rd, Labour critics of the Government’s policies in Kenya were revitalized. In the ensuing months, the full story was to come out and a commission appointed to investigate British rehabilitation policies in Kenya. However, in the immediate aftermath of Hola, events elsewhere in Africa overshadowed the almost inevitable tragedy of British practices in Kenya: the declaration of a state of emergency in the protectorate of Nyasaland.

Nyasaland, one of the three protectorates constituting the Central African Federation, like other places in British Africa, was in a perpetual state of unrest throughout the 1950s. The rising tide of African nationalism there took the form of an intense rejection of the Federation. Rightly believing that Federation meant white settler domination, Nyasas were fearful of the coming constitutional review set for the year 1960, fearful that it might rule in favor of the Federation

²⁰⁷ Lapping, *End of Empire*, 434.

²⁰⁸ Lonsdale, “Mau Maus of the Mind,” 416.

gaining dominion status and thus securing white rule over the three territories of Nyasaland, Northern and Southern Rhodesia. Many in Britain, particularly on the left, were fearful of the same possibility. Though the scheme of Federation emerged from the first Labour Government of 1945-51, by the end of the decade many in the Labour Party were skeptical as to the ability of the Federation to achieve a multiracial political system under the current regime of Sir Roy Welensky, the Federal Prime Minister. This anxiety regarding the political future of Nyasaland, coupled with similar economic and agrarian crises as seen in Kenya in the 1950s, put the country on edge by the beginning of 1959.

That previous year, the burgeoning African National Congress (ANC) in Nyasaland received a tremendous boon: the return of Dr. Hastings Banda from almost twenty years of practicing medicine in England. Dr. Banda was quickly voted the head of the ANC in Nyasaland and became a rallying figure for those dispossessed by the colonial system and dreading Federal dominion over the territory. With the return of Banda, nationalist activities and demonstrations throughout the country increased. By the beginning of the new year, the anxiety surrounding the upcoming constitutional review grew. Banda, though popular with the average Nyasa, found negotiating with the colonial authorities for African representation during the constitutional review slow going. Frustrations intensified among the top leadership of the African National Congress. Some in the leadership, disappointed that the return of Banda did not translate into a better reception for African demands from the Governor, Sir Robert Armitage, suggested more drastic action. The top leadership held a 'secret' meeting on January 25 and discussed the use of violence in retaliation if Banda were arrested. This meeting was the so-called 'murder plot' or 'massacre plot' that was to be the lynchpin of the British government's justification of emergency powers.

By this point in early 1959, Governor Armitage had already discussed the need for an emergency to quell the unrest developing throughout the country and sought Federal troops to

assist in Nyasaland. This move only antagonized African nationalists further. Facing pressure from Federal authorities in the neighboring Rhodesias, Governor Armitage decided to declare a state of emergency on the night of March 2-3. Banda and over 150 other nationalist leaders were arrested. Violence erupted in the aftermath of the arrests, leaving dozens of Africans dead at the hands of colonial police forces. Back in Britain, Lennox-Boyd addressed the Commons to explain. He defended Armitage's decision by announcing he had evidence that Congress planned to "carry out widespread violence and murder of Europeans, Asians, and moderate African leaders; that in fact a massacre was being planned."²⁰⁹ In the Protectorate, Governor Armitage was surprised that Lennox-Boyd made reference to the January 25 meeting, for it had not entered into his own calculations for the need for emergency powers.²¹⁰ The British press however latched onto the 'massacre plot' in their coverage of the declaration of emergency, with headlines reading "'Massacre' Plan In Nyasaland" (*Daily Telegraph*); "26 Africans Die; 'Massacre Planned'" (*The Guardian*); "Massacre Planned; Blacks and Whites Both In Danger MPs Told" (*Daily Mail*); "On Nyasaland MPs Were Told: MASSACRE PLANNED" (*Daily Mirror*), among many others. In the popular discourse, the 'massacre plot' was the *raison d'être* of the entire emergency and at the time, the Colonial Office and Lennox-Boyd felt no compulsion to argue otherwise.

It was expedient for Lennox-Boyd to play up the 'massacre plot' to the Commons. His defense of the emergency on March 3 was bombarded with intense criticism from the Opposition, notably Brockway, Castle and shadow Colonial Secretary James Callaghan, who believed Armitage had been insidiously influenced by Federal authorities to declare emergency powers. The Opposition asserted there was no cause for emergency and that the entire affair was a move for white settlers, through the guise of Federation, to clamp down on African

²⁰⁹ United Kingdom. *House of Commons Debates*, 03 March 1959 (Mr. Alan Lennox-Boyd, Con). <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1959/mar/03/nyasaland-state-of-emergency-1>.

²¹⁰ Philip Murphy, *Alan Lennox-Boyd: A Biography* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 206-7 and Colin Baker, *State of Emergency: Crisis in Central Africa, Nyasaland, 1959-1960*. (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1997), 55: "Armitage was 'staggered' when he learned what Lennox-Boyd had said."

nationalism in Nyasaland before the constitutional review. As historian John Darwin so succinctly describes, “for the left in Britain, the emergencies had little to do with upholding law and order: they were the 18th Brumaire of Roy Welensky.”²¹¹ The Government conversely posited themselves as having prevented another Mau Mau. Over the ensuing month, the Opposition continued its criticism of the emergency, challenging the notion of a ‘massacre plot’ and prompting the Macmillan Government into one of its most fascinating political miscalculations in colonial affairs: the institution of the Devlin Commission.

While the Opposition wanted a Parliamentary commission to investigate the violent fallout from the Emergency, the Macmillan government instead chose to appoint their own. Chaired by Justice Patrick Devlin, an Irishman, the Commission included three other members: Sir Percy Wyn-Harris, an “old Africa hand” who was once considered for the Nyasaland Governorship, E.T. Williams, and Sir John Ure Primrose, a Scotsman with strong ties to the Church of Scotland.²¹² The selection of Primrose was a political given considering the significant influence the Church of Scotland held among white settlers of Nyasaland. In fact, the Church of Scotland played a major role in white Nyasa opposition to federation, believing as the African nationalists did that federation would unduly privilege the white settlers. The terms of the Commission were set by Macmillan’s cabinet: “to inquire into the recent disturbances in Nyasaland and the events leading up to them and to report thereon.”²¹³ The Government was set on keeping the issue of federation out of the realm of the Commission’s inquiry, though this was to prove somewhat unrealistic considering the political situation of the Protectorate.

What was truly surprising about Macmillan’s decision to appoint a commission of inquiry was how convinced his Government was that any commission’s findings would unequivocally exonerate and justify the declaration of emergency. As will be shown, this was not

²¹¹ John Darwin, “The Central African Emergency, 1959” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 21:3 (1993): 220.

²¹² Colin Baker, *State of Emergency: Crisis in Central Africa, Nyasaland 1959-1960*. (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1997), 82-3.

²¹³ *ibid.*, 84.

entirely the outcome. The Devlin Commission, as historian Colin Baker claims, was almost predisposed to draw conclusions critical of the Government.²¹⁴ The influence of the Church of Scotland's anti-federal stance and Devlin's own personal antipathy towards colonialism (a man described by historian John Darwin as "least likely to take a relaxed view of boisterous colonial methods") colored the Commission's sympathies.²¹⁵ After nearly seven weeks of hearing testimony from over 2,000 witnesses (including Governor Armitage and Dr. Banda) in Nyasaland, Southern Rhodesia, and London, the Commission drafted their report for publication in mid-July. The timing was not coincidental: Devlin wanted the findings published in time for a late session Parliamentary debate. After the Colonial Office received a copy, the press first reported on Devlin's findings to a firestorm of controversy and scrutiny.

"Nyasaland is - no doubt only temporarily - a police state, where it is not safe for anyone to express approval of the policies of the Congress party, to which the vast majority of politically-minded Africans belonged, and where it is unwise to express any but the most restrained criticism of government policy."²¹⁶ Thus began the published findings of the Devlin Report. It went on to determine that there was no evidence of a massacre plot, utterly discrediting the Government's self-given reason for the Emergency, and that excessive force was utilized by colonial, federal, and British forces resulting in several unnecessary deaths. Controversially as well, since the Government made it clear they wanted the question of Federation left out the Commission's purview, the report concluded that African antipathy towards the Federation was "was deeply rooted and almost universally held."²¹⁷ This the Commission determined was the basic cause of unrest in the territory. It also held that Dr. Banda was not an extremist or incendiary figure, calling into question the need of his continued imprisonment under British authority. Essentially the report, which some criticized as more an

²¹⁴ *ibid.*, *passim*.

²¹⁵ Darwin, "The Central African Emergency, 1959," 218.

²¹⁶ Quoted in "Excerpts from the Devlin Report," *African Today*, 6:4 (Sept. 1959): 17.

²¹⁷ Quoted in Philip Murphy, *Alan Lennox-Boyd: A Biography* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 216.

opinion than the findings of a judicial inquiry, described the failings of the ‘benevolent despotism’ established by the Nyasaland Government. It criticized what it determined to be a break down in the rule of law within the territory while asserting that rule of law “was what empire was all about.”²¹⁸

While critics of Macmillan’s Government rapidly adopted this language of a Nyasaland police state diverging from the goals of benevolent British rule, the report also gave ground to defenders of the Government’s decision to declare an emergency. In a crucial passage, the report concluded that the Government, faced with the growing unrest resultant from the Federation’s unpopularity, had to either “act or abdicate” viz. maintaining a level of political control in the territory. The Commission believed that the Government either had to quell the unrest through emergency powers or abdicate its position of authority to the Nationalists. Clearly in the mindset of the Government, the latter option was off the table and the ‘act or abdicate’ line became the focal point of the Government’s defense of its choices. Overall however, Macmillan’s Cabinet was aghast that the Commission’s findings would be so critical of the Government. They had assured themselves the report would prove they had prevented another Mau Mau in the making. Macmillan himself was outraged, complaining in his diary:

I was away in Russia when the Devlin Commission was chosen. Why Devlin? ... I have since discovered that he is a) Irish - no doubt with that Fenian blood that make Irishmen anti-Govt on principle; b) A lapsed R.C. ... c) A hunchback; d) Bitterly disappointed at my not having made him Lord Chief Justice. I am not at all surprised that his report is dynamite. It may well blow this Govt out of office...²¹⁹

Colonial Secretary Lennox-Boyd also was personally angered by the report, describing it as “very hostile.”²²⁰ In an interview with *The Daily Mail*, he called the report “unrealistic” and

²¹⁸ Paraphrased in Brian Simpson, “The Devlin Commission (1959): Colonialism, Emergencies, and the Rule of Law,” *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 22:1 (2002): 17-52.

²¹⁹ Peter Catterall, *The Macmillan Diaries, Vol. II: Prime Minister and After, 1957-1966* (London: Macmillan, 2003), 234-5.

²²⁰ Murphy, *Alan Lennox-Boyd*, 217.

merely an intellectual exercise in colonial policy making.²²¹ Despite the attempt at damage control, Lennox-Boyd quickly came under assault from voices, both within the Opposition and his own party, clamoring for his resignation. He attempted an offer, which Macmillan refused. Macmillan felt losing Lennox-Boyd in such a manner, before the October general election, would weaken his Government at the polls.

The Devlin Report made front page news on July 24, 1959 and was scheduled for a Parliamentary debate the following week on July 28th. Voices in the leftwing press were unanimous: the Government had failed in maintaining rule of law, a police state was untenable for British policies and for the good name of Britain on the world stage, and Lennox-Boyd should be held personally responsible and resign. While the last of these was politically unachievable in the face of Macmillan rallying his party around Lennox-Boyd's reputation, the first two points struck a deep chord within the political debate surrounding Devlin's findings. *The Daily Mirror's* front page headline on July 24th read "Macmillan's Day of Disgrace" and excoriated the Government for playing politics with the lives of its African subjects. *The Daily Herald* too claimed the Opposition must attack the Government on these findings and "speak out for the honour of Britain. ... [For] British honour and justice are on trial with the world looking on."²²² *The Guardian*, while breaking leftist ranks by denying the need for Lennox-Boyd to resign, argued British policies in Africa were no longer tenable. "If the police were inadequate and the Africans ill-educated, the fault lay with the British."²²³ The right-leaning press, which quickly came to the Government's defense, was however initially fairminded towards the report's findings and towards Devlin himself personally. *The Daily Telegraph* described the report as offering "balance and sympathy" towards the "familiar colonial situation of 'benevolent despotism' pitted against impatient nationalist politicians."²²⁴ *The Daily Express* published a

²²¹ "Lennox-Boyd Speaks: 'My Conscience is Clear,'" *The Daily Mail*, 27 July 1959, 4.

²²² "Have They No Shame?" *The Daily Herald*, 28 July 1959, 1.

²²³ "Devlin Report's Implication," *The Guardian*, 27 July 1959, 8.

²²⁴ "No Plot But A Crisis," *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 July 1959, 10.

flattering profile of Justice Devlin, categorizing him as a testament to the virtues of English law and liberty.

Initially, most rightwing voices offered a sober analysis of the Commission's report while emphasizing the Government's obligation to act over abdication. Criticism of Devlin's major points was muted overall, though some conclusions, like that on Dr. Banda's moderation, were countered more strongly. *The Daily Mail* took umbrage with the report's wording that Dr. Banda's speeches were nothing more than typical Hyde Park fare, and thus harmless politically, arguing: "The point is that they were not delivered in Hyde Park but to a more primitive throng[.]" one more likely to turn violent.²²⁵ This opinion was clearly predicated upon the modern/backwards dichotomy so well-versed in the British imagination regarding their subjects. Indeed, this dichotomy was prevalent in the discourse over Nyasaland and Kenya and was also to come under fire during the debates over the direction of British rule in Africa. One crucial component of these debates was the nature of British justice. Was British justice something that only applied in Britain or was it something that should be applied to all British subjects, regardless of race or place in the backwards/modern scale? Voices on the left continually asserted the universality of British justice and how the Devlin Report made clear that such justice had failed in the 'police state' of Nyasaland. As will be seen, these questions and arguments were also picked up by those on the right equally critical of the Government's handling of both Nyasaland and the Hola Camp murders in Kenya.

With the Devlin Commission's report scheduled for a Commons debate on July 28 immediately before the summer recess, the Opposition took the opportunity of the publication of the disciplinary inquiry into the Hola Camp murders to renew debate on that event in addendum. Hola Camp and its surrounding fallout had been given a full debate the previous month, on June 16, but the findings of the disciplinary inquiry coupled with a seemingly similar failure of British policies in neighboring Nyasaland allowed the Opposition another go. The

²²⁵ "Devlin," *The Daily Mail*, 24 July 1959, 1.

disciplinary inquiry, much to the anger and dismay of the Government's critics, determined that the eleven deaths were the result of "mistakes made by relatively minor officials."²²⁶ This exonerated both the Kenyan Governor, Evelyn Baring, and Colonial Secretary Lennox-Boyd. The inquiry also placed the disciplinary burden on the camp Superintendent, Michael Sullivan, advocating that he be forced to retire but with no loss of gratuity. No others were disciplined, though the Commissioner of Prisons in Kenya had resigned a month earlier in the aftermath of an official inquiry into the prison conditions leading to the murders. The Opposition was incensed by this 'slap-on-the-wrist' while also sensing a political opportunity to hit Macmillan's Government hard on a clearly whitewashed inquiry. On the evening of July 27, around 10:00 PM, the House of Commons sat for another debate on the Hola Camp murders, which was to last until nearly 3:00 AM the following morning.

The central themes of the debate were the legal and moral implications of the detention without trial of both Mau Mau detainees in Kenya and those African nationalists held in the Federation. The Opposition also focused closely on the notion of whose responsibility the eleven deaths really were. Labour MP Dingle Foot initiated the debate and claimed "detention without trial is becoming almost a permanent feature of our colonial rule."²²⁷ He concluded his address with the assertion that such practices were contrary to the very spirit of British law and liberty; that they were "contrary to Magna Carta, the Petition of Right, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights. There is a remarkable contrast between the speeches that Ministers make at home and their actions overseas...I hope that the right hon. Gentleman the Colonial Secretary will inform us tonight that he agrees with those sentiments. If he does, I suggest that they should be prominently displayed on the walls of Hola ..."²²⁸ In response, Conservative MPs reiterated the findings of the White Paper on the

²²⁶ Quoted in Nigel Fisher, *Harold Macmillan* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982), 217.

²²⁷ United Kingdom. *House of Commons Debates*, 27 July 1959 (Mr. Dingle Foot, Lab). <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1959/jul/27/hola-camp-kenya-report>.

²²⁸ *ibid.*

disciplinary inquiry: that Hola was the result of departmental mistakes. John Peel (Leicester, South East), the first Conservative defender to speak after Foot, argued that mistakes will happen when a nation is “engaged in a gigantic and epic task of building a Commonwealth out of an Empire which will be a strong, cohesive force for peace and prosperity in an unsettled world.”²²⁹

Along with invoking the Whiggish vision of the transformation of empire into Commonwealth, the Government’s defenders also appealed to the decade long tradition of portraying its Mau Mau opponents as bestial and backwards. Peel referred to the Mau Mau detainees at Hola as “subhuman,” prompting cries of interruption from the Opposition. Despite this, the Conservative side of the debate maintained the bestial nature of Mau Mau as a kind of justification of its rehabilitation policies. Essentially, Labour argued that the issue of Hola was as much a moral issue as a political one, an issue which could not help but reflect on British values as enacted in her colonies. Labour MPs who debated also maintained the present Government had intentionally covered up the severity of the situation with what they called the “water communiqué,” the initial medical report that said the inmates had died from drinking contaminated water. Overall, Labour voices were incensed that only Sullivan, and to a lesser extent, Lewis, the Kenyan Commissioner of Prisons, had to face discipline and that this discipline was so mild. The central arguments made by all Labour speakers was that responsibility for Hola should be held by higher-ups in the chain of command, including the Colonial Secretary himself. Most speakers called for his resignation. In the face of this, Conservative defenders maintained the line that mistakes were made and the appropriate disciplinary action was taken, while accusing Labour of unnecessary partisanship that could potentially harm the morale of those working in the prison system and in the Kenyan colonial administration.

²²⁹ United Kingdom. *House of Commons Debates*, 27 July 1959 (Mr. John Peel, Con). <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1959/jul/27/hola-camp-kenya-report>.

Labour's position was best summed up in Barbara Castle's address to the Commons. Taking the floor around 12:30 AM, Castle argued that the issue of Hola was more than assigning blame, though responsibility should be owned by most in the colonial administration. Castle in no uncertain terms claimed Hola to be "one of the gravest miscarriages of justice in British colonial history."²³⁰ She contended the events at Hola "concerned the good name of Britain" and jeopardized "the important constitutional principles involved" when authorizing detention without trial.²³¹ Castle, like some of the other Labour participants in the debate, invoked public opinion as a testament to the seriousness of the issues at hand. The "large attendance in the House at this late hour is a ... reflection of the uneasiness in the country" regarding Hola and its implications. She continued that if something of this magnitude were to happen in Britain, outrage would be tremendous, concluding that the discrepancy between expectations of justice at home and abroad was "the very basis of the problem. Hon. Members opposite do not believe that an African life is as important as a white man's life."²³² Fundamentally, Castle argued that the challenge the British now faced as a result of the Government's failed policies was nothing less than the restoration of "confidence of the Africans in British justice." She ended her time on the floor by reiterating Opposition criticism of Colonial Secretary Lennox-Boyd and calling for his resignation.

Castle's speech was met with swelling approval by the Labour benches, but the speech that followed hers was to be considered by some as one of the best British political speeches of the twentieth century.²³³ Conservative MP Enoch Powell, less than a decade away from his infamous 'rivers of blood' speech which was thought to have ushered in a new wave of racialism in 1960s Britain, took the floor at 1:15 AM. Repeating the Conservative line that "the affair of Hola Camp was a great administrative disaster," he then broke ranks and asserted that indeed

²³⁰United Kingdom. *House of Commons Debates*, 27 July 1959 (Mrs. Barbara Castle, Lab). <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1959/jul/27/hola-camp-kenya-report>.

²³¹ *ibid.*: 219.

²³² *ibid.*

²³³ At least to Simon Heffer, editor of *Great British Speeches* (London: Quercus, 2007).

responsibility should be taken by those higher up in the Government.²³⁴ He cleared Lennox-Boyd of any direct responsibility for Hola, but not for the failure of preventing the whitewashing that was now so contested in the Commons. Powell also dismissed the Conservative line that the ‘bestial’ nature of Mau Mau somehow justified methods such as the Cowan Plan in British rehabilitation schemes:

It has been said that these eleven men were the lowest of the low ... subhuman ... But that cannot be relevant to the acceptance of responsibility for their death. ... In general, I would say that it is a fearful doctrine, which must recoil upon the heads of those who pronounce it, to stand in judgment on a fellow human-being and to say, ‘Because he was such-and-such, therefore the consequences which would otherwise flow from his death shall not flow.’²³⁵

Perhaps though the most riveting aspects of Powell’s address came at the end. He asserted that despite the differences between African and British political cultures, the duty to fulfill the Whiggish vision of transformation of empire into Commonwealth mandated a consistency of principles.

We claim that it is our object—and this is something which unites both sides of the House—to leave representative institutions behind us wherever we give up our rule. I cannot imagine that it is a way to plant representative institutions to be seen to shirk the acceptance and the assignment of responsibility, which is the very essence of responsible Government.

Powell concluded, in a stirring summation of the principles both espoused by the Opposition and by the doctrine of the British Empire’s ‘peaceful evolution’ to Commonwealth:

Nor can we ourselves pick and choose where and in what parts of the world we shall use

²³⁴ United Kingdom. *House of Commons Debates*, 27 July 1959 (Mr. Enoch Powell, Con). <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1959/jul/27/hola-camp-kenya-report>.

²³⁵ *ibid.*

this or that kind of standard. We cannot say, 'We will have African standards in Africa, Asian standards in Asia and perhaps British standards here at home.' ... We must be consistent with ourselves everywhere.... What we can do in Africa, where we still govern and where we no longer govern, depends upon ... the way in which Englishmen act. We cannot, we dare not, in Africa of all places, fall below our own highest standards in the acceptance of responsibility.

Powell's conclusion reiterated the notion of a moral responsibility held by the British on the world stage, a notion imbued with a hierarchy of British values as the most modern. This clearly was an articulation of Britishness as tied to the Whiggish vision of end of empire. In the face of one of the gravest crises over how the British were ending their empire, Powell and others like Barbara Castle and sundry voices on the left reiterated the ideal that the British government was beholden to the principles which made the British exceptional on the world stage. In essence, this crisis of the Hola Camp murders only strengthened the potency of the Whiggish vision in political and public discourse. Reiterating this vision served as a rejoinder to the moral failures that Hola and the Nyasaland Emergency represented.

The debate over Hola was both a debate over the moral nature of Britain's transformation of empire into Commonwealth and a contentious partisan battle between the sitting Conservative Government and the Labour Opposition as a general election neared. At 1:55 AM, Colonial Secretary Lennox-Boyd took the floor and continued to defend his Department's actions. He concluded on a partisan note, positing that the Opposition was damaging the credibility of HM Government abroad by insisting on wrongdoing and whitewashing at the highest levels. While his defense was admirable for so late an hour, Lennox-Boyd and the Conservative Government barely scraped by politically. Many of their own backbenchers were highly charged over Hola and critical of Lennox-Boyd's handling of it. Macmillan's Government scraped by over this

issue because of the way Labour chose to bring the matter to debate, as an appropriation bill, meaning there was no motion to vote on. If there had been a motion of censure, it was very unlikely the Government would have avoided a damaging vote against it. This may have seemed like a political miscalculation on the part of Labour leadership, but the Hola Camp debate was just the first round in a political attack aimed at Macmillan and his Government's Africa policies. The next round concerned the acceptance of the Devlin Report, a report already well-known to have criticized the Government's colonial policy.

The Macmillan Cabinet's antipathy towards the Devlin Commission's findings was already well-hashed in the press by the time the debate started on July 28, about twelve hours after the Hola debate concluded. This time there were two motions to be voted up or down. Surprisingly the motion put to the House by the Conservatives was not a blanket acceptance of the findings of their own Commission; rather, the motion had three points, cherry picking the best of the Devlin Report and omitting the parts critical of the Government. Labour of course felt this played politically right into their hands and introduced a counter motion to accept the Devlin Report *in toto*. For eight hours, the House of Commons debated the findings of the Devlin Commission and its implications politically and morally for Britain's world role. The Attorney-General, Sir Reginald Manningham-Buller, began with the Government's position: that it was unnecessary to accept all of the Commission's conclusions, that the 'act or abdicate' passage justified the Emergency, and that the language of a 'police state' was misleadingly critical. James Callaghan, Labour's Shadow Colonial Secretary, spoke next. He argued that accepting the Devlin Report *in toto* would represent a break with the failed policies of the Nyasaland Government, thereby relegitimizing British authority in the eyes of its African subjects, and that the Conservatives were nonsensical in refusing to accept the findings of their own Government's inquiry. These points, particularly the notion that British policies in Nyasaland had failed for the Commonwealth's African subjects, were the main lines of Labour's

attack on Macmillan's Government. Overall, the debate covered in detail specific points of Devlin's conclusions while each side accused the other of spinning the report for their own particular partisan needs.

While the debate over the Devlin Report was comparatively more politically charged with party politics than morally charged, many voices nevertheless continued to reassert the importance of Britain's responsibility to her colonial 'charges' and to the practices of good government. Many leftwing voices were concerned that failure to adopt the Devlin findings would engender ill will between the Government and its African subjects. In the words of one Labour MP, British leaders would appear as "stilted despots," an appearance unbecoming of the "standard bearers of Western democracy."²³⁶ Conservative defenders of the Nyasaland Government too invoked the concept that Britain's world role was one of her guiding its 'charges' to democratic independence. Conservative MP Brigadier Sir John Smyth (Norwood) countered Labour criticism with the declaration: "We are extremely lucky that we have a Colonial Secretary and a Government who have the deepest sympathy with African opinion in its struggle towards self-determination and independence, but are, at the same time, absolutely firm that no progress can be made in an atmosphere of violence and civil disturbance."²³⁷ He thus reaffirmed the Conservative line justifying the Emergency, that acting was preferable to abdicating to political chaos.

Labour on the other hand made the case that to deny the validity of the entire Devlin Report was to deny the very real failures they perceived in colonial policy, condemning Britain's reputation in Africa and preventing a serious reevaluation of such policy. Labour MP John Stonehouse, who previously that winter had been expelled from the Central African Federation, resolutely argued that the Conservatives were merely playing politics and were avoiding the true

²³⁶ United Kingdom. *House of Commons Debates*, 28 July 1959 (Mr. James Johnson, Lab). <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1959/jul/28/nyasalnad-report-of-commission-of-inquiry>.

²³⁷ United Kingdom. *House of Commons Debates*, 28 July 1959 (Sir John Smith, Con). <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1959/jul/28/nyasalnad-report-of-commission-of-inquiry>.

questions regarding their African policy. Particularly damning, in the eyes of the Opposition, was Lennox-Boyd's statement before Parliament given that March over the reason for the Emergency: the so-called massacre plot. Stonehouse repeatedly accused the Colonial Secretary of having played "a political trump card" with the massacre plot, an event the Devlin Commission found no evidence of having existed as Lennox-Boyd described it. With the charge that the Colonial Secretary invented or at least considerably exaggerated the massacre plot threat, Labour giant Aneurin Bevan stood to speak. Bevan got right to the point: he criticized both sides of the House for playing politics with an issue that could irrevocably damage British prestige on the world stage. He claimed that if politics were not dropped, a situation similar to what the French were facing over Algeria might develop. He pulled no punches, asserting "this Parliament will be known in history as the squalid one. ... Hon. Members opposite have made mistake after mistake ... There are Africans lying in their graves as a consequence of this Government" and the policies and approaches must change, regardless of partisan loyalty.²³⁸ He argued failure at this would condemn "the message we have been trying to teach the world for the last hundred years:" that of the benefits, methods, and principles of a democratic system of government.

After this, Lennox-Boyd held the floor, concluding the debate after a forty-five minute rebuttal of Labour's accusations. He was extremely critical of Bevan and held the line that the Emergency was justified as was the Government's approach to the Devlin Report. He ended his address : "At the start of my speech I said the Government had either to act or to abdicate." To this, shouts of "abdicate" arose from the Opposition. Undeterred, Lennox-Boyd finished: "we have acted and we will not abdicate."²³⁹ Thus ended a trying twenty-hours for the beleaguered and sleep-deprived Colonial Secretary. Macmillan recorded in his diary that Lennox-Boyd handled it well, fending off partisan attacks with those of his own making. After the Colonial

²³⁸ United Kingdom. *House of Commons Debates*, 28 July 1959 (Mr. Aneurin Bevan, Lab). <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1959/jul/28/nyasalnad-report-of-commission-of-inquiry>.

²³⁹ United Kingdom. *House of Commons Debates*, 28 July 1959 (Mr. Alan Lennox-Boyd, Con). <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1959/jul/28/nyasalnad-report-of-commission-of-inquiry>.

Secretary sat down, the motions were called. Unsurprisingly, given the heightened partisanship of the debate, the Conservative majority held the day, passing the Government's motion 316 to 254 and defeating Labour's 317 to 254. This was a tremendous blow to Labour's attempt to shame the Government while at the same time a lucky break for Macmillan. His anxiety regarding the fallout over the Hola and Nyasaland revelations was well-founded but his capacity at playing politics and rallying his party was equally potent.

Reaction in the press reflected the partisanship of the House. *The Daily Mail* complained that while "the good name of Britain has been under debate this week in Parliament, in the press, and among the people," Labour's handling of the Devlin debate was unclassy and mean-spirited.²⁴⁰ *The Express* chirped in its leader "Labour's big challenge turned out a big flop," a partisan assertion that was indeed accurate.²⁴¹ On the left, the failure to accept the Devlin Report was viewed as a miscarriage of justice witnessed by the whole world. *The Tribune* editorialized: "Britain is branded throughout the world for using the methods of totalitarian persecution."²⁴² *The Daily Mirror* opined "after this, what African can believe in British fair play?"²⁴³ Even Justice Devlin himself was depressed by the outcome of the debate. He never anticipated that Macmillan's Cabinet would react so badly to the Commission's findings. In a letter to his commission co-member, he expressed his disgust with the Government's handling of the report. He wrote "the government [was] being so 'un-British' to say 'the Umpire was right every time he said No Ball to the opponent and wrong every time he gave a batsman out.'"²⁴⁴

Many believed that the events in Kenya and Nyasaland did reflect on the meanings of Britishness on the world stage as Britain underwent her vaunted transformation from empire into Commonwealth. This was a common refrain not only in criticisms of the Government from the left but also in more centrist observations. *The Economist* concluded that the Government had

²⁴⁰ "After the Battle," *The Daily Mail*, 30 July 1959, 1.

²⁴¹ *The Daily Express*, 29 July 1959, 1.

²⁴² "Devlin," *The Tribune*, 31 July 1959, 1.

²⁴³ Richard Crossman, *The Daily Mirror*, 28 July 1959, 4.

²⁴⁴ Quoted in Baker, *State of Emergency*, 162.

missed an opportunity by not endorsing the Devlin Report. To endorse it would have been a “testimony to British justice and fair play” and “a feather in the cap” of the Government for recognizing its own failings. However, “politics has overridden the appearance of detached justice.”²⁴⁵ Of course, this was the view from the immediate aftermath of those late night debates. From a longer term perspective, the events at Hola and in Nyasaland fomented a fundamental change in British policy. That summer Macmillan and his Cabinet, clearly for the expediency of the forthcoming October general election, initiated partisan tactics rather than policy changes in the face of Labour criticism, prompting contemporary observer Anthony Sampson to note that Macmillan “seemed to be behaving, as he had after Suez, as if nothing had happened; it was the low point of his political morality.”²⁴⁶ However, by the time the General Election had wrapped up, Macmillan was determined to change course in Africa, for the sake of both British policy and British prestige in the world. To this end, he accepted Lennox-Boyd’s resignation and installed the Scotsman Iain Macleod as Colonial Secretary with the explicit instruction “to get a move on Africa,” i.e. speed up the scramble out of Africa. He also announced his upcoming tour of Africa, scheduled for early 1960. To say politics completely blinded Macmillan to the realities of the African situation was unfair; he could read the writing on the wall. Hola and Nyasaland played a significant role in speeding up the pace of British decolonization in Africa. At the risk of belaboring a metaphor, they were the weather vane by which Macmillan gauged the wind of change.

This is something noted by many historians, including Wm. Roger Louis, who argued the fallout over Hola and the Nyasaland Emergency constituted the “moral end” of the British Empire. In a policy sense this was true: British policies of rehabilitation and emergency powers were revealed to be morally bankrupt. However, the moral component of the transformation of empire into Commonwealth remained intact in and of itself. Indeed, the moral component of the

²⁴⁵ “Living with Devlin,” *The Economist*, 01 August 1959, 12.

²⁴⁶ Quoted in Baker, *State of Emergency*, 182.

British mission in Africa, the Whiggish vision of Britain's Commonwealth transformation, in some ways emerged even more potent after Hola and the Devlin Report. Observers and critics of the Government's mistakes in Kenya and Nyasaland reasserted the ideal of the Whiggish vision more vigorously, calling on Britain's moral responsibility to live up to the democratic and liberal ideals thought to be so central to Britishness in the world. Macmillan, a true advocate of the Whiggish vision, heeded the call once it became politically feasible to do so after the furor of that summer had died down. The Whiggish vision, though standing in stark contrast to the political realities on the ground as evinced by the deaths at Hola and in Nyasaland, survived while British colonial policies that led to such events did not. 1959 was the turning point in Britain's end of empire in Africa. The Whiggish vision emerged from the events of this year energized by its frequent reassertion to face another set of challenges as Britain embarked on the final stage of its scramble out of Africa. These challenges, specifically those entailed in wrangling with the white populations of Africa, would have a deeper effect on the meaning of Britishness on the world stage. As Malcolm Muggeridge wrote in *The New Statesman* in the aftermath of Hola and Devlin: "All over Africa, the whites are going out. The most that [they can do] is to buy a little time with blood, oppression, and hypocrisy."²⁴⁷ How the Whiggish vision developed in reaction to such "blood, oppression, and hypocrisy" is the focus of the next chapter.

²⁴⁷ *The New Statesman*, 8 August 1959, 8. Clearly Muggeridge invoked Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary on the eve of World War I, who famously said in the summer of 1914: "The lights are going out all over Europe. We shall not see them lit again in our time."

Chapter 5

The Vision Split: South Africa Leaves the Commonwealth, March 1960 to May 1961

“The Union of South Africa might have become an enlightened liberal community. That it has become something so very different is a shocking setback to our liberalizing policy, a refutation of our doctrine of progress, a blow to our pride. It is we, the British, who are the losers by the defection of South Africa since we believed that we had a programme for the new nations in the twentieth century, but we were wrong. The transfer of power had been premature.”

- C.E. Carrington, January 1962²⁴⁸

Macmillan’s tour of Africa in early 1960, culminating in his visit to South Africa, was indisputably a public relations success for him back home. The “wind of change” speech was heralded by the British press as a triumph of British principles over the racialist policies of the South African government. Throughout Britain, a popular movement to boycott South African goods was underway, having declared March 1960 the Boycott Month. As *The Guardian* noted on March 1, 1960, “‘the boycott’ begins today, and it is an indication of the organisers’ success so far that no one needs to ask ‘boycott of what?’”²⁴⁹ Given these developments as the winter of 1960 receded, anti-apartheid crusaders could not help but feel optimistic regarding the eventual dissolution of apartheid. However, within six weeks of Macmillan’s visit to South Africa, African popular protest begot state-sanctioned violence, hardening the Afrikaner line against repealing apartheid policies and effectively turning South Africa into a police state domestically and a pariah internationally. The central event in this was the massacre of protesters by South African police in the township of Sharpeville.

On Monday, March 21, 1960, demonstrators, responding to calls for action by Pan-African Congress leaders, surrounded the police station at Sharpeville. Ostensibly a protest against the pass laws (laws which required all African adults to carry papers when traveling anywhere within the country), nearly 5,000 people showed up to surrender peacefully for violating the law. Police, overwhelmed by the numbers agitating outside their station, eventually opened

²⁴⁸ Quoted from C.E. Carrington, “Decolonisation: The Last Stages,” *International Affairs* 38: 1 (Jan. 1962): 33.

²⁴⁹ Quoted in Christabel Gurney, “‘A Great Cause’: The Origins of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, June 1959-March 1960,” *Journal of South African Studies* 26:1 (Mar. 2000): 141.

fire on the crowds, emptying nearly 1,000 rounds into the unarmed populace.²⁵⁰ At least 69 people were killed and hundreds more injured, most of whom were shot in the back. One eyewitness described the aftermath as “like a Western Front battlefield in the First World War;” in the press it was compared to Amritsar, Lidice, and Belsen.²⁵¹ Reaction to the massacre was instantaneous worldwide, with South Africa condemned at the U.N. and by the United States, Canada, and India. In Britain, Sharpeville dominated the press while boycott organizers attracted thousands of people to Trafalgar Square with a march and rally against the South African government the following Sunday. In South Africa, government reaction was initially conciliatory, relaxing the pass laws temporarily. However, in the ensuing weeks, Prime Minister Henrik Verwoerd’s government changed course, declaring a state of emergency, outlawing the PAC and the African National Congress, arresting African resistance leadership, and enacting draconian laws revoking *habeus corpus* along with other measures cracking down on African resistance. The aftermath of Sharpeville ensured that the government’s policies of apartheid were more entrenched than ever before. Effectively, the South African government’s response to Sharpeville set the nation on a path divergent from the values espoused by most western nations, a path it maintained for another thirty years.

The significance of Sharpeville within the story of Britain’s end of empire is that it was a point of no return for Britain’s policies regarding South African apartheid. Liberal leader Jo Grimmond described Sharpeville to the Commons in April 1960 as a “dividing line in history,” after which things will not “ever be quite the same again” within the Commonwealth family.²⁵² From a historical perspective, Sharpeville was the beginning of the irrevocable split between Britain, the Commonwealth, and the Union of South Africa that culminated with South Africa

²⁵⁰ Philip Frankel, *An Ordinary Atrocity: Sharpeville and Its Massacre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), vii and “Verwoerd’s Doomsday Men,” *The New Statesman*, 2 April 1960, 469.

²⁵¹ Quoted in Howard Smith, “Apartheid, Sharpeville and ‘Impartiality’: The Reporting of South Africa on BBC Television, 1948-1961,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television*, 13:3 (19913): 259.

²⁵² United Kingdom. *House of Commons Debates*, 08 April 1960 (Mr. Jo Grimmond, Lib). <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1960/apr/08/union-of-south-africa-racist-policies>.

departing the Commonwealth in mid-1961. This chapter will explore South Africa's departure within the contemporary debate the British were conducting over the transformation of their empire into a 'free, associative' Commonwealth. In many ways, the loss of South Africa was both a failure and a triumph of the Whiggish vision of end of empire. Some contemporary observers regretted the departure as a loss of Britain's ability to influence South African policies and to guide them to a more tolerant (i.e. British) stance. It was in essence a failure of the British ideals of tolerance and plurality to act as a binding agent within the Commonwealth itself, as C.E. Carrington's analysis quoted above demonstrates. Others believed however that South Africa's departure reaffirmed the liberal values of racial equality and democracy viewed to be at the heart of Britain's Commonwealth. This chapter will explore how these attitudes unfolded within the context of South Africa's withdrawal from the Commonwealth, beginning with the 1960 Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference held just over a month after Sharpeville and ending with the Union's eventual departure on May 31, 1961.

Included in this story are the specific reactions of the political left and right, for this period between March 1960 and the summer of 1961 was on a larger scale also the point of no return for Britain's policies of decolonization in Africa. Looking at how the Whiggish vision was utilized by both left and right to justify their positions on South Africa and white settlement in Africa in general will demonstrate the inherent flexibility this component of British national identity possessed. On the left, the Boycott Movement, which by April 1960 had renamed itself the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM), figured prominently in press coverage of the Prime Ministers' Conferences, as popular protests were held throughout the events to criticize South African policy. Despite its attempts to court Tory support, the AAM never really moved beyond a left-center organization. While stocked with leftwing organizers, the AAM's significance rests with the fact that it was wholly emblematic of the British public's harsh view of apartheid as weighed in public opinion polls.²⁵³ Press attitudes towards the AAM will also

²⁵³*The Daily Mail*, 6 March 1961.

figure in this chapter. On the right, the buildup to the 1961 Prime Ministers' Conference in March witnessed the most open revolt of Tory opinion against Macmillan's policies of decolonization ever offered. Lord Salisbury's unprecedented criticism of Colonial Secretary Iain Macleod in the House of Lords not only symbolized hardline Tory frustration with a policy of decolonization they felt moved too fast but was also sensationalized within the press as Commonwealth Prime Ministers arrived in London. Thus this incident too will figure into the story of South Africa's departure and how it both challenged and reinforced the Whiggish vision of the British Commonwealth, a story that in many ways started in that dusty township of Sharpeville.

Summed up simply, Sharpeville galvanized both British and worldwide anti-apartheid opinion, prompting *The Economist* to note that "South Africa is putting itself outside the comity of the whole western world."²⁵⁴ *The New Statesman* remarked in regards to British press reaction that "not for a long time has there been such passion and unanimity" as the thorough condemnation of South Africa that week in March, while also noting the situation "lays a heavy responsibility on Britain" both within Africa and world opinion.²⁵⁵ As was seen in chapter three, worldwide criticism of South African policies, particularly at the United Nations, was a thorn in the side of British leadership, who were caught between loyalty to South Africa as a Commonwealth "family member" and genuine disapproval of South African racial policies. Before Macmillan's Cape Town speech and the massacre at Sharpeville, Britain had managed to avoid openly criticizing apartheid. Post-Sharpeville, this was no longer a possibility, though critics of Macmillan at the leftist *Mirror* felt his government dragged its feet over condemning South Africa for Sharpeville. "Why does Mr. Macmillan not speak out...Must the voice of humanity be left to the Americans, the Indians, the Labour movement and a bunch of young people in the sunshine in Trafalgar Square?"²⁵⁶ While fearful of antagonizing the Afrikaner

²⁵⁴ "Blood on the Club Steps," *The Economist*, 26 March 1960, 1192.

²⁵⁵ "Fleet Street" and "Verwoerd's Doomsday Men," *The New Statesman*, 2 April 1960, 472-3 and 469.

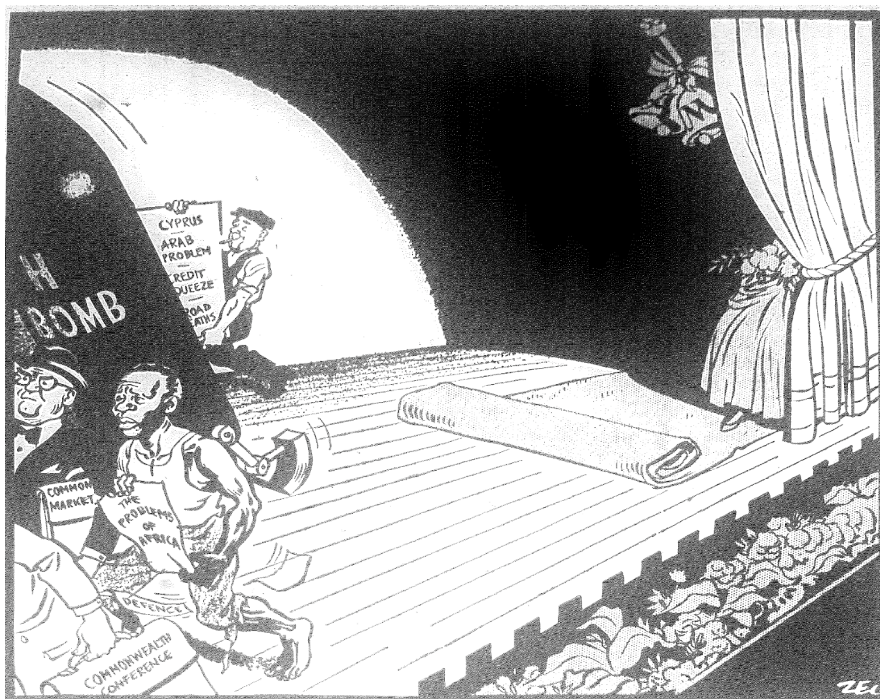
²⁵⁶ Quoted in "Fleet Street," *The New Statesman*, 2 April 1960, 472-3.

Nationalist-led Union government into leaving the Commonwealth (a development many anti-British Afrikaners welcomed), Macmillan's government was nevertheless committed to the 'wind of change' and was losing the will to defend South Africa in the international court of opinion. Government condemnation of the massacre at Sharpeville arrived in the form of a House of Commons debate on April 8, 1960. Criticism of South Africa was rampant throughout public debate that month as well while the AAM saw a marked increase in its publicity and popularity. It was into this situation that the representatives of the nations within the British Commonwealth arrived for their annual meeting.

The 1960 Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference was held during the first two weeks of May, the first week of which coincided with the royal wedding of Princess Margaret. Despite competing with this for attention in the press, the issue of South African racial policies dominated political debate that week. Many in the press, with Sharpeville still so fresh in the public's mind, did not hesitate to call for a showdown over apartheid as the Prime Ministers trickled into London. *The Daily Herald* editorialized the need for Commonwealth critics of South Africa to step forward by arguing "the Commonwealth has meaning as an association of nations with broadly the same belief in the rights of free men. If one member denies these rights, how long can the others shrug their shoulders?"²⁵⁷ Confrontation over apartheid at the Conference was however the last thing Macmillan and his Cabinet wanted, fearful that criticism would play into the anti-British Afrikaner republican push that had been steadily gaining political traction in the Union. Macmillan feared it would induce the Union to leave the Commonwealth. Prime Minister Verwoerd had already called for a public referendum on the question of South Africa becoming a republic, which would then require South Africa to reapply for Commonwealth membership. Reapplication for membership inevitably meant a showdown between Commonwealth nations on the issue of apartheid, one that the British government knew would not end well for South Africa; i.e. they might be refused reentry by the other members.

²⁵⁷ "It's Up to South Africa," *The Daily Herald*, 30 April 1960, 1.

Macmillan's overarching goal then going into the 1960 Conference was to keep South Africa a Commonwealth member at all costs and to postpone as long as possible the debate over apartheid; to this end he tried to persuade Verwoerd to hold off on the referendum, scheduled for later that year, and to convince his fellow Commonwealth Prime Ministers not to bring apartheid into official debate at the Conference.



Interlude

A cartoon from *The Daily Herald* touting the Royal wedding as an interlude from the intractable problems of the day.²⁵⁸

The British press however kept the issue of South African racial policies alive through its coverage of the Conference. *The Daily Mirror* called the 1960 meeting “The Wind of Change Conference,” touting it as “one of the most vital ever” because of the opportunity to tackle apartheid.²⁵⁹ Arriving ministers were quizzed on their willingness to bring up apartheid at the Conference; most deferred, but the representative for the newest member nation, Tengku Rahman of Malaysia, declared it was his intention to do so. Many in the press, from left to right, felt the

²⁵⁸ *The Daily Herald*, 5 May 1960, 5.

²⁵⁹ “Eleven Men Face Wind of Change,” *The Daily Mirror*, 3 May 1960, 10.

Conference provided an opportunity for Commonwealth leadership to debate and condemn apartheid in an unequivocal fashion. Others, including Macmillan and Australian PM Robert Menzies, felt the issue of apartheid was a powder keg, ready to blow the Commonwealth itself apart if ignited.²⁶⁰ Those reluctant to address apartheid argued that it was an “internal issue” relevant to South Africa only, the same argument Britain had made at the UN to protect the Union from international criticism. Many other PMs subscribed to this interpretation, even those who had been openly critical of South Africa back home in their respective nations. Canadian Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, while espousing the conviction that the Commonwealth’s major principle was “the equality of all races and peoples,” also argued “the spirit of the Commonwealth denies that the Prime Ministers’ Conference should, in effect, become the judge and jury on the actions of other members.”²⁶¹

Nevertheless, voices in the public debate over South Africa’s role in the Commonwealth stressed the inherent contradiction between the Union’s policies and the British ideals binding the Commonwealth together. *The Herald* challenged readers with the questions “who wants a Commonwealth that Hitler could have belonged to? Why shouldn’t every member be expected to accept a code of human rights?”²⁶² *The Daily Mail* in a front page commentary directly refuted the argument that apartheid was an internal South African issue, claiming that the Union’s policies were very much a Commonwealth issue. “It is a question that could split the Commonwealth and it must be settled by the Commonwealth.”²⁶³ Failure to do so, the editorial continued, would be an international embarrassment for Britain. *The Economist* posited that the Commonwealth could no longer serve its function as a multiracial link between western and Afro-Asian nations with such a blatant hypocrisy in its midst. It too pointed out how the issue of

²⁶⁰ Menzies too felt that Australia was vulnerable to charges of racial discrimination if that door were to be opened at the Conference. See Frank Hayes, “South Africa’s Departure from the Commonwealth, 1960-1961,” *International History Review* 2:3 (July 1980): 453-484.

²⁶¹ Quoted in *The Daily Herald*, *The Daily Mirror*, and *The Daily Express*, April 1960.

²⁶² “Now for Act Two,” *The Daily Herald*, 2 May 1960, 1.

²⁶³ “The Noisy Conference,” *The Daily Mail*, 11 May 1960, 1.

South Africa was a kind of worldwide embarrassment for the British Commonwealth. “The British hate a scene; and the continuing strength of British habits in other Commonwealth countries has been revealed by the general extent of the embarrassment” felt over apartheid by member nations.²⁶⁴ *The Daily Mirror* likened the situation to a family analogy: “they [the Commonwealth PMs] know the British family of nations of many races cannot prosper with the grim skeleton of race discrimination in its cupboard.”²⁶⁵ In the end however, such calls for debate among the PMs went unheeded. Macmillan was able to secure a guarantee from the Commonwealth leadership to keep talks on apartheid ‘informal,’ that is, out of official Commonwealth business, and to acknowledge officially that apartheid was a South African internal affair.

This resolution however did not diminish the issue within debate in the British press. In fact, in some ways, it made the conflict over apartheid among Commonwealth leadership a more public affair, as its battles were now fought out in the pages of the dailies rather the relative privacy of the Conference rooms. The lightning rod for controversy over the issue of apartheid was the South African representative himself, Foreign Minister Eric Louw. Louw replaced PM Verwoerd, who was convalescing after an assassination attempt earlier in April, and was an unrepentant proponent of apartheid. Actively hostile to those critical of the Union’s racial policies, Louw attracted protests immediately after arriving in London that spring. He was greeted at his hotel by protesters chanting “murder” in reference to Sharpeville, a public protest exalted by *The Daily Mirror* but excoriated by the rightwing *Daily Express* as a “boorish display” unbecoming of the British people.²⁶⁶ Indeed, most papers acknowledged the presence of anti-apartheid protesters outside of the Conference and South Africa House. The more leftwing dailies of course supported them wholeheartedly, both through publicity and like-minded

²⁶⁴ “In Black and White,” *The Economist*, 14 May 1960, 611.

²⁶⁵ “Eleven Men Face Wind of Change,” *The Daily Mirror*, 3 May 1960, 10.

²⁶⁶ “Shouts of Murder,” *The Daily Mirror*, 2 May 1960, 11 and “Boorish Display,” *The Daily Express*, 2 May 1960, 8.

editorials. Others in the press merely made note of the protests, something on which *The Economist* remarked “one must try to avoid the British superiority complex of taking radical organizations - especially those run by the young - too lightly.” Rather, *The Economist* suggested that the AAM and other organizations influenced by African exiles were surprisingly important, being not only reflective of popular opinion in some circles but also a training ground for future African leaders.²⁶⁷ Meanwhile, *The Daily Express* took great lengths to ridicule the anti-South African protests, even publishing a piece mocking some protesters’ attempt to carry a symbolic coffin to South Africa House, an attempt scuttled by a no-nonsense police constable.²⁶⁸

While anti-apartheid protests did not go unremarked in the press, most attention was focused on the PMs and their opinions regarding South Africa’s racist policies. Foreign Minister Louw, attacked continuously by the British press for his strident and blustering support for apartheid, actively courted a confrontation with the media by holding a press conference in the midst of the first week of the Conference.²⁶⁹ Even though the reporters in attendance were carefully vetted by South African officials, the tenor was still hostile to Louw, a given considering all mainstream British papers were openly anti-apartheid. Most reportage of the press conference was innately critical of Louw and his arguments supporting the Union’s racist policies. What struck most reporters was how close-minded and self-righteous Louw seemed in his support of South Africa’s position, with even Macmillan describing Louw’s performance as “bitter” and “unyielding” in his diary entry of that day.²⁷⁰ Only the typically contrarian ultra-rightwing *Daily Express* evinced sympathy and admiration for Louw’s handling of the questions. In addition to his tone, the press was taken aback by Louw’s insistence that British and South African policies were not so dissimilar. When asked about the massacre at

²⁶⁷ “Africa in London,” *The Economist*, 2 April 1960, 15.

²⁶⁸ “Protest Marchers Take a Coffin,” *The Daily Express*, 7 May 1960, 2.

²⁶⁹ Sir John Maud, British High Commissioner for South Africa, described Louw as an “unpopular, unprepossessing and neurotic figure, so disturbingly reminiscent of Dr. Goebbels.” Quoted in Ronald Hyam and Peter Henshaw, *The Lion and the Springbok: Britain and South Africa since the Boer War* (London: Cambridge University Press), 261.

²⁷⁰ Peter Catterall, ed. *The Macmillan Diaries: Prime Minister and After, 1957-1966* (London: Macmillan, 2003), 291.

Sharpeville, Louw compared it the situation faced by the British in Nyasaland the previous year, an “act or abdicate” scenario, that, as Louw pointed out, Britain resolved with violence much as South Africa did.

This comparison of course infuriated most voices in the press, who reiterated the fundamental divergence between British and South African policies in Africa, again invoking the notion that the British were exceptional in their liberal principles. Anti-Louw histrionics on the left matched with with more measured criticism of Louw’s arguments in the center-right press.

The Economist summarized Louw’s perceived fallacy :

[A]t his press conference, both Nyasaland and Notting Hill were thrown into the British glass house. But only myopia or obstinacy could have persuaded him that there is no basic difference between the current British policy and his own government’s policy towards Africans. Mr. Louw in argument is a more sophisticated edition of the man who counters criticism by asking whether you would like to have a black man marry your sister.²⁷¹

The Daily Mail too was highly critical of Louw’s assertion that British and South African policies were not different by asking “does he really expect that to be taken seriously?” and describing Louw as “blinker against the realities of the modern world.”²⁷² The indignation summoned in the press at Louw’s assertion was not surprising; the narrative of the Whiggish vision the British repeated to themselves in this period of decolonization could not sustain the notion that British policies were anything other than progressive, liberal, and benign. Additionally, South Africa, as was seen in chapter three, continually served as a kind of anti-British “other” in regards to African policies and developments. For Louw to challenge that mental fixture through comparison was of course to invite rabid criticism from British quarters. *The Mail* summed it up: “...there is no excuse for apartheid and all it implies. It is as politically primitive as Darkest Africa,” invoking Britain’s other great “other” on the continent.²⁷³

²⁷¹ “No Penitent He,” *The Economist*, 7 May 1960, 505.

²⁷² “It Won’t Do, Mr. Louw,” *The Daily Mail*, 5 May 1960, 8.

²⁷³ *ibid.*

Despite such dustups in the press, including a very public row between Louw and Malaysian PM Rahman along with Nigeria's future PM suggesting that a Commonwealth with South Africa might have no place for an independent Nigeria, the remainder of the Conference witnessed a surprising degree of unanimity regarding retaining South African membership and tolerance towards her policies. By the end of the Conference, the leadership had reached by unanimous agreement a final communiqué that addressed anti-apartheid sentiment among Commonwealth nations while still touting the primacy of South Africa's internal sovereignty. The smooth passage of the communiqué prompted Macmillan to declare "we have saved the unity of the Commonwealth (at least for the time) without any sacrifice of principle."²⁷⁴ It was clear that the operative phrase for Macmillan and for many observers in the British press was "at least for the time." With the South Africa republic referendum still on the horizon, many in the press acknowledged that the true debate of South Africa's role in Britain's liberal, multiracial Commonwealth had only been postponed.

Despite South African demands that Britain offer a guarantee of easy reentry should the Union vote a republic, Macmillan and his government remained uncommitted on the issue, instead trying to dissuade the Afrikaners from holding the referendum that year. They failed. On October 5, 1960, South African voters took to the polls, and in a 850,458 to 775,878 margin, chose to turn the Union into a republic and to set South Africa up for readmission to the Commonwealth. British reaction to the vote witnessed a reignition of the old arguments of Afrikaner anti-British attitudes along with debate on South Africa's role in a multiracial Commonwealth. Many in the press saw the passage of the referendum as a direct rejection of Britishness in the Union, with *The Daily Mail* calling it the final battle of the Boer War. "Under the enlightened British connection, South Africa is given the liberty to cut free if she so wishes. But she is using the right for the wrong reasons[:]" to avenge the Boer War and to secure

²⁷⁴ Catterall, *Macmillan Diaries*, 295.

apartheid.²⁷⁵ Some feared South Africa would take this opportunity to abandon the Commonwealth, while others, mostly on the left, hoped for just that. As *The Herald* argued, “...a state that denies basic rights to millions of people on the ground of colour damages the whole concept of the Commonwealth.”²⁷⁶ In this view, it was better for the British Commonwealth to dispense with the hypocrisy of having South Africa as an achingly embarrassing member of the club.

The more centrist and right-leaning opinion however disapproved of the idea of South Africa leaving the Commonwealth, suggesting it was bad for both the Commonwealth and Britain, which still had strong ties of kith and kin, not to mention business and economic ties, to the English-speaking communities of South Africa. But most observers who felt South Africa should stay did so out of the belief that departure was inherently bad for South Africa and could only lead to her isolation on the world stage. As *The Economist* described it, leaving the Commonwealth would sever South Africa’s only link to western civilization, a huge mistake given the geopolitical dynamics of the Cold War. *The Mail* projected a future in which an independent South Africa would fall behind her African Commonwealth neighbors: “we may even see the new ... African states advancing to a higher civilization while South Africa, denied the stability and benefits of the Commonwealth connection, becomes a closed, backward, festering police state.”²⁷⁷ Others argued the official line espoused by the British government, that the best way to help South Africa end apartheid was to keep Commonwealth connections solid and the liberalizing British influence intact. Some though in the press were skeptical of the power Commonwealth influence could actually wield. As *The Daily Telegraph* pointed out, “links with the Crown have proved wholly ineffective in protecting the blacks in the past,” a situation unlikely to change whether South Africa became a republic or not.²⁷⁸ *The Telegraph*

²⁷⁵ “Verwoerd’s Victory,” *The Daily Mail*, 7 October 1960, 8.

²⁷⁶ “South Africa and the Future,” *The Daily Herald*, 8 October 1960, 6.

²⁷⁷ “Verwoerd’s Victory,” *The Daily Mail*, 7 October 1960, 8.

²⁷⁸ “South Africa’s Choice,” *The Daily Telegraph*, 4 October 1960, 4.

went on though to suggest that Verwoerd's government will not last forever and that maintaining Commonwealth ties was the best method to help South Africa transition out of apartheid when that day might come.

Post-referendum, with the application for South Africa's readmission as a republic to be debated at the next Prime Ministers' Conference, the stage was irrevocably set for a showdown over apartheid and its place in the British Commonwealth of Nations. The 1961 Conference was held mid-March and the press reaction to the question of apartheid picked up almost exactly where it left off from the previous year. However, issues arising in other parts of the British Empire in Africa were to distract the press briefly from the question of South Africa, refocusing attention instead on the continual drama surrounding the fate of the Central African Federation.

A week after South Africans went to the polls in October of 1960, the neighboring CAF underwent a political cataclysm of its own with the publication of the Monckton Commission report. The Commission had been set up by the Macmillan government to investigate the questions surrounding the future of the Federation. Most prominently, especially for the masses of Africans wanting out of the Federation, was the question of whether the three member colonies, Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland, could secede from the Federation if so desired. The Monckton Commission, much to the chagrin and outright anger of federal and Southern Rhodesian leadership, advised secession as a viable option. This flew in the face of the personal assurances Macmillan had issued to the Federal Prime Minister, Sir Roy Welensky, about secession being "off the table" in regards to the Commission's recommendations.²⁷⁹ By the time of the 1961 Commonwealth Conference, a very upset Welensky had coordinated with Tory hardliners sympathetic to Southern Rhodesian, Federal, and white settler causes in the CAF over this issue. What also incensed Welensky and his allies were the proposed constitutional settlements for Northern Rhodesia that would guarantee

²⁷⁹ Macmillan, ever the wily politician, had made private assurances with members of the Commission that succession was an "on-table" topic while conveniently leading Welensky to believe otherwise.

majority (i.e. African) vote, presented by Colonial Secretary Iain Macleod the previous month. Most hardline Tories were innately critical of the Colonial Secretary's policies and methods for the seemingly rapid transfer of power within African territories. They felt he conceded too much to African nationalists at the white settlers' expense and went about it in an underhanded, even two-faced manner. With Welensky in London for the Conference, the situation was to come to a head.

On March 7, 1961, the British House of Lords began a two-day debate on the future of the Central African Federation. Taking the floor, the Marquis of Salisbury, a former Conservative Cabinet member and a staunch ally of Welensky's, addressed what he felt was a "crisis in confidence" between the home government and the white settlers of the Federation.²⁸⁰ At the heart of this crisis, he believed, lay the actions and attitudes of the Colonial Secretary and specifically his "unscrupulous" dealings with the white settlers. "I believe he [Macleod] has adopted, especially in his relationship to the white communities of Africa, a most unhappy and an entirely wrong approach. He has been too clever by half."²⁸¹ At this, as *The Telegraph* reported on its front page the next day, a wave of gasps reverberated through the House.²⁸² Salisbury continued: "The Colonial Secretary was a very fine bridge player...It seems to me that the Colonial Secretary, when he abandoned the sphere of bridge for the sphere of politics, brought his bridge technique with him." Developing the bridge metaphor, he described Macleod as treating African nationalists as his partners and white settlers as his opponents. "At any rate, it has become the convinced view of the white people of Eastern and Central Africa that it has been his object to outwit them [as in a game of bridge], and that he has done most successfully."²⁸³

Salisbury followed these remarks by detailing the specific developments in which he felt

²⁸⁰ Lord Salisbury resigned from the Macmillan Cabinet in 1957 in protest over the proposed settlements regarding the situation in Cyprus.

²⁸¹ United Kingdom. *House of Lords Debates*, 07 March 1961 (Lord Salisbury, Con). <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1961/mar/07/central-africa-1>.

²⁸² "Macleod Attacked by Lord Salisbury," *The Daily Telegraph*, 8 March 1961, 1.

²⁸³ United Kingdom. *House of Lords Debates*, 07 March 1961 (Lord Salisbury, Con). <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1961/mar/07/central-africa-1>.

Macleod had been ‘fast and loose’ with settler goodwill in both Kenya and the CAF. Reaction to the Marquis’ attack in the House was immediate; some Peers called out “shame,” while others sought to clarify whether Lord Salisbury believed Macleod had been intentionally deceitful with the white settlers. Baroness Summerskill declared “Lord Salisbury’s conduct was utterly vicious.”²⁸⁴ Viscount Kilmuir, the Lord Chancellor, who was not scheduled to speak until the following day, presented the strongest rebuttal to the Marquis’ challenge. Referring to the “too clever by half” assertion, Lord Kilmuir responded “that remark, which could only be calculated offensiveness was, I suggest, designed to infer that the Colonial Secretary was disingenuous.”²⁸⁵ He proceeded to claim the Marquis’ accusation was the “bitterest attack I have even known in my 26 years in Parliament. It is baseless and without foundation” before refuting Salisbury’s assertions point-by-point.²⁸⁶ At the end of the debate, the Marquis reasserted, “I thought the Colonial Secretary was rather unscrupulous. I am not going to withdraw that.”

The next day, March 8, the story of Lord Salisbury’s surprisingly personal attack (in the words of Macleod’s biographer “nothing less than character assassination”) on his own Government’s Colonial Secretary splashed across the front page of nearly every London daily.²⁸⁷ *The Daily Express* reported “Colonial Secretary Macleod Under Bitter Attack: Peers in Angry Clash;” *The Daily Mirror* blared “Macleod: A Shock Attack,” describing the “sensational personal attack” that “roused a storm” in the Lords.²⁸⁸ The dailies covered in detail the exchanges made on the floor between Lord Salisbury and Viscount Kilmuir, reporting the next day as well on the rebuttal against the Marquis’ accusations by Lord Hailsham. Within a week after his attack on Macleod, Lord Salisbury resigned a minor local position he held in the Conservative Party in protest of Macmillan’s Africa policy, stoking further the press debate on Salisbury’s

²⁸⁴ United Kingdom. *House of Lords Debates*, 07 March 1961 (Baroness Summerskill, Lab). <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1961/mar/07/central-africa-1>.

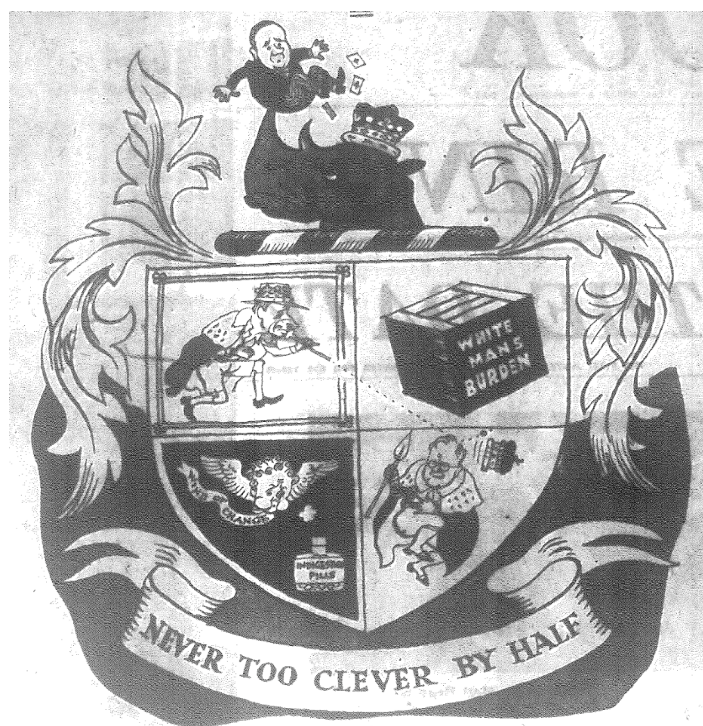
²⁸⁵ United Kingdom. *House of Lords Debates*, 07 March 1961 (Lord Kilmuir, Con). <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1961/mar/07/central-africa-1>.

²⁸⁶ *ibid.*

²⁸⁷ Robert Shepherd, *Iain Macleod: A Biography* (London: Pimlico, 1994), 226.

²⁸⁸ *The Daily Express*, 8 March 1961, 1 and *The Daily Mirror*, 8 March 1961, 1.

arguments and methods in criticizing his own Government. *The Daily Express* hailed his resignation as “Exit the Party Conscience” whose “ominous words” on the state of Africa “will be heeded by many in his party.”²⁸⁹ Left-leaning papers continued to criticize his “ugly attack” that “(minus the Queensbury Rules) was hitting below the belt.”²⁹⁰ *The Daily Herald* described the Marquis as a “self-elected leader” of the Tory party who was “fighting the Government’s policy of racial progress in Africa.”²⁹¹ But most telling was the editorial offered by *The Daily Telegraph*, which gently chided the Marquis for his “highly emotionalized approach” and misreading of Macmillan’s intentions. *The Telegraph* argued that the situation in Africa was not moving as rapidly as diehard Tories might believe and to “remember the British tradition of trusteeship” was developed “as a means to eventual self-government.”²⁹²



The Salisbury coat of arms according to *The Daily Mail*, replete with a gored Iain Macleod dropping his playing cards.²⁹³

²⁸⁹ “Exit the Party Conscience,” *The Daily Express*, 11 March 1961, 8.

²⁹⁰ “Cassandra: Too Clever By Half,” *The Daily Mirror*, 9 March 1961, 8.

²⁹¹ “Rebel Peer Taunts Colonial Secretary,” *The Daily Herald*, 8 March 1961, 1.

²⁹² “Lord Salisbury’s Attack,” *The Daily Telegraph*, 8 March 1961, 14.

²⁹³ “Salisbury Arms,” *The Daily Mail*, 10 March 1961, 8.

That *The Telegraph* reiterated the fundamental thesis of the Whiggish vision in connection with this public debate was unsurprising: Lord Salisbury in his opening remarks during his attack on Macleod also invoked notions of the British tradition in Africa. He claimed “no one believes in the British mission in Africa more passionately than I do.”²⁹⁴ He also described the white settlers for whom he spoke as “the most British, in the fullest sense of that word, of any” in Britain’s African territories.²⁹⁵ Lord Salisbury’s motivations derived from a conservative reading of the Whiggish vision of Empire, one which emphasized deeply the white man’s role in bringing Britain’s liberal policies to her colonial peoples. This reading stemmed from more than just the traditional conservative outlook; it derived as well from the social traditions of the British Empire. As Anthony Sampson, a journalist specializing in African affairs, argued in his 1962 monograph *Anatomy of Britain* the attack on Macleod represented a clash between ‘old’ and ‘new’ factions within the Tory party cast as the traditional hard right versus more progressive Tory elements. However, as Sampson analyzed, this clash was over more than just differing political outlooks; it was also a strident example of certain social tensions within the Conservative Party. He quoted one Peer as remarking on the attack: “It wasn’t really about Africa. It was pure class warfare - the upper-class peers against middle-class peers.”²⁹⁶ Given that traditionally the upper-classes were more innately bound to the overall mission of Empire, it was not surprising that aristocratic elements of the British public sphere were put off by the Macmillan Government’s push to get out of Empire. Macleod’s approach to the African question challenged the assumptions of the upper-class, conservative reading of the Whiggish vision, one imbued with a staunchly paternalistic conception of ‘backwards’ subject peoples and a loyalty to the ethnically-identified fellow ‘Britons’ living in their midst.

²⁹⁴ United Kingdom. *House of Lords Debates*, 07 March 1961 (Lord Salisbury, Con). <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1961/mar/07/central-africa-1>.

²⁹⁵ This concept too was to be reiterated by Rhodesian separatists, with rebel leader Ian Smith declaring in 1966 “If Churchill were alive today, I believe he would probably emigrate to Rhodesia -- because I believed that all those admirable characteristics of the British we believed in, loved, and preached to our children no longer exist in Britain.” Quoted from Bill Schwartz, *The White Man’s World* (London: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²⁹⁶ Anthony Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 81.

As historian Stuart Ward argued, this ethnic identification or “race patriotism” evinced by the more conservative, traditional elements in the British public sphere was rejected by Macmillan and his policy makers, thus paving the way for the rapid decolonization of the early 1960s.²⁹⁷ However, as Lord Salisbury’s attack on Macleod indicated, this rejection did not go wholly unchallenged. Indeed, Salisbury’s outburst and his commitment to the white settler cause in the CAF represented a reassertion of conceptions of a “Greater Britain,” a concept popularized by late nineteenth century historians John Seeley and Charles Dilke. The “Greater Britain” concept preceded on the assumption that Empire promoted ties of both cultural and ethnic identification among Britons. It assumed Britishness was white. The “Greater Britain” concept, exclusively associated with the Dominion colonies, was eventually subsumed into the Commonwealth vision by the early twentieth century, as outlined in chapter two. By World War II, the exclusive ethnic identification of white European with Britishness was undergoing reformulation and the concept of the multiracial, free, associative Commonwealth was ascendant. However, “race patriotism” regarding imperial subjects, and particularly the white settlers of Africa, was alive and well within the conservative factions of the Tory party in the era of decolonization. Lord Salisbury represented this most clearly, proffering an aristocratic, conservative reading of the Whiggish vision that emphasized and privileged the ties of loyalty between kith and kin and the ‘progress’ white settlers brought to their colonies over immediate racial equality in the emerging African nations.

This reading however was hotly contested in the public debate over the role of the white settlers in Africa. The British left, populated to a great extent by middle and working class participants, offered another interpretation of how Britain’s benign liberalization was to shape the future of the African continent. After World War II (and partly because of it, as seen in chapter two), the concept of racial equality within the postwar Commonwealth was powerfully

²⁹⁷ Stuart Ward, “The End of Empire and the Fate of Britishness,” in *History, Nationhood, and the Question of Britain*, eds. Helen Brocklehurst and Robert Phillips (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), *passim*.

ascendant in mainstream opinion. By the 1961 Conference, even the right-leaning *Daily Telegraph* could report: “suddenly the multiracial Commonwealth seems to have made the jump from an idealised tradition to a solid reality in world affairs.”²⁹⁸ Activists on the left, repulsed by apartheid in South Africa and what they viewed as attempts at recreating such a system by federal and white settler authorities in the CAF, literally took to the streets during the 1961 Conference to assert their own reading of the Whiggish vision of the end of the British Empire. This reading emphasized the multiracial nature of the new Commonwealth through condemnation of South African apartheid.

The most significant action adopted by anti-apartheid forces was a seventy-two hour vigil (an hour for each victim of Sharpeville by the AAM’s reckoning) outside Lancaster House, site of the Prime Ministers’ meeting, during the start of the Conference. AAM members, joined by Members of Parliament and British clergy, held shifts to stand silently outside in protest. High profile Labour members, such as Barbara Castle, Anthony Wedgewood Benn and his wife, and Baroness Summerskill participated. The vigil made front page news, with *The Economist* remarking later in the week that while the boycott did not enjoy a literal success over the past year, it and actions like the vigil did provide considerable publicity for the anti-apartheid movement.²⁹⁹ The vigil effectively brought popular attention to the question whether an unreformed republican South Africa should remain in the Commonwealth. During the first week of the Conference, 20 Labour MPs also published an open letter calling for Commonwealth leadership to suspend South Africa’s membership until apartheid was abolished. Actions and attitudes such as these reflected and reinforced British public opinion that was hostile to the Union’s racial policies. *The Daily Mail* in conjunction with National Opinion Polls, Ltd. published a fascinating poll of British opinion on this issue and other related Commonwealth topics. While the British public overwhelming disapproved of apartheid, a majority believed

²⁹⁸ “Ten Critical Days for the Commonwealth,” *The Daily Telegraph*, 8 March 1961, 14.

²⁹⁹ “No Success,” *The Economist*, 11 March 1961, 937.

South Africa should remain in the Commonwealth regardless.³⁰⁰

Whether South Africa should stay or go was the central question surrounding the Conference as Commonwealth Prime Ministers arrived in London that March. As *The Mail* summarized, “one by one, Commonwealth leaders flew into London yesterday and denounced apartheid.” The settlement arrived at during last year’s Conference was clearly going to need renegotiation. Significantly, the attitude of Canada’s Prime Minister, John Diefenbaker, had hardened considerably in regards to South Africa’s place in the Commonwealth. In November 1960, Diefenbaker conveyed to Macmillan his doubts that Canada would be willing to support a pro-apartheid, republican South Africa in the Commonwealth. Macmillan, who still believed his duty was to keep South Africa in at all costs, complained in his diary entries that month:

John Diefenbaker is going to be troublesome about South Africa. He is taking a ‘holier than thou’ attitude, which may cause trouble. For if the ‘Whites’ take an anti-South Africa line, how can we expect the Browns and Blacks to be more tolerant?³⁰¹

However indelicately put, Macmillan’s question was insightful and indeed the hardened position of Diefenbaker was to come into play when the question of South Africa’s application was finally debated. While Commonwealth leadership arrived in a London abuzz with talk of whether South Africa would retain her membership, the expectation was that South Africa would stay. Commonwealth leadership was expected to reach a settlement similar to the previous year’s. To ensure this, Macmillan again secured agreement among the leadership that the question of South Africa’s application would be postponed until the second week of the Conference.

This of course did not mean a cessation of debate over South Africa in the press. Attention focused most squarely on the South African Prime Minister, Henrik Verwoerd, who was overwhelmingly criticized in the press as an “apostle of apartheid.”³⁰² Leftwing reporting

³⁰⁰ “Britain Says: Don’t Kick South Africa Out,” *The Daily Mail*, 6 March 1961, 8.

³⁰¹ Quoted in Harold Macmillan, *Pointing the Way* (London: Macmillan, 1976), 293.

³⁰² In the words of *The Daily Mail*.

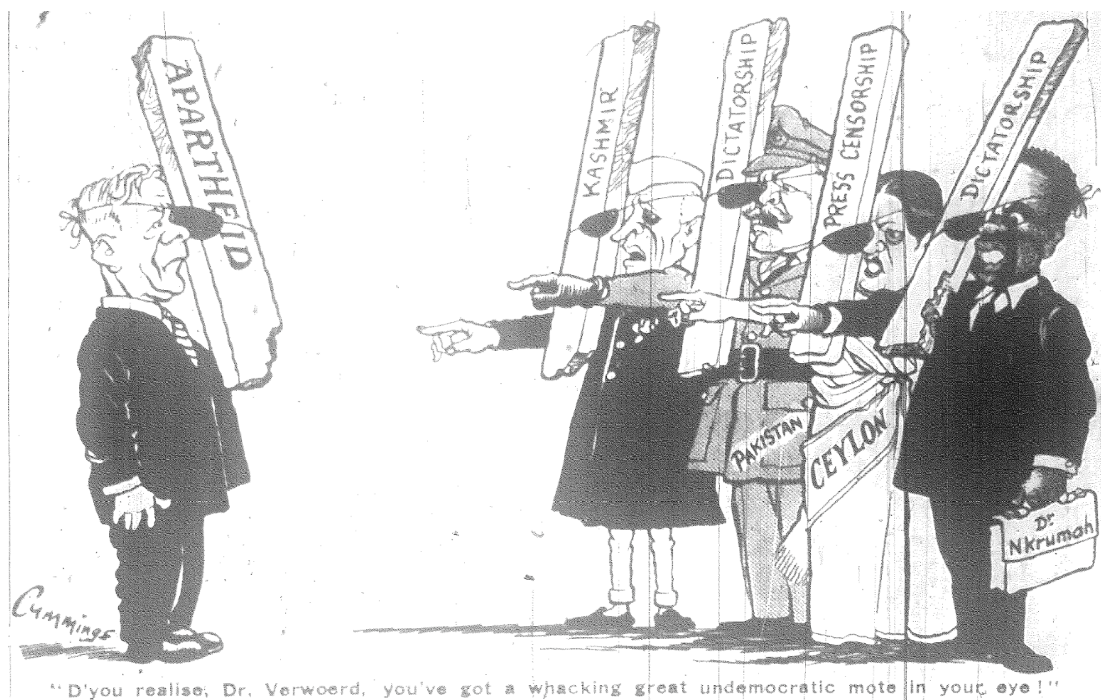
continually excoriated Verwoerd and his positions. *The Daily Herald* wrote “for most people, [the sight of his face] wreathed in smiles, has been enough to make their blood run cold” and described him as “beyond the reach of reason” when discussing a modification of South Africa’s policies.³⁰³ *The Mail* editorialized on the disconnect between his seemingly nice and gentlemanly demeanor and his support and development for policies as evil as apartheid. Only *The Daily Express* evinced any sympathy for Verwoerd and his position as a budding pariah among Commonwealth leadership. As during the previous Conference, the central contention was that Verwoerd’s policies were a direct contradiction of the principles that bound the Commonwealth together. Some advocated strongly for the direct expulsion of South Africa. Many, including voices in the press and PM Diefenbaker, felt that the Conference should draw up a specific statement of principles to which Verwoerd and South Africa could either subscribe or leave the Commonwealth. In the words of *The Herald*, the proposed drafted statement would “leave South Africa to make the grade, or go out.”³⁰⁴ Both *The Guardian* and *The Mail* adopted the same position.

The question of South Africa was finally taken up on Monday, March 13th in a debate that lasted six hours. On Tuesday, the question was debated over the course of the day’s entire session. It was not the smooth process anticipated the previous week. What turned the foregone conclusion of an easy readmission of South Africa into nothing less than a crisis within the Commonwealth was the hardened positions of leaders like Diefenbaker, Ghanaian PM Kwame Nkrumah, and the leader of the soon-to-be-independent Tanganyika, Julius Nyerere. During the first weekend of the Conference, Nyerere published a piece in *The Observer* in which he declared that an independent Tanganyika would decline to apply for Commonwealth membership if South Africa, with its apartheid policies unmitigated, remained a member. This idea of “us or South Africa” was taken up by Nkrumah as well. This of course brought Ghanaian policies, and

³⁰³ “The Smile on the Face of Verwoerd,” *The Daily Herald*, 9 March 1961, 6.

³⁰⁴ “The Dilemma of South Africa,” *The Daily Herald*, 6 March 1961, 1.

particularly Nkrumah's leadership, into the debate roiling in the press. Rightwing voices were quick to point out the hypocrisy in Nkrumah's criticisms of South Africa, given the dictatorial nature of his own rule. *The Daily Express* continually argued that it was inherently hypocritical for other members to judge South Africa, given how many in the Commonwealth struggled with ensuring liberal policies in their own nations. *The Telegraph* too published a series of readers' letters that made much the point.



***The Daily Express* refuses to abide Afro-Asian 'hypocrisy' in the Commonwealth:
"D'you realise, Dr. Verwoerd, you've got a whacking great undemocratic mote in your eye!"³⁰⁵**

While charges of hypocrisy flew in the press and the "us or them" mantra made headlines, within the Conference itself the mood was far more accommodating for both critics and supporters of South Africa. Only Verwoerd himself seemed unwilling to compromise with his colleagues to determine a formula by which the Commonwealth could resolve this conflict. By midweek, debate over South Africa's readmission focused more closely on the final wording of the Conference communiqué, much as it had the previous year. Critics of South Africa, including

³⁰⁵ *The Daily Express*, 13 March 1961, 16.

Nkrumah, Diefenbaker, and the Indian, Pakistani, Ceylonese, and Malaysian Prime Ministers, argued the communiqué should include a strong condemnation of apartheid. This Verwoerd was willing to accept only on the grounds that the communiqué also include a kind of ‘dissenting opinion’ in the form of South Africa’s perspective. For those leaders who believed the Conference should draft a kind of charter of rights, most notably Diefenbaker, South Africa’s proposal was unacceptable. Verwoerd however insisted that the communiqué contain South Africa’s perspective.

What was probably the final straw though came when Verwoerd honestly admitted that South Africa would not accept having African representatives of Commonwealth nations hold residency in the Union. By the end of the Wednesday session, with tensions inflamed by this admission, Macmillan called a brief recess. Reconvening in the early evening, Macmillan gave Verwoerd the floor. In a short address acknowledging the loggerhead the Conference had reached regarding the Union, PM Verwoerd formally withdrew South Africa’s application to the Commonwealth. This stunning development, unforeseen by political observers in the press, was in essence a face-saving measure, both for Verwoerd and Macmillan; South Africa’s withdrawal prevented the need for a Conference vote on the question of membership, a vote which would have been far more contentious and divisive than anything seen yet at the Conference. It was clear that anti-apartheid PMs would not tolerate South African reentry without the assurance that Verwoerd could be flexible on issues of apartheid. Verwoerd went out of his way to remain inflexible, thus the contention over the wording of the communiqué. Rather than be voted out after an ugly debate, Verwoerd, with Macmillan’s backing, instead chose a quieter exit for South Africa, setting the official date of withdrawal for May 31, 1961. After this date, South Africa would no longer be a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

Macmillan took South Africa’s withdrawal as a failure on his part to keep the Commonwealth intact. Looking back on those days in March, he concluded the causes for South

Africa's departure stemmed mostly from "the tremendous newspaper agitation and buildup, supported by political leaders and publicists here, against ... 'readmitting' South Africa because of apartheid" and "the extreme rigidity of Dr. Verwoerd, who never made the smallest concession to his colleagues."³⁰⁶ Writing to Sir John Maud, the British High Commissioner for South Africa, Macmillan claimed that the "wind of change has blown us away" during this "most exhausting and painful affair."³⁰⁷ The leftwing press, while in favor of the outcome, was quick to criticize Macmillan's choices during the Conference. *The New Statesman* argued Macmillan only wanted to retain South African membership because "to preside over the dissolution of the British Empire is too painful for an elderly Tory statesman" and that he behaved deplorably by trying so desperately to appease Verwoerd.³⁰⁸ After South Africa's application was withdrawn, *The New Statesman* pointed out that it was not through Britain's moral authority that this happened:

...[B]y pursuing the path of moral ambivalence and short term expediency, Britain automatically forfeited her right to leadership. ...[I]t was the junior members of the club, who have most recently acquired the democratic standards which we like to call British, who have insisted that they be upheld [by forcing South Africa's hand].³⁰⁹

Voices on the right however were kinder to Macmillan and his attempts to maintain South African membership. *The Daily Express* highlighted how Verwoerd's withdrawal not only prevented a schism among Commonwealth leadership but also how it was a kind of favor to Britain in that she would now no longer have to choose between South Africa and her Afro-Asian co-members.

Macmillan of course was rightly concerned as to how Conservatives would receive the news. Fortunately for his position, and surprisingly given the Salisbury controversy the week previous, many on the right felt that such an outcome was almost unavoidable. At least, many

³⁰⁶ Catterall, *Macmillan Diaries*, 366.

³⁰⁷ *ibid.*

³⁰⁸ "London Diary: Charon," *The New Statesman*, 10 March 1961, 376.

³⁰⁹ "South Africa: Birth of a Commonwealth," *The New Statesman*, 17 March 1961, 410.



Poor Macmillan caught in the fight between South Africa and the ‘rest,’ according to *The Daily Mirror*. Iain Macleod stands by as Verwoerd blocks several punches.³¹⁰

diehards felt the ‘new’ Commonwealth members, the Afro-Asian bloc, were more to blame than Macmillan. In his address to Parliament after the fact, Macmillan asserted, to cheers in the Commons, that the “door was still open” for South Africa to return to the Commonwealth. The leftwing and right-center press too kept an eye on Tory reaction to South Africa’s departure, with many predicting a schism within the Party on the issue of Africa in general. *The Daily Herald* posited that Macmillan’s Commonwealth dream, in which “Britain, no longer a great power, but a great moral influence, would be the first among equals of a collectively powerful group of nations leading the less experienced members by its generous spirit and ancient wisdom,” was entirely rejected by diehard Conservatives.³¹¹ *The Economist*, somewhat presciently, downplayed the severity of the split on Africa. In total, Salisbury’s ‘revolt’ the first week of the Conference was the most open rejection of Macmillan’s African policies he was to face that year and very few cast South Africa’s withdrawal as an invalidation of his wind of

³¹⁰ *The Daily Mirror*, 17 March 1961, 7.

³¹¹ “What Do the Tories Think of Macmillan’s New Commonwealth?” *The Daily Herald*, 20 March 1961, 2.

change. Diehard Tories accepted the Union's departure with saddened equanimity.

This acceptance was understandable in part because of the political and economic realities behind South Africa's departure. While many observers noted the break represented the end of a tradition, a fifty-year-old connection between the two nations of Britain and South Africa, in reality business as usual could continue and it did. The most tangible connection that was irrevocably disrupted, as many papers made note, was that of Commonwealth sports. Given that economic ties were not particularly affected by the Union's withdrawal, most reactions then in the press were sentimental and moralistic in nature. Some voices in the rightwing press were extremely dismayed at the development. *The Daily Express* declared that Wednesday to be the "Empire's day of tragedy," claiming that those who truly understood the Commonwealth would find "no joy" in South Africa's departure.³¹² Others on the right were more prosaic. *The Daily Mail*, while earlier in the week pleading not to "let us break up the family for the sake of differences over a formula of words" (i.e. the final communiqué), surmised that South Africa leaving the Commonwealth was a "great victory" for those opposed to apartheid. In an editorial later that week, *The Mail* also hailed South Africa's departure a "good riddance," reiterating the ubiquitous reaction of the leftwing press.³¹³

Leftwing response was best summed up by *The Daily Mirror's* exclamation that Wednesday was "a day of triumph for the Commonwealth" with the forces fighting for equality scoring a "tremendous victory."³¹⁴ *The New Statesman* summarized South Africa's departure as the "best" and "only acceptable outcome" of the Conference.³¹⁵ *The Daily Herald* editorialized on the mix of "relief and regret" that accompanied the development through which the Commonwealth "gains in moral stature."³¹⁶ Indeed, a common narrative in the left and even center-right press was this idea that with the departure of South Africa, a new Commonwealth

³¹² "Empire's Day of Tragedy," *The Daily Express*, 16 March 1961, 1.

³¹³ *The Daily Mail*, 15 March 1961 and 19 March 1961.

³¹⁴ "Out Goes South Africa," *The Daily Mirror*, 16 March 1961, 1.

³¹⁵ "South Africa: Birth of a Commonwealth," *The New Statesman*, 17 March 1961, 410.

³¹⁶ "Out ... In Silence," *The Daily Herald*, 16 March 1961, 1.

was born. “Something worthwhile has been saved,” contemplated *The Economist*, “something of great potential value born. ... [A] bridge of candid friendship, based on equal dealing, between the Asian-African world and the western one.”³¹⁷ *The Daily Mail* quoted Malaysian PM Tengku Rahman as saying that now the Commonwealth can become “a living force” in the world. *The Express* however condemned such viewpoints, bitterly spitting out “the situation is preposterous as well as tragic. The Commonwealth has reached it by worshipping false gods.”³¹⁸ Clearly, hard right reaction hewed closer to Salisbury’s interpretation of the Whig vision, privileging the kith and kin mission over doctrines of racial progress. *The Express* continued to lament the perceived abandonment of British kith and kin in South Africa: “Are these loyal people to be treated worse than Nkrumah [the right’s great antidemocratic boogeyman]” who remains in the Commonwealth?

Throughout most of the press, the departure of South Africa was cast in unwavering moral terms, whether as a moral defeat of the Salisburian doctrine of the bonds of kith and kin or as a moral victory for the forces of racial equality. *The Daily Telegraph* however voiced a surprising rejection of the notion that morality should be a factor in Commonwealth policy. *The Telegraph* warned that a dangerous precedent of a “moral test” had been set. If that principle were to continue, what Commonwealth nation would not face theoretical expulsion, the editorial asked, given the illiberal policies existing in almost all Commonwealth countries. *The Telegraph* justified this position by arguing: “Moral tests are out of place, for the Commonwealth is not a moral entity.”³¹⁹ In many ways, this assertion was a deep rejection of the Whiggish vision of the end of empire and transformation into Commonwealth. A similar argument was made by *The Economist*, emphasizing that what bound the Commonwealth together was not sentiment or shared moral convictions, but common political and economic interests. What was most telling about these interpretations of the Commonwealth’s role in world affairs was how they did reject

³¹⁷ “The Bridge Still Stands,” *The Economist*, 18 March 1961, 1041.

³¹⁸ *The Daily Express*, 16 March 1961, 10.

³¹⁹ “South Africa Withdraws,” *The Daily Telegraph*, 16 March 1961, 14.

the moral component of the Whiggish vision of the transformation of empire into commonwealth and, significantly, how this rejection was a minority opinion in mainstream debate on the nature of the post-South Africa Commonwealth. Majority opinion continued to reiterate South Africa's departure as moral victory over apartheid, and more specifically, over the anti-British nature such racial policies represented.

Unsurprisingly, many voices in the political debate over the meaning of South Africa's departure from the Commonwealth cast the development as wholly in keeping with the anti-British sentiment felt by Afrikaner nationalists like Verwoerd. This was to be the dominant narrative in coverage of South Africa's official departure later that year on May 31. Again, the idea that South Africa's withdrawal from the Commonwealth was the "final shot" of the Boer War was heard. *The Herald* claimed Afrikaner diehards were celebrating their independence from "the hated Britishers with their 'liberal' views."³²⁰ Both the left and right dailies reiterated the notion that Verwoerd and his Afrikaner cronies were the antithesis of progressive British policies. In a lighthearted manner, *The Mirror* and *The Herald* both emphasized the anti-British nature of Afrikaner opinion by reporting on PM Verwoerd's souvenir from the Conference, a British bulldog he was taking home to South Africa. Much in the same way the press found a humorous juxtaposition of the very British Macmillan wearing his Boer hat souvenir from his 1960 African tour, the papers reported that Verwoerd was taking home a "formidable" symbol of Britain, albeit, as the South African attaché described it, a "quiet one." While Afrikaners were posited as the opposite of the liberalizing British, many in the press viewed the departure of South Africa as an Afrikaner victory over British principles. As Carrington's quote opening this chapter expressed, South Africa's departure was evidence that British liberal policies failed to take hold in in the Union. *The Mail* argued that South Africa as a nation was a "British creation" and a "great liberal experiment" arising from the aftermath of the Boer War. Apartheid and the subsequent rupture it caused in the Commonwealth resulted from the British failing to enforce

³²⁰ "The South Africa Story," *The Daily Herald*, 16 March 1961, 6.

their liberal policies of racial tolerance. Instead, the British mistakenly appeased Afrikaner opinion and allowed them to enact their own illiberal native policies. This view of South Africa's departure too reinforces the potency of the Whiggish vision, the British experiment of transformation of the liberal empire into the 'free, associative' Commonwealth by highlighting a moment of the vision's failure.

While the failure perspective emerged in some quarters of the mainstream press, overwhelmingly South Africa's departure was viewed as an affirmation of Britain's liberal policies and mission to transform her empire into a free and equal multiracial Commonwealth. In this view, Britain's liberal policies were unequivocally put into practice. The tone in the press was surprisingly optimistic. The British Commonwealth of Nations was a vibrant entity, poised to realize its destiny as a force for liberal (British) values in the world. This was a triumph not only for Britishness and what it represented on the world stage, but also for those activists who agitated against South Africa retaining her Commonwealth membership. The AAM in their monthly bulletin after the PM Conference claimed that South Africa's departure was "probably the greatest victory yet in the national campaign against apartheid."³²¹ Barbara Castle in her memoirs also attributed the development to the potency of the anti-apartheid vigil, "which helped to raise the temperature and so make it impossible for South Africa to stay."³²² In the aftermath of South Africa's withdrawal from the Commonwealth, many leftwing voices expressed the view that expulsion from the club was just the first step to forcing South African reversal on apartheid and the triumph of British values in Africa. The popular manifestation of the doctrine of racial equality that was the AAM was an embodiment of the Whiggish vision as it faced a decisive challenge in the form of South African apartheid. The movement enjoyed immense popularity at the time of transformation into Commonwealth, a level of popularity it was not to enjoy again until the post-Soweto climate of the 1980s.

³²¹ Quoted in Roger Fieldhouse, *Anti-Apartheid: A History of the Movement in Britain: A Study in Pressure Group Politics* (London: Merlin Press, 2005), 38.

³²² *ibid.*

The AAM and leftist opponents of apartheid, crediting themselves with South Africa's departure from the Commonwealth, represented one reading of the Whiggish vision of end of empire. This reading juxtaposed against that offered by diehard Conservatives and Lord Salisbury in particular, who also subscribed to a variation of the Whiggish vision. Both these readings stemmed from the Commonwealth tradition that posited Britishness on the world stage as a liberalizing and modernizing influence. Both derived as well from a sense of moral responsibility regarding Britain's world role and the transformation of Empire into Commonwealth. For the left, the British had a direct duty to uphold doctrines of racial progress and equality; for the right, maintaining the ties of kith and kin with white settlers in Africa was the best mode to ensure British values in the world. Such ties would steer the course of transformation of empire into Commonwealth as deliberately and carefully as possible, helping the 'backwards' peoples of Africa learn self-government from the white settlers in their midst. The debate over South Africa's place in the emerging multiracial Commonwealth coupled with the increasing tension over the fate of the white-dominated CAF highlighted what was an emerging split in British opinion regarding their inevitable march towards a free, associative Commonwealth. More so than ever before, interpretations of the Whiggish vision of this transformation were cast along the lines of the political left versus the political right, the AAM versus Lord Salisbury. There were also undertones of class conflict, as Anthony Sampson observed, between aristocratic holdouts and the expanding ascendancy of the middle and working classes in the age of postwar affluence.

These divisions were more than the quotidian partisanship of the day, instead they reflected an ideological split within the Whiggish vision itself. When end of empire was merely an academic teleology forecast by Whiggish dreamers in the 1930s and 1940s, the tension between ethnic loyalty to white British settlers and the concept of a multiracial world polity remained latent. When Macmillan set Britain on the course to get out of Africa, this tension

became a very real manifestation in British political culture as witnessed in Lord Salisbury's attack on Macleod and leftist activism against apartheid. This split, while obviously causing political conflict within Macmillan's Britain, showed how flexible the Whiggish vision was. Significantly, competing ideologies within the Whiggish vision made this component of Britishness even more potent since the vision could incorporate such differing outlooks without breaking. Even with tensions flaring between conservatives dedicated to white rule in Africa and activists campaigning against apartheid, the Whiggish vision of Britain's special destiny to impart liberal values of British justice and good government was never abandoned but rather insistently reiterated in its various incarnations. It even remained potent as the actual efficacy of British power on the world stage became increasingly uncertain as the 1960s continued, as the next chapter will show.

Chapter 6
The Writing on the Wall?: Dean Acheson's Challenge to the Whiggish Vision,
December 1962

Great Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role. The attempt to play a separate power role -- that is, a role apart from Europe, a role based on a "special relationship" with the United States, a role based on being the head of a "commonwealth" which has no political structure, or unity, or strength, and enjoys a fragile and precarious economic relationship by means of the Sterling area and preferences in the British market -- this role is about played out. Great Britain, attempting to work alone and to be a broker between the United States and Russia, has seemed to conduct policy as weak as its military power. H.M.G. is now attempting -- wisely, in my opinion -- to reenter Europe, from which it was banished at the time of the Plantagenets, and the battle seems about as hard-fought as were those of an earlier day.

-Dean Acheson, West Point, NY, December 5, 1962³²³

With a severity unanticipated by most, former American Secretary of State Dean Acheson cut to the heart of British self-imaginings in his speech, "Our Atlantic Alliance," the keynote address delivered during a student conference at the American military academy at West Point, New York. His blunt assessment of Britain's world role questioned the very meaning of the Whiggish vision and found it a kind of fallacy. It was not surprising that many in Britain would find his speech extremely controversial. Macmillan in his diary entry on the subject remarked, "Acheson was always a conceited ass, but I don't really think he meant to be offensive."³²⁴ The British press made much of this affair, coming as it did in the midst of both Britain's first application to the European Common Market and negotiations with the United States to secure an independent nuclear deterrent, the Skybolt initiative. This chapter will explore the British public reaction to Acheson's shockingly frank evaluation of Britain's world role. To a political culture convinced that 'losing an empire,' i.e. transforming their empire into a free, associative Commonwealth, *was* their world role such an evaluation could only serve up contention. Acheson's statements were an assault on the very fundamentals of British national

³²³ Dean Acheson, "Our Atlantic Alliance: The Political and Economic Strands" (Speech delivered at United States Military Academy at West Point, December 5, 1962). Quoted in *Vital Speeches of the Day* (Pelham, NY: City News Publishing, Co., 1963), 163-4.

³²⁴ Peter Catterall, ed. *The Macmillan Diaries, Vol. II: Prime Minister and After, 1957-1966* (London: Macmillan, 2003), 522-3.

identity on the world stage, a repudiation of the Whiggish vision delivered in an almost unthinkingly and brutally honest manner. It was also perhaps a moment in which the cold light of Britain's political reality began to fade the Whiggish colors of her imagined post-imperial destiny and the public reaction to it was quite telling of the British national psyche viz. their evolving Commonwealth. To begin though, this chapter will explore the political developments in African decolonization leading up to Acheson's speech at the end of 1962, essentially detailing the final stages of 'losing' an Empire.

By the summer of 1961, the British Commonwealth of Nations had lost South Africa, but had gained new members with the independent nations of Cyprus (August 1960) and Sierra Leone (April 1961). Later that year, these were joined by Tanganyika (December 1961, later to merge with Zanzibar to become Tanzania in 1964). Uganda became independent in 1962. The speed of independence for many territories in the British Empire was remarkable. Of the nineteen African colonies, only two (Ghana and the Sudan) had gained independence when Iain Macleod became Colonial Secretary in October of 1959. "Africa in the Next Ten Years," a governmental study into questions of Africa independence written in 1958, postulated independence for most territories would come no earlier than 1970. However, after just two years of Macleod at the helm, all African colonies with the exception of Southern Rhodesia were independent by 1968. This was the result of the "sea-change" in colonial policy instigated by Macleod and Prime Minister Harold Macmillan in the wake of the Hola Camp revelations and the Nyasaland Emergency. As Macleod later remarked, those events were "the decisive moment when it became clear to me that we could no longer continue with the old methods of government in Africa, and that meant inexorably a move towards African independence."³²⁵

As has been seen, Macleod's speeding up of the timetable towards African independence was not uncontested within his own Party. Lord Salisbury's attack on the Colonial Secretary in March of 1961 did lasting damage to Macleod's reputation, particularly among the Tory

³²⁵ Quoted in Robert Shepherd, *Iain Macleod: A Biography* (London: Pimlico, 1994), 159.

rightwing. His antipathy towards the Central African Federation and Prime Minister Roy Welensky specifically also earned him few allies on the far right of the Conservative Party who were extremely sympathetic towards Welensky's point of view. This antipathy, while giving him the necessary fortitude to tackle the constitutional problems of the CAF and its attendant territories, eventually cost Macleod his position at the Colonial Office and, as his biographer argued, hampered his post-CO political career. Two years after assuming the post, Macleod was asked by Macmillan to step down in October of 1961. He was replaced by Reginald Maudling, whom Macmillan felt would be a less contentious and less provocative appointment. However, Maudling himself was to prove a match to Macleod's enthusiasm for rapid decolonization and sympathy towards African nationalism. Macleod remained in the Government, though for the rest of his political career he was to find his reputation checked. As his biographer summarized, "Macleod had the power of intellect and the sheer, ruthless determination to bring about African independence more quickly than almost anybody had thought possible ... But although he saved Britain from a fearful fate in Africa, he had to pay a price in the Conservative Party for his part in dismantling the Empire ahead of schedule."³²⁶ Some speculated he could have been Party leader, even Prime Minister, if not for the ill-will he engendered as the Colonial Secretary deftly navigating the wind of change.

What specifically did Macleod accomplish that so revolutionized British colonial policy and antagonized the diehard Tories? Among his many activities and most pertinent to this project, Macleod set in motion an independent Kenya with an African majority rule and oversaw the preliminary dissolution of the Central African Federation that paved the way for majority rule in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. These were no small feats, given the potency of white settler opinion deadset against majority rule in Kenya and the CAF and Macleod's own assessment that these problems were the most intractable he faced as Colonial Secretary. In regards to Kenya, what eased Macleod's burden was the changing political landscape of white

³²⁶ *ibid.*, 258.

settler opinion. The brutality of the Mau Mau counter-insurgency and specifically the murders at Hola Camp effectively discredited diehard settler opinion in Kenya and Britain, allowing for more moderate voices, best exemplified by Michael Blundell and his New Kenya Party, to come to prominence. February 1960 witnessed Blundell's contribution to constitutional talks at Lancaster House, the initial moves towards majority rule in Africa. By the next year, an election had secured a minority government composed of Blundell's party, KADU, and Kenyan Asians. The African nationalist KADU party agitated for the release of Jomo Kenyatta, still imprisoned since the Mau Mau Emergency began in 1952. It was one of the most delicate situations faced by Macleod in his Kenyan reckoning. White opinion still fundamentally distrusted Kenyatta and characterized him as emblematic of the atavistic evil of Mau Mau. Macleod however understood that Kenyatta was the only man in Kenya with whom Britain could do business to retain legitimacy in African eyes. After careful plotting, Macleod secured the release of Kenyatta in August of 1961. This broke the dam of reticence over majority rule. Another election, six months after Macleod left the CO, secured a new Kenyan government formed by KADU and Kenyatta's own party, KANU. By December 1963, Kenya was an independent nation with Kenyatta as its Prime Minister.

Just five years earlier, this development would have been unthinkable. The rapidity and direction of Kenyan independence were a testament to Macleod's persistence and his genuine faith in both the imperial mission as one of the transformation of Empire into Commonwealth and his self-professed belief in the "brotherhood of man." He applied this faith as well to the problems facing the Central African Federation, which more so than his Kenyan reckoning earned him enemies within his own Party. By December of 1960, the federal review conference, anticipation for which had set off the unrest leading to the Nyasaland Emergency the previous year, had been canceled. This in part was the result of the findings of the Monckton Commission, which concluded the Federation in its present form was untenable and, as has been

seen, recommended secession as viable option for the Federation's three territories of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland. This paved the way for separate constitutional development of each territory. In Southern Rhodesia, where white settler authority was most pronounced, constitutional settlement protecting white rule while paying lip service to African and non-white representation was a given. However, in the other two territories, constitutional advancement was to prove far more contestable.

Throughout 1961, the central bone of contention then for Macleod was the constitutional settlement for Northern Rhodesia. In February 1961, Macleod submitted a proposal that would eventually ensure African majority rule. At this, Welensky balked and turned to his Tory allies in the British Parliament, prompting Lord Salisbury's attack on Macleod the following month. This first proposal however was just the beginning of the battle between Macleod and Welensky over the Northern Rhodesian constitution, a battle which was to last for the remainder of Macleod's tenure as the Colonial Secretary. It also played a significant part in Macmillan's decision to remove Macleod from the CO. The animosity between Macleod and Welensky grew to epic proportions as the battle over representative rule heated up during the summer of 1961. Macmillan remarked "Welensky hates Macleod and vice-versa, and each hope to destroy the other."³²⁷ By the fall, after repeated renegotiations over the details of constitutional representation and an outbreak of violence among frustrated African nationalists in Northern Rhodesia, Macmillan was done with his contentious Colonial Secretary. Despite concluding that Macleod had been "persistent, imaginative, and ingenious" in his handling of colonial affairs, Macmillan was tired of his "many faults" and informed Macleod of his intention to reassign him in the Cabinet.³²⁸

Macleod's replacement, Maudling, however proved equally adept at courting controversy over plans to ensure majority rule in Northern Rhodesia. Picking up where Macleod left off,

³²⁷ Quoted in Alistair Horne, *Harold Macmillan, Vol. II: 1957-1986* (New York: Viking, 1989), 394.

³²⁸ Shepherd, *Iain Macleod*, 232.

Maudling had in place by February 1962 a constitutional arrangement extremely similar to that proposed a year earlier. By this point too, the political will in the Cabinet to defend Welensky and non-majority rule had evaporated, and privately, the Cabinet came to the conclusion that the Central African Federation was at an end. After nine months at the CO, Maudling was replaced by Duncan Sandys, who was explicitly charged with the task over overseeing the dissolution of the CAF, which officially ended on December 31, 1963. Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland gained independence the following year, as Zambia and Malawi respectively. These events in turn prompted a turn to radicalism among the white population of Southern Rhodesia, who, even under federation and the leadership of Welensky, had hinted at armed secession from the British Commonwealth. This of course was the eventual fate of Southern Rhodesia under Prime Minister Ian Smith. In 1965 he proffered the Unilateral Declaration of Independence from Britain, throwing his country into unrest and civil war that lasted until 1980.

As historian Brian Lapping noted, the “downfall of the Federation took more time of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet” than any other colonial issue of the day.³²⁹ Macmillan complained about it as well, saying it poisoned the end of his term as Premier. It was however a kind of triumph for the policies and beliefs held by Macleod, even though he had left the CO before the Federation’s dissolution. Macleod felt that to prevaricate or concede on African majority rule would only lead to chaos and violence, creating more situations like Algeria in Africa. In his final speech as Colonial Secretary, delivered to the Conservative Party Conference at Brighton on October 11, 1961, he claimed to critics who said he went too fast in securing African independence: “look around the map of Africa and look at Angola, Algiers, and South Africa and see the tragedies that can come if you go too slow... there is probably greater safety in going too fast than in going slow.” It was, as *The Times* noted, “an almost provocative vindication of his stewardship” of colonial affairs. Macleod took a moralistic approach to his accomplishments as Colonial Secretary, reiterating his belief in the “brotherhood of man” and the

³²⁹ Brian Lapping, *End of Empire* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), 489.

British “imperial mission” still “not yet completed.” “We are the only people who, with all the hesitations and failures that there have been, are genuinely resolved in turning, to use Harold Macmillan’s phrase, an empire into a commonwealth and a commonwealth into a family.” As his biographer argued, Macleod’s speech banished “any idea that the end of Empire was little more than an inglorious act of expediency ... from his audience’s mind and instead transformed [it] into an inspirational act of idealism.”³³⁰

Clearly, Macleod played a pivotal role in British decolonization; he was the Mountbatten of Africa, in the words of historian Wm. Roger Louis.³³¹ And that his role was guided by notions of the Whiggish vision and the moral obligations of Britishness on the world stage was not surprising. He truly believed he was putting British principles into practice as he set the stage for the rapid decolonization of Britain’s African territories. This rapid decolonization left some in British political culture bewildered and critical; it also did not go unremarked by the world at large. Perhaps the most famous assessment was of course Dean Acheson’s 1962 comment, of Britain losing an empire and not yet finding a role. The end of 1962, when Acheson gave his speech, was a point at which the writing on the wall regarding British control in Africa was unavoidable. Kenya’s date for independence and the realization that the CAF was no longer tenable were already set. Independence for Britain’s other African colonies had already been accomplished or were scheduled within a number of years, rather than decades as in estimations from the 1950s. Acheson’s comment was as much a statement of geopolitical reality as anything else.

Yet his comments also came at a time when Britain was tentatively exploring new “roles” in geopolitics. Most notably was the application to the European Common Market, a highly politically charged move that could potentially weaken Britain’s ties to the Commonwealth. This was something critics of European integration played up, most notably Labour leader Hugh

³³⁰ Shepherd, *Iain Macleod*, 254-6.

³³¹ Quoted in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 10-16 February 1989, 146.

Gaitskell. Nevertheless, Macmillan applied for membership in July 1961. The end of 1962 witnessed a buildup of talks over the application. Macmillan also wanted to strengthen the potential for Britain to act as an independent nuclear deterrent in a bipolar world reeling from the Cuban Missile Crisis. To this end, his Government was in negotiations with the United States to purchase a series of Skybolt missiles capable of air-to-surface nuclear strikes. It was in this climate that Acheson, a private citizen though active as an informal advisor to President Kennedy (he worked with Kennedy during the Missile Crisis and advocated a military strike against Cuba), gave his speech.

In essence, the speech was an assessment of the pitfalls and challenges facing NATO if it wanted to strengthen the nature of its transatlantic alliance, something which Acheson argued was crucial. It was overall quite blunt towards the weaknesses not only of Britain but of all the major European powers. Initial reports of the speech in the British press, published on December 6 in most dailies, emphasized this aspect. However, ire was quickly raised and by the next day, the speech and British reaction to it was front page news. Given the language in Acheson's critique of British pretensions regarding their newly 'transformed' Commonwealth, one can hypothesize how British opinion would react to Acheson's points. His description of Britain's "played out" role, one "based on being the head of a 'commonwealth' which has no political structure, or unity, or strength, and enjoys a fragile and precarious economic relationship by means of the Sterling area and preferences in the British market," struck at the heart of those who contended the Commonwealth was a force for unity and prosperity in the world. This reading also damaged Labour's position regarding European integration given that they argued Common Market membership would damage the 'strong ties' of economic and political partnership in the Commonwealth. Additionally as has been seen, many advocated, particularly after the departure of South Africa, that the British Commonwealth was a vital link between western and Afro-Asian nations. Acheson clearly dismissed this in his reckoning of geopolitical reality. In fact,

from the wording alone, his disdain over the idea was almost palpable. One would anticipate considerable British outrage at this: it denied the very fundamental nature of Britishness in the post-imperial world according to the Whiggish vision, a vision which has been shown to have been a formidable concept in the British imagination of their postwar world role.

Indeed, voices in British political culture reacted very strongly against Acheson's statements, to a degree that caught many, including Acheson, other American leaders, and Macmillan himself, off guard. Acheson in a letter to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. expressed his surprise at the severity of the British reaction and sarcastically asked "I wonder who the unsung reportorial genius was who read through the whole speech and found that paragraph to cable to London?"³³² Macmillan followed up his "conceited ass" assertion in his diary by lamenting the widespread outrage as "not a good sign, for we ought to be strong enough to laugh off this kind of thing."³³³ Nevertheless, ever the wily politician willing to play sides, Macmillan was goaded by a formal letter of protest from the Institute of Directors into publicly chiding Acheson for denigrating "the resolution and will of Britain and the British people." Macmillan's open letter response declared this was the same mistake "made by quite a lot of people in the course of the last 400 years, including Philip of Spain, Louis the Fourteenth, Napoleon, the Kaiser and Hitler."³³⁴ He went on to say that Acheson seemed "wholly to misunderstand the role of the Commonwealth in world affairs" and to argue that the doctrine of interdependence among nations was not exclusive to just Europe but to all nations, the United States included. Macmillan later recorded in his diary his anticipation that this response "will please the Conservative Party and the 'patriotic' elements in the country."³³⁵

The letter to which Macmillan responded that effectively initiated the hostile backlash against Acheson was published throughout the British media on December 7, 1962. It read in

³³² Quoted in Douglas Brinkley, "Dean Acheson and the 'Special Relationship': The West Point Speech of December 1962," *The Historical Journal* 33:3 (Sept. 1990): 601.

³³³ Catterall, *Macmillan Diaries*, 523.

³³⁴ Quoted from "Hitler Made Same Error Says Mr. Macmillan," *The Daily Telegraph*, 8 December 1962, 1.

³³⁵ Catterall, *Macmillan Diaries*, 523.

part: “We consider the whole of Mr. Acheson’s speech to amount to a calculated insult to the British nation. ... We particularly resent, and fear the effect of, his particular denigration of the Commonwealth.”³³⁶ Calling on Macmillan to press President Kennedy for a disavowal of Acheson’s remarks before the two leaders were to meet in the Bahamas, the letter was signed by Lord Chandos, President of the Institute of Directors and a former Conservative Cabinet member, and two others. Macmillan’s response came the next day, also making front page news. However, that was as far as Macmillan was willing to take it. He clearly viewed the affair as a non-issue, and if anything he agreed on some level with Acheson’s comments, even as tactlessly and brutally worded as they were.

In the eyes of those angered in the British public, Acheson not only denigrated the world role of the British Commonwealth, but also the vaunted ‘special relationship’ between Britain and the United States. The ‘special relationship’ had been a source both of resentment among British opinion, no stranger to anti-Americanism, and of geopolitical legitimacy. For Acheson to invalidate it stirred up a hornets’ nest of British feeling. Lord Hailsham, Minister of Science and one of the Peers to defend Macleod against Lord Salisbury’s “too clever by half” assertion, was particularly hurt by this assessment of a nonexistent ‘special relationship.’ At a luncheon in Glasgow, he stated he was tired of friends “who have got so used to our friendship that they cease to care about our feelings.”³³⁷ The Americans were taken aback by the level of hostility evinced in the reactions to Acheson’s comments. The Kennedy White House found itself needing to implement a little damage control. Issuing a statement denying that Acheson’s views represented the Administration’s, the White House reasserted that he spoke as a private citizen, not as an agent of the government. Dean Rusk, Kennedy’s Secretary of State, at a press conference a few days later took pains to reassure the British that America viewed Britain as “one of the great Powers in the Atlantic Community” and that the strength of the 400 year old

³³⁶ Quoted from “Acheson Speech Insults Britain,” *The Daily Telegraph*, 7 December 1962, 1.

³³⁷ Quoted in “The Friends Who Stamp on Britain’ - By Lord H.,” *The Daily Mirror*, 13 December 1962, 6.

‘special relationship’ was as potent as ever.

What exactly did British hostility against Acheson’s comments look like? In addition to the Lord Chandos letter which set off the firestorm in the press, the left and the right took turns excoriating Acheson, offering *ad hominen* attacks and reasserting wounded British pride. *The Daily Telegraph* reported that initial reaction ranged from “ribaldry to deep indignation” with *The Daily Mail* claiming Acheson “should have known better.”³³⁸ *The Telegraph* also in its “London Day by Day” opinion column offered a slew of inflammatory descriptions of Acheson’s speech: “anti-British tirade,” “ill chosen words,” “derogatory opinions,” summing it up as an “outburst [that] has needlessly and stupidly damaged Anglo-American friendship” in the view of both the Government and the Opposition.³³⁹ Letters to the editor the next week also reminded readers that without Britain’s determination, America would have faced the Axis Powers alone in 1940. *The Sunday Times* editorial accused Acheson of undue smugness, postulating that American success during the Cuban Missile Crisis must have “gone to his head.”³⁴⁰

The most hostile attack on Acheson from the right though was led by *The Daily Express*. Even as early as December 6, *The Express* excoriated Acheson as a bad counselor from a nation urging Britain “along the path of surrender.”³⁴¹ *The Express* was also unhesitant in its rabid anti-Americanism and belief that Acheson’s views truly represented those of Washington. In an editorial entitled “They Damn Their Own Cause,” the writers went so far as to suggest an American conspiracy to force Britain into the Common Market so as to serve up her troops as cannon fodder in the Cold War defense of Berlin. As part of this conspiracy, America was trying to undermine British world power by insisting her role was played out. Acheson’s speech was one part of this; the other was the failed Skybolt initiative. At the same time Acheson’s speech was making headlines, it was also leaked that the Skybolt deal between the U.S. and Britain had

³³⁸ *The Daily Telegraph*, 7 December 1962, 1 and *The Daily Mail*, quoted in Brinkley, “Dean Acheson,” 602.

³³⁹ “London Day by Day,” *The Daily Telegraph*, 7 December 1962, 14.

³⁴⁰ Quoted in Brinkley, “Dean Acheson,” 602.

³⁴¹ “Bad Counsel,” *The Daily Express*, 6 December 1962, 12.

fallen through and that America had no intention of propping up Britain as an independent nuclear power. It was unsurprising then that anti-American sentiment intensified in Britain at this time, something that more moderate voices in the press warned against. *The Telegraph* offered a rejoinder warning against such sentiments while reminding its readers that Acheson did not reflect Washington policy. His views were an aberration of “one who, as he showed in 1950 in the context of Korea, has been more immaculate in dress than in judgment.”³⁴²

Among the left and the Opposition, anti-Americanism and personal attacks against Acheson were just as popular. *The Guardian* reported on the speech by Labour MP Manny Shinwell who exclaimed “I resent this stupid attack made on Britain by President Kennedy’s odd-job man. ...We are not taking instructions from the country of McCarthyism, gangsterism, and bootlegging. We may not have as many bombs... but we possess a sense of independence and moral quality and we intend to keep it.”³⁴³ *The New Statesman*, in a more measured criticism, disavowed Acheson’s assessment of the Commonwealth. What he got wrong, the editorial argued, was that “the concept of the Commonwealth as a postcolonial instrument for reconciling races and bridging the gap between the Haves and the Have-nots is a myth.” It continued that nations wanting to avoid Cold War entanglements could look to a powerful, independent Britain, “whose political standing as a postcolonial power is in most such areas higher than America’s.”³⁴⁴ *The Daily Mirror*, which, as will be seen, thought the whole kerfuffle over Acheson’s comments silly in the first place, nevertheless warned America not to underestimate British resilience. “Britain was ‘written off’ by another American in 1940. By a man who told Roosevelt we didn’t have one hope in hell in Hitler’s war. ...That man was President Kennedy’s father - the rich, faint-hearted Mr. Joseph Kennedy, American Ambassador to the Court of St. James in the days of Dunkirk. Maybe the British didn’t invent it - but blimey, they DO understand the art of

³⁴² “Are We Downhearted?” *The Daily Telegraph*, 8 December 1962, 8.

³⁴³ “Labour Views Mixed,” *The Guardian*, 10 December 1962, 2.

³⁴⁴ “Shooting the Albatross,” *The New Statesman*, 14 December 1962, 853.

survival.”³⁴⁵ Even former Labour PM Clement Attlee tossed out his two cents in letters to *The Times* and in a column for *The Daily Express*, claiming the U.S. needed the Commonwealth and that if Britain was indeed played out, it was unsurprisingly the Tories’ fault.

While these kinds of sentiments were what was expected from a political culture imbued with the notion of British exceptionalism on the world stage, there was also a deep wellspring of reaction against the anti-American, anti-Acheson line. In a letter to *The Times*, a Peer of the Realm argued that British opinion had deeply overreacted to Acheson’s assessment. MP Roy Jenkins in another letter wrote, with the same wording as Macmillan’s diary entry, that the British should “be able to laugh off” the whole mess.³⁴⁶ *The Mirror* reported how the Beaverbrook press (*The Express* and *The Evening Standard*) apparently “got the vapours” after reading Acheson’s speech. *The Guardian* chided the minority in British political culture who overreact “whenever an American observes that Queen Victoria is unhappily no longer with us.”³⁴⁷ *The Spectator* too criticized “our public men [who] give way to the expression of wounded pride ... our parties [who] are convulsed by unreasoning gusts of anger and our people [who] can only express hurt bewilderment...”³⁴⁸

This widespread counter-reaction to the anti-Acheson crowd was motivated by a single notion: that Acheson got it right. *The Spectator* wrote Acheson’s “plain truth ... hardly justifies the reactions it excited in the United Kingdom.” *The Guardian* reported that Acheson had only “mentioned the unmentionable,” the widely held opinions nevertheless usually only voiced in the privacy of the club. This was the common line: what Acheson said had been said before, even by Britain’s own leaders. His views, though perhaps expressed in a unhelpfully blunt and tactless manner, were those held by many both in Britain and the United States. *The Daily Telegraph* reported the incredulity felt by British representatives in Washington who agreed with

³⁴⁵ “The Art of Survival,” *The Daily Mirror*, 7 December 1962, 1-2.

³⁴⁶ Letters, *The Times*, 10 December 1962.

³⁴⁷ “Played Out,” *The Guardian*, 8 December 1962, 6.

³⁴⁸ “New Power Rising,” *The Spectator*, 14 December 1962, 919-920.

Acheson's assessment and were confounded by all the "fuss" made over his speech back home. *The Mirror* described Acheson as looking like "Anthony Eden" but talking "more modern sense" regarding Britain's evolving place as a world power. The editorial concluded that Acheson's statements regarding Britain, the Commonwealth, and the need for Common Market entry were true. "[I]t is better to be cut down to realistic size than to be inflated with the dangerous dreams of dead grandeur." *The Economist* criticized the anti-American cheerleaders by arguing that Acheson's points "were plainly true... The ability frankly to own up to what is clearly the case would be the ideal gift for Britain this Christmas."³⁴⁹

The defense of Acheson so widespread in the debate over his speech testified to growing doubts over the surety of Britain's world role offered by the Whiggish vision of end of empire. While few in British public opinion were willing to write off the Commonwealth entirely as a player on the world stage, it was increasingly clear that the vision may not be fully realized in the near future. South Africa's departure was viewed by some as harbinger of this. Yet surprisingly there were those in British political culture who were discovering this might not be a terrible thing. Macmillan clearly had. His push to decolonize Africa was a proactive solution to the changed geopolitical realities of the Cold War world that he could claim as putting principle into practice. At the same time, the tenuous nature of this 'experiment' freed his hand to explore other options to maintain Britain as a world power. His Government's attempt to secure an independent nuclear deterrent and to apply, however belatedly, to the Common Market were just that. Attempting the bold transformation of Empire into Commonwealth was another way to hedge Britain's bets, another door to keep open to enhance Britain's world prestige, like the EEC application and the Skybolt initiative. If the experiment worked, that would be so much the better for Britain. Macmillan's belief in the Commonwealth mission was however more than just expedient, face-saving propaganda: he earnestly subscribed to the Whiggish vision while still realizing the realpolitik advantage to dismantling empire. Others clear-sighted in British political

³⁴⁹ "Acheson," *The Economist*, 15 December 1962.

culture saw the same thing, thus the defense of Acheson's assessments. The Whiggish vision and transformation of Empire into Commonwealth were genuine, potent, and satisfying to conceptions of Britishness in the world, but they were also just another hand the Government could play to keep Britain in the international political game.

The significance of Acheson's speech then was the fact that he essentially claimed that hand was worthless. He claimed that most British efforts on the world stage were futile, except of course given Acheson's fondness for stronger European integration, the attempt to enter the Common Market. Acheson's reading of the Commonwealth's role and its attendant commentary on the meaning of the Whiggish vision, a true mission invested in by all British political culture, denied that this vision had any meaning at all. The implicit commentary behind Acheson's criticisms of the Commonwealth suggested that the British subscribed to a kind of 'fairy tale,' that of the Whiggish vision of end of empire. Observers in British political culture however understood that the doctrines of transforming empire into Commonwealth may have been many things, but they were not a fairy tale. These doctrines were a kind of experiment that had antecedents throughout the history of the British Empire although they may not have always, as they did not in the early 1960s, reflect the true geopolitical reality of Britain's position. Acheson's assessment fundamentally denied this tradition. The desire to confirm the potency of the Whiggish vision coupled with latent frustrations over American policies, the natural tendency toward national pride, and basic partisan politics ensured that Acheson's comments, especially in their bluntness, would court controversy. Was this controversy however indicative of a crisis in Britishness or British national identity on the world stage resulting from the geopolitical fact that Britain *had* lost an empire?

Chapter 7

Conclusion: The Whiggish Vision and a Crisis in British National Identity?

It is tempting to argue that the potency of the Whiggish vision in Britain's imagination of its world role precluded an obvious crisis in British national identity as empire ended. Returning to Stuart Ward's assertion that it is taken as an article of faith rather than of reason that end of empire caused an identity crisis for Britain, this argument would be a satisfying refutation of such faith. What is certain though, as the findings of this project make clear, is that the development and potency of the Whiggish vision of end of empire emerged most pronounced in this period of imperial retreat under Macmillan. Was this renewed potency enough to prevent a crisis? If so, then where did this article of faith come from? That is, why are so many observers led to assume that end of empire did foment a crisis in British national identity?

An answer to these questions is found in the conclusions drawn from the case studies offered in this project. First it is important to reassert that the Whiggish vision was a form of British national identity in and of itself, a vision of Britishness on the world stage as enacted through colonial policy and ideals of British political exceptionalism. The political transformation of the empire into Commonwealth and its attendant philosophy of a 'free, associative' supranational organization were the most tangible manifestations of this vision. Because the Whiggish vision was a component of British national identity, it shared the traits associated with most forms of identity: an inherent flexibility in the face of challenges and historical changes. Each case study in this project demonstrated how the Whiggish vision was reiterated in the face of various challenges. Analysis of Macmillan's 'Wind of Change' tour proved that the Whiggish vision survived and thrived in a political environment where it had a competing identity against which to define itself, that of the avowedly and consciously anti-British Afrikaner nationalism. It also helped that Afrikaner apartheid was a direct rejection of the principles of equality espoused not only in the Whiggish vision but in many other facets of

British identity and political imaginings, reinforcing a sustained European “other” to Britishness in Africa.

In terms of crises within the Whiggish vision, the tragedies at Hola Camp in Kenya and the Emergency in Nyasaland highlighted the divergence between colonial reality and British ideals. Under pressure as the vaunted transformation of Empire into Commonwealth butted against traditional forms of colonial repression, adherents to the Whiggish vision, which included most in British political culture from left to right, only asserted that vision more vigorously. While Macmillan’s Government played partisan politics over the affairs in Kenya and Nyasaland, observers of all political stripes recognized the inherent contradiction between professed British ideals and actual colonial policies. As a response, critics of British policies turned to the ideals of the Whiggish vision as a guide, calling on Britain’s moral responsibility to live up to the democratic and liberal ideals thought to be so central to Britishness in the world. After the political furor over Hola and the Devlin Report died down, Macmillan and his Government heeded the call, embarking on the rapid decolonization of Africa under Colonial Secretary Macleod, a true subscriber to the Whiggish vision.

During the Commonwealth crises caused by Britain’s great white “other” in Africa, the Afrikaner government of the Union of South Africa, the Whiggish vision proved its flexibility as an ideal most clearly. The departure of South Africa from the British Commonwealth was both a triumph and a failure of the Whiggish vision while leaving the ideal as potent as ever within British political culture. It was a triumph in the sense that the political realities of the new Commonwealth were truly committed to the liberal values of racial equality and democracy viewed to be at the heart of Britain’s great experiment. It was a failure in the sense that the British ideals of tolerance and plurality were unable to act as a binding agent within a diverse supranational organization. However, the vision’s ability to reconcile this triumph/failure dichotomy successfully into British imaginings of the Commonwealth was not the only test of

the Whiggish vision's inherent flexibility. The emergence of separate readings of the Whiggish vision from the political left, exemplified by the Anti-Apartheid Movement, and the political right, exemplified by Lord Salisbury's Conservative 'revolt' against Macleod, proved the vision's political flexibility. In the face of such an ideological split as that between the AAM and Lord Salisbury, the Whiggish vision remained intact and a potent force in British political culture.

Even when its meaning was directly challenged, as it was in Dean Acheson's dismissal of Britain's Commonwealth ambitions, the Whiggish vision still maintained political traction for its adherents. Case in point was Macmillan's own geopolitical calculations for Britain's role in the world, calculations that incorporated the transformation of Empire into Commonwealth as one facet to protect Britain's world power status. That the vision and the vaunted transformation were just one realpolitik technique among others, like the EEC application and the Skybolt initiative to ensure Britain's independent nuclear capability, did not mean the ideals behind them were dormant or any less potent. Macmillan and others could genuinely believe in them and yet still exploit them as a kind of face-saving justification of Britain's scramble out of Africa, a scramble that allowed Britain to explore other avenues to protect its world position.

What is truly intriguing though, and what might explain the perceived crisis in British national identity fomented by such a scramble out of Empire, is that Macmillan's calculations failed so miserably. Britain's Common Market application was rejected by President De Gaulle of France, not once, but twice, in the 1960s, while the Skybolt initiative fell apart before British and American representatives even had the chance to discuss it in December 1962. America's makeup offer of the Polaris submarine hardly provided the independent nuclear deterrent sought by Britain's policymakers. And of course, the strength of the British Commonwealth as a world organization proved illusory over the course of the decade after Macmillan's premiership. Perhaps it is from this stillborn dream of a Commonwealth that the seeds of this perceived crisis emerge.

This begs the question then: why did the Commonwealth fail to develop into the powerful international body the Whiggish vision and its adherents believed it would? Dean Acheson would answer it failed because it lacked a unified political structure and was built on the tenuous foundation of the strength of the British currency. This was partly true: the Commonwealth was a victim of its own success in that the decentralized supranational organization failed to hold together as it grew increasingly more diverse with newer members in the early 1960s. Additionally, the lack of political stability in many of its new member states coupled with the specific crisis of UDI in Southern Rhodesia in the 1960s and 1970s prevented a coalescence among member nations within the Commonwealth. However, the strongest and most obvious answer to this question, and one which in no way is mutually exclusive to the others, is the shifting nature of geopolitics in the postwar, Cold War world. Great power politics were dead after 1945; superpower politics had superseded them. Far-flung empires based on naval supremacy, Britain's nineteenth century 'bread and butter,' lost out to large continental empires stocked with nuclear arsenals. As a consequence of this shift and the rise of American supremacy, former British colonies like Australia, Canada, and New Zealand found it made more political sense to enter the American sphere of influence than to remain within the British one. Conveniently enough, the United States could point to a tradition of democracy and liberalism every bit as potent as that the British had to offer and the Americans spoke English too.

It was not just superpower politics that enticed former colonies into the American sphere of influence; generational shifts within nations like Australia, Canada, and New Zealand too played a role in diminishing the strength of Commonwealth ties. With the passing of tried and true Commonwealth leaders like Robert Menzies of Australia and John Diefenbaker of Canada, feelings of Commonwealth loyalty began to fade and the ties of kith and kin dissolved. A similar phenomenon was witnessed decades earlier when Jan Smuts, the great Commonwealth adherent in South Africa, died, taking with him the Union's strongest tie to Britain and paving the way for

the supremacy of Afrikaner nationalism in the 1950s.

While the Commonwealth faded into historical and geopolitical irrelevance over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, the Whiggish vision behind it did not. The vision, given its nature as a component of British identity on the world stage, adapted far more easily to the changing realities of world politics than its political manifestation could. The Whiggish vision, in the same period in which the Commonwealth as a supranational organization failed to take root, instead grew into the saga of “gracious decolonization.” Because the vision anticipated the end of empire, the story of the end of empire became the vision, thus its pervasiveness in the historiography and historical imaginings of British decolonization even up to today.

This project showed how adaptable and flexible the Whiggish vision was and its continued potency in the twenty-first century is a testament to those traits it possessed. While this project examined specific challenges to the vision in the actual moments of end of empire, there are of course other ways of looking at the historical phenomenon of the Whiggish vision as an expression of Britishness on the world stage. One such approach is comparative; Britain was not the only great power undergoing a scramble out of Africa in the mid-twentieth century. Examining how the British viewed themselves in comparison to other decolonizing powers such as France and Belgium could potentially illuminate articulations of Britishness as well. The age-old ‘other’ of British identity, the French Empire underwent a similar dissolution process in its African colonies. This project briefly touched on how the British tended to view themselves as more successful at negotiating with colonial nationalisms than their French counterparts. A deeper study into British postwar attitudes towards French imperial policies in particular, and towards France and Europe in general, could yield significant understanding into how the British thought of themselves as a world power as their empire ended.

As the introduction to this project addressed, questions of end of empire and French national identity have been at the forefront of scholarship on the French decolonization

experience. The central category for analysis within this scholarship has been the issue of race, which has also been subject to comparative studies between modern British and French race relations, particularly those studies emphasizing the British multicultural approach versus the French assimilationist one. While race and immigration are issues attendant to end of empire for both nations, not many scholars have explored the comparisons between the French and British decolonization experiences, either politically or in regards to national identity. One notable exception however is Miles Kahler's 1984 work *Decolonization in Britain and France: The Domestic Consequences of International Relations*. Kahler precedes on an assumption that the fundamental difference between the two nations was the relative stability of Britain's experience versus the violence and intense political contestation of the French one.

The French Government collapsed in 1958 over the questions of Algeria, while in 1959 Macmillan pointlessly worried that African issues like the Nyasaland Emergency and the Hola Camp revelations might hurt the Tories' reelection chances; they did not. French conduct in the Algerian War tore French society apart, to a degree not witnessed since the Dreyfus Affair of the late nineteenth century. In Britain, while issues were debated and passions aroused, no such social cataclysm occurred. Obviously, from some angles, this would make it seem as if the British had a considerably more peaceful transition out of empire than the French. To argue this difference as a historical truism however is problematic and contemporary British scholars are less willing to overlook the violence inherent within Britain's end of empire in places such as Kenya and Malaysia. It was however an assumption and an observation made to an extent by the British themselves at the time - one such example being John Strachey who in 1959 argued the British should feel "lucky" that they were not losing their empire "the hard way" like the French.³⁵⁰ It was also a viewpoint that reinforced the Whiggish vision of peaceful colonial evolution into a Commonwealth of Nations.

The British official mind was not shy to compare their problems of end of empire with

³⁵⁰ John Strachey, *End of Empire* (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1959), 213.

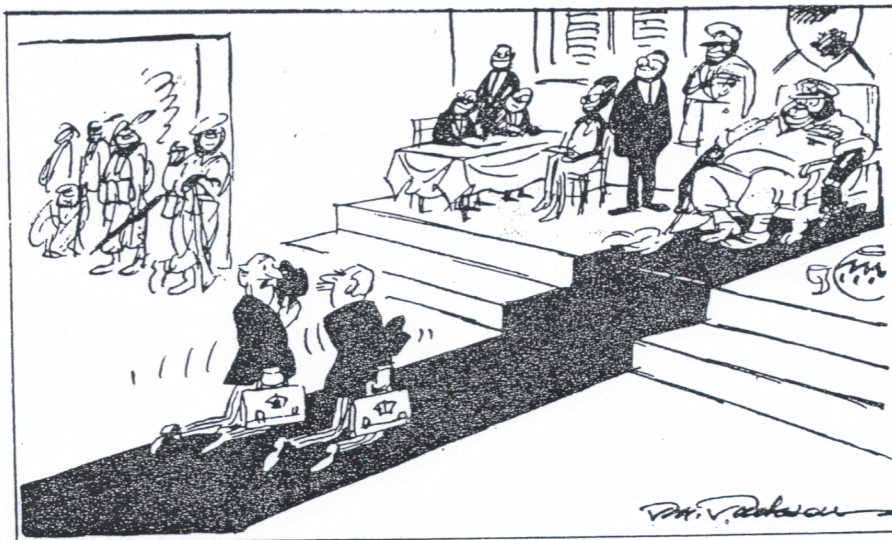
those faced by France, as has been evinced in various points throughout this project. In many ways, the scramble out of Africa shared a similar nationalistic competitive edge with the nineteenth century scramble for Africa. Macmillan and his Government took into account policies with the specific aim of making the British look more progressive, western, democratic, and humanitarian than the French. The 1958 study “Africa in the Next Ten Years” made the case that if the constitutional issues of the Central African Federation devolved into violence, “our past record of benevolent government will be forgotten and it will be the French ... who will be regarded by world opinion as the leaders, while we may be classed with the Portuguese as the obstacles to further advancement.”³⁵¹ The official mind clearly saw themselves engaged in an “image race,” like a kind of arms race, with France over colonial development and progress in Africa. The British were packing the discursive tradition of the Whiggish vision, which was predicated on the notion that the British particularly were exceptional at promoting liberal values in the world. The French had their *grandeur* and Enlightenment-derived, centuries-old belief in the universality of French culture. Exploring the similarities and differences between these imaginings and this notion of an “image race” and the role of the Whiggish vision within it would yield more understanding of how Britishness was asserted on the world stage as empire ended.

Additionally, another path by which to explore these questions of Britishness and end of empire involves an examination into how decolonization was viewed during other moments in post-imperial British history. This project examined the actual moments of decolonization under the Macmillan Government; future projects could advance in the chronology of the twentieth century, investigating how end of empire was viewed from the Thatcherite perspective, relatedly from the perspective of the Falklands crisis, or from the New Labour perspective of the late 1990s, a vantage point incorporating the end of rule over Hong Kong. Conversely, examining earlier moments of decolonization, for example, the granting of Indian independence, could also

³⁵¹ Quoted in L.J. Butler, *Britain and Empire: Adjusting to a Post-Imperial World* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 149.

yield a deeper understanding into how the Whiggish vision emerged in the postwar world. India truly provided a theoretical model for the British imagination regarding the inevitable transformation of empire into Commonwealth. While the political realities of post-independence India, specifically the violence between the new nations of India and Pakistan, belied a narrative of peaceful evolution, India nevertheless remained a major player within the postwar Commonwealth. Its presence as a significant component of the new multiracial Commonwealth was frequently touted in Whiggish imaginings of the 1950s as a testament to British exceptionalism. Independent India was highlighted as a kind of “mission accomplished” of the Commonwealth teleology. Exploring the specific manifestations of these sentiments both before and after Indian independence would round out the picture of the Whiggish vision’s potency as a form of Britishness on the world stage.

Another example of various kinds of approaches to the questions of empire and British identity involves exploring the evolution of the rightwing reading of the Whiggish vision. Lord Salisbury was simply the most direct challenge presented to Macmillan’s push for decolonization, but it was not the only one emerging from the right end of the political spectrum. Organizations like the Monday Club, dedicated to pressuring a slowdown on end of empire, and others geared towards representing white settler views in British politics are appropriate fodder for such investigations. It could be said as well that these organizations in the 1960s paved the way or even directly evolved into more radical rightwing mouthpieces vocal during the 1970s, a period which witnessed a resurgence in radical right political activity. In some ways, the radical right imagining of the British Empire rejected the notions of a benevolent teleology and worldwide promulgation of liberal values inherent in the Whiggish vision; instead radical right rhetoric emphasized the raw power such a world empire evoked, evincing a bitter nostalgia for its passing. For example, the ultra-rightwing and neo-fascist British Movement, the popularity of which peaked in the late 1970s, published a “joke book” that contained the following cartoon:



"Is it just me — or do you feel a twinge of nostalgia for the old gunboat?"

Two diplomats, bowed before an African warlord resembling General Idi Amin of Uganda, remark: "Is it just me - or do you feel a twinge of nostalgia for the old gunboat?"³⁵²

These explorations could give insight into how conceptions of Britishness and empire continued to evolve even after empire was over. Given the potency of the Whiggish vision even in the twenty-first century, it would seem a crucial addendum to understanding how the vision itself adapted.

This potency too explains to a degree the debates and preoccupation within the 'new imperial history' that not only seek to place empire within the national historiography but also to do so in a mode critical of any triumphant readings of empire or its end. In some ways, the 'new imperial' historiographical lines are drawn between those historians arguing a positive case of Britain's imperial legacies, the Piers Brendons and the Niall Fergusons, versus those emphasizing the negative, the Caroline Elkinses and Antoinette Burtons. Thrown into this historiographical mix are the Bernard Porters who contend no one cared about empire, thus no one cared (and maybe were even glad to see it go) when it ended. All these viewpoints nonetheless ask the question of how much did empire matter for Britain and British national identity. Clearly this project, by isolating and examining one facet of British national identity,

³⁵² "Official British Movement Joke Book." (198?), RH WL C2669, Wilcox Political Collection, Spencer Research Library.

the Whiggish vision, assumes that empire had a role in Britishness. Empire may not have necessarily created Britishness or even served as the foundation for British national identity and this project was not aimed at exploring these points either. Empire was however an avenue along which characteristics of Britishness, the ideas of liberal values, justice, good government, law and order, and capitalist economic development, traveled freely and were discussed and debated by those engaged in the political culture. Empire was also a mode by which to assert Britishness on the world stage and at no time was this more clear than at its the Empire's end.

The Whiggish vision was an actor in the debates over end of empire, but was it a pure fiction? Do those historians and commentators who reiterate it or variations of it into the twenty-first subscribe to a myth? Is the paradigm of "gracious decolonization" laughably obsolete now that historians have access to the documents on end of empire? Clearly the notion that British decolonization was any kind of a planned program has been debunked by the actual historical evidence emerging from the government archives. These sources show how contingency, expediency, experimentation, and realpolitik calculations rather than loyalty to a teleological ideal characterized the British policies wrapping up their Empire. However, in a comparative context with the French, decolonization for the British was historically a smoother process than that undertaken by their Gallic co-imperialists. Many of the key actors determining the course of decolonization too were schooled in the traditional teleology and subscribed to the Whiggish vision willingly, not just as a face-saving device to mitigate the sting of scrambling out of empire but also as a moral guide for policy making. Iain Macleod and the Government's critics over Hola and the Nyasaland Emergency best exemplified this. That some historians posit the end of empire as the British putting principles into practice, the Whiggish vision becoming the story of end of empire, is understandable. But this begs the question: given the history of a comparatively 'smooth' British decolonization and the potent reassertion of the Whiggish vision as empire ended, where does the rhetoric of the peaceful teleology end and the historical truth

begin? For the purposes of understanding how this component of empire and identity interrelate, perhaps it is unnecessary to delineate fully the distinction. Constructions of national identity frequently take on myths and half-truths in their imaginings and clearly the Whiggish vision, particularly as it exists in the twenty-first century, is no exception.

So, did end of empire cause a crisis in British national identity? No and yes. While in the actual moments of imperial dissolution, the potency of the Whiggish vision precluded a kind of crisis in national identity like that which rocked France in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the crisis was seemingly only delayed. The Whiggish vision was Britishness writ large on the world stage; it did bear repeated articulations as the British got out of Africa, thus Britishness in this conception maintained an inherent strength and continuity. Because of what the Whiggish vision promulgated, that nothing was more British than transforming the Empire into a free, associative Commonwealth, global Britishness (the liberal, modernizing strain that is) survived the empire's end. Crisis only emerged when the vision's teleological end of a British Commonwealth proved impotent on the world stage. Failure of the dream of Commonwealth to become a political reality seems a more likely suspect behind Britain's post-imperial identity crisis than the actual decolonization of empire itself. Clearly then, empire and Britishness were intertwined: visions of empire and its eventual transformation into Commonwealth reflected images of what Britishness meant on the world stage and as it compared to other identities like the Afrikaners or even the African nationalists. Given its flexible nature, the Whiggish vision survived and adapted in the post-imperial era. The historiographical implications of this are clear: in the continuing debate on the nature of British national identity and empire, the Whiggish vision is still an active player, alive and well both on the left, who blame lingering imperial identities for Britain's contemporary geopolitical misadventures, and on the right, who hold 'gracious decolonization' as a truism and a vindication of British exceptionalism on the world stage.

APPENDIX: SOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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